

Part 4

Writing the Thesis

8

Writing and the Writing Process in a Doctoral Programme

CHAPTER CONTENTS

One of the activities common to every doctoral programme is the business of writing. Producing the thesis for submission is the ultimate goal and this is examined in Chapter 9; this chapter argues that writing is also a key part of the thinking and development process. We also look at different styles, genres and approaches to writing that can be included in doctoral work. The chapter selectively considers some of the published research and guidance on writing and attempts to distil the main points. We include comments from our own interviews with writers, who have varying levels of experience, to show that all writers are different. There can be no set of handy hints or infallible guidelines which apply to all writers and genres of writing. Perhaps the main messages of this chapter are: writing is part of the thinking process; there is no one right way to write; start writing from day one; draft and redraft; and ‘don’t get it right, get it written’.

Classical models of writing and their dangers

The traditional, popular model of writing was based on the idea that ‘what you want to say and how you say it in words are two quite separate matters’ (Thomas, 1987). Others have called it the ‘think and then write paradigm’ (Moxley, 1997, p. 6), that is, we do all of our thinking before we start writing. Writers first decide what they want to say and then choose the words to express their thoughts and their meaning, that is, you decide what you want to say, and then you write it down. Elbow (1973, p. 3) is, like Moxley and Thomas, a critic of the so-called classic model, and he sums up the view as follows: ‘In order to form a good style, the primary rule and condition is not to attempt to express ourselves in language before we thoroughly know our meaning. When a man [*sic*] perfectly understands himself, appropriate diction will generally be at his command either in writing or speaking.’

Thomas (1987, pp. 95–98) analyses several ways in which a belief in this classical model can be harmful, or ‘lead to trouble’ as he puts it. First, belief in the model creates the expectation that writing should be easy if ‘you know your stuff’. Then, when people find it difficult (as we all do), feelings of inadequacy and frustration set in. Second, the model leads to the implicit and incorrect belief that thorough knowledge will lead to clear, high-quality writing. This is not always true and can again lead to negative feelings. Third, the expectation that writing is a linear process can lead to feelings of inadequacy and frustration as soon as the writer realises that it is in fact recursive or cyclical. Finally, the classic model goes something like: do all your reading, grasp all your material, think it through, plan it out, then write. Writers who follow this would never get started.

In reality, thinking and writing interact. Thinking occurs during writing, as we write, not before it. Elbow (1973) described this model, the generative model, as involving two processes: growing and cooking. Writing various drafts and getting them on paper is growing; rereading them, asking for comments from others and revising is part of the cooking process. Adopting and believing in this ‘generative model’ (Thomas, 1987) will lead to several important attitudes and strategies:

- **greater willingness to revise one’s writing (drafting and redrafting);**
- **a willingness to postpone the sequencing and planning of one’s writing until one is into the writing process (it is easier to arrange and structure ideas and words once they are out there on paper, than in our heads);**
- **a habit of ‘write first, edit later’ (although this will not suit the working style of every writer, in our view);**
- **the attitude that extensive revisions to a piece of writing are a strength not a weakness;**
- **more willingness to ask for comment and feedback, and to take this on board; and**
- **greater sensitivity to readers and their needs, prior experience and knowledge and their reasons for reading it.**

In fact, writing is a form of thinking – it is not something that follows thought but goes along in tandem with it (Wolcott, 1990). Laurel Richardson (1990; 1998) often describes writing as a way of ‘knowing’, a method of discovery and analysis. Becker (1986, p. 17) puts it beautifully by saying: ‘The first draft is for *discovery*, not for presentation.’ This process of learning, discovery and analysis does not precede the writing process – it is part of it. Richardson tells of how she was taught, as many of us were, not to write until

she knew what she wanted to say and she had organised and outlined her points. This model of writing has ‘serious problems’: it represents the social world as static and it ‘ignores the role of writing as a dynamic, creative process’ (Richardson, 1998, p. 34). Most harmful, for new writers, is that the model undermines their confidence and acts as a block or obstacle in getting started on a piece of writing. If we feel that we can not start until we know exactly what we think, intend to write and how we are going to organise it, then we will never get started. This is one of the reasons why Richardson objects to the term ‘writing up’ of research, as if it comes afterwards. Like the linear model of writing, this is based on a similarly linear model of the research process, which puts ‘writing up’ as the last task (discussed fully in Wellington, 2000, pp. 46–49). Over 40 years ago, the Nobel prize winning scientist Sir Peter Medawar (1963; 1979) argued that virtually all scientists write up their research as if it were a clean, linear, non-messy, carefully planned process. In reality the process is far more messy and cyclical, hence Medawar’s accusation that the typical ‘scientific paper is a fraud’.

Planning, thinking and writing

The view that writing is a form of thinking does not rule out the need for planning. Plans are a starting point for writers. Although a few writers follow them meticulously, most treat the plan as something to deviate from.

Here are some of the points made by experienced authors whom we interviewed (extracts taken from Wellington, 2003, ch. 3):

I like to write to a plan. I produce section headings and fairly detailed jottings about what these will contain and then follow them through. Sometimes I find that the plan isn’t working so I revise it – I never write without an outline to my side though. (Female author)

I do plan my writing but I usually find that in the process of writing the plan might take a new direction. I will then ‘go with the flow’. (Female)

I have ideas in the back of my mind but I only really know what I want to say as I begin to write things down. I rarely write the proper introduction until I have finished. (Female)

I usually pre-plan it, though on the occasions when I’ve just let it ‘flow’ it seems to have worked quite well. The more sure I am of the theme the more natural it would be to let it flow, at least on first draft. I think I do a lot of thinking beforehand but invariably the act

of writing is creative for me – some new links and strands pop up. I think I do structure my writing though the structure often gets revised. (Male)

I put a lot of emphasis on pre-planning and particularly on structure, because the nature of what I write is argumentative. So I need the structure of the argument mapped out – and I work to this map. But quite often I don't actually, myself, understand fully what the argument is until I've done the first draft. So the first draft is a learning curve. (Male)

And finally, from a female writer:

I plan things visually, with a spidergram. I brainstorm ideas then try to connect them with a spidergram or a mind map. I find that as I'm writing the plan changes. If I write under sub-headings it's easier to move things. I can cut and paste, or move things to the bottom of the page if I don't know where to put them.

These comments show that different people adopt different approaches to planning and even that the same writers sometimes use different approaches. Planning is an important activity for all writers. The extent and style of the planning seems to vary from one to another but all plan in some way. Some writers plan in a very visual way by using mind-mapping or spidergrams and use metaphors such as sketching the landscape, taking a route or forming a map. Others seem to plan in a more verbal way.

Writing is seen as a learning process by most authors. They talk of learning through their writing, as opposed to writing activity occurring as a result of their learning. Learning and thinking come from writing rather than preceding it. This ties in with several studies reporting that writers see the act of writing as an aid to thinking (for example, Hartley, ed. 1992 and Wason, 1980)

Writing is difficult

Perhaps the main thing to remember about writing is that it is hard, even painful, work. It is a struggle. It is difficult. Writing clearly and succinctly is even more difficult. Having extensive experience of writing does not make it easier, it simply makes the writer more confident. In discussing the question of 'what people need to know about writing in order to write in their jobs', Davies and Birbili (2000, p. 444) sum up by saying: 'We would suggest that the most important kind of conceptual knowledge about writing should be, in fact, that in order to be good it must be difficult.'

Our own interviews with different writers, many of them experienced and widely published, is that they all face barriers to writing – and the ‘aids’ they use to overcome so-called writers’ block can be quite creative! (Again, these comments are taken from Wellington, 2003, ch. 3):

I get it all the time and I don't deal with it. I just stay there and plug away. I have to have total silence else I can't think. I do sometimes go and stand in the shower for 15 minutes or so and I find that can make me feel better.

If I get stuck I re-read what I have already produced and often spend a bit of time re-phrasing things or clarifying. This usually helps me get in the frame of mind for writing and I can then continue by building on the writing already there. If that is no help I might read for a while and this may give me a few ideas on how to get going or I might draw diagrams. I use the diagrams to set out my ideas in a different way than words and this might then help to clarify what I am trying to do.

I don't know where to go next. Sometimes I just give up and do something else. Other times I go back to another chapter or a different sub-heading, or even my spidergram. Other times I just try to write my way through it, knowing that I'll probably delete most of it.

Different writers like to work at different times of the day, under different conditions and have different routines and avoidance strategies:

I find procrastination to be a useless but common avoidance strategy. I write (and do most things) best in the morning and would regard 9–1 as being optimum writing time. I tend to leave routine chores (referencing, etc.) for late afternoon.

I need silence, no noise at all. I write at the desk in my study, with the desk cleared of clutter. I write best in the morning between 8 and 1. A round the block or to-the-newsagents walk for 10 minutes helps enormously.

I had a colleague once who said: 'If I don't write in the morning, I can't write all day'... and I really relate to that. There can be days on end where I just sort of go back and only move forward a sentence at a time. I find it's best just to leave it and do something else. Often if you do leave it, you find that something happens, out of the blue, that suddenly gives a different perspective on what you were writing about ... and you can come back and start again. I suppose it's the sub-conscious working on things – it leaves the mind open.

We suggest that many people, during writing feel the need for incubation, for lying fallow, or for mulling things over during the business of writing something – especially during a long piece of work such as a doctoral thesis or a chapter in a thesis.

Getting started: when to stop reading and start writing

Starting a piece of writing is the hardest thing to do, except perhaps for finishing it (or at least knowing when to stop). Getting started on a piece of writing usually involves a kind of build-up to it: various authors have called this cranking-up, psyching up, mulling, organising and so on (see Wolcott, 1990, p. 13; Woods, 1999). One of the ways of building up is to read widely (making notes on it, distilling thoughts, and jotting down your own ideas and viewpoints). The problem, of course, lies in knowing when to stop reading and to start writing. Initial reading is needed to help in the build up process (cranking and psyching up) but one has to start writing before finishing reading – mainly because, in a sense, the reading can never stop. Reading should be done in parallel with writing ('in tandem' as Wolcott, 1990, p. 21, puts it). The two activities need to be balanced, with reading being on the heavier side of the see-saw initially and writing gradually taking over. Wolcott's view is that writing is a form of thinking and therefore 'you cannot begin writing early enough'.

There is a problematic connection between *reading* and *writing*:

The move from doing your reading to doing your writing can be a difficult one. I sometimes start by doing just a piece of 'stream of consciousness' writing, to say 'what do I feel about the issues'? Just to break that fear of going from 'all these people have written all these things', where do I start? Reading can be inhibiting, it can take away your confidence to write. Reading different things can toss you around like a cork.

Reading is a good way of filling in time and not starting to write. When should we stop? When things start to repeat themselves. Reading gives you a feel for what the 'books' are, and at least gives you some key headings for what you're writing. Sometimes I read until I find the book really.

Ideally, the writer reaches a point where his or her own writing is just waiting to get out there, onto the page. A kind of saturation point is reached. It starts to ooze out.

This is the time when we should spend more time writing than we do reading – the balance shifts to the other side. At that stage, ideally, one is impatient to get back to writing. But even then, most of us engage in all sorts of displacement activities: vacuuming the hall carpet or walking the dog. Tidying up the hard disk on the computer or checking the e-mails as they come in can also be excellent distractions.

Managing time – or creating it

Dorothea Brande (1983) in her classic book, first published in 1934, suggests that a beginning writer should start off by writing for a set period at the same time every day. Once this discipline becomes a habit she suggests that you can write at a different time each day, provided you always set yourself an exact time and keep to it. This advice may be too rigid and impossible to adhere to if one has a busy and unpredictable working day or a complicated home life (as most people now have, even if they did not in 1934). Brande tends to use a physical education (PE) analogy for writing, talking of exercise, training oneself to write, using unused muscles and the value of early morning writing. The PE analogy can be useful to a point (it can be helpful to think of keeping in trim, exercising our writing muscles and taking regular practice) but perhaps should not be overstretched.

One of the great dangers preventing us from finding or creating time to write is the tendency to wait for a big chunk of time to come along when we can ‘really get down to it’. People convince themselves that productive writing will happen when they have a large block of uninterrupted time. This is one of the most common forms of procrastination: ‘I’ll just wait for that day, that weekend, that holiday or that period of study leave and then I can really get some writing done’. Boice (1997, p. 21) calls this the ‘elusive search for large blocks of time. First colleagues wait for intersession breaks. Then sabbaticals. Then retirements.’

Haynes (2001, p. 12) suggests adopting simple routines for the beginning and end of each session. For example, one could begin with a ‘freewriting’ session of four or five minutes, just bashing out some words and sentences without pausing for correction, revision and certainly not editing. Haynes recounts that he likes to start a new writing session by making revisions to the text that he produced in the last one – a kind of warming up exercise. He also suggests the ploy of finishing a writing session before you have written everything you want to write, with the aim of making you look forward to the next session. Some writers, he claims, even end a session in the middle of a paragraph or even a sentence.

Abby Day (1996, pp. 114–115) suggests that one should limit any writing session to a maximum of two hours. After that, one should take a break, perhaps have a walk or a coffee and come back to it another time feeling refreshed. This is also good health advice if working in front of a screen – most safety guidance suggests short breaks at frequent intervals away from the screen, standing up and looking at distant objects to rest the eyes and neck.

Different ploys, different times of day, different starting strategies will work for different people. The main general advice is to carve out some time to write when it suits your working and domestic day best, and your own preference for your ‘best time’; and then try to write little and often, not hope for an entire day when you can work uninterrupted. This may never come and anyway, who can write productively for an entire day? Two or three hours, if you can find them, can yield as much good writing as a solid day that you look forward to with great expectations and then you force yourself to write. However, as we keep saying, everyone differs and if you are really one of those people who can not write unless you have a substantial time in which to do it, you will have to find ways of clearing the decks and making it possible.

What are the distinguishing features of skilled, productive writers?

‘PRODUCTIVE’ WRITERS

Hartley (1997) produced a useful summary based on his own research into what makes a productive writer in the discipline of psychology. His eight points can be transferred to writing in other areas, although point three looks a little dated now. His view was that ‘productive writers’ exhibit the following strategies. They:

1. Make a rough plan (which they do not necessarily stick to).
2. Complete sections one at a time (however, they do not always do them in order).
3. Use a word processor.
4. Find quiet conditions in which to write and if possible write in the same place or places.
5. Set goals and targets for themselves to achieve.

6. Write frequently, doing small sections at a time, rather than in long 'binge sessions'.
7. Get colleagues and friends to comment on their early drafts.
8. Often collaborate with long-standing colleagues and trusted friends.

Haynes (2001, p. 11) offers an even shorter list of the 'qualities of productive writers'. From his experience as a commissioning editor, the productive writer:

- seeks advice;
- shares drafts; and
- writes regularly (little and often).

SKILLED WRITERS COMPARED WITH UNSKILLED WRITERS

A large body of research has been published on the differences between 'good' and 'poor' writers. The most commonly cited authors are Flower and Hayes. Their 1981 work, for example, concluded that good writers engage in 'global planning' that incorporates rhetorical concerns such as audience, purpose and intention. So-called 'poor writers' engage in local planning, focusing on surface features of their writing. Hayes and Flower (1986), and other researchers since, have done extensive work on the differences between people in terms of how much revising they do. They suggest that 'experts' revise more than novices. They also revise at a higher level.

More generally, they and other authors have tried to identify the key differences between experienced, skilled writers and those who are less skilled or perhaps novices. The key points from this literature can be summarised (see Hartley, 1992) as follows:

- Skilled writers revise more than novices. 'Expert' writers (as Hayes and Flower, 1986, call them) attend more to global problems (for example, re-sequencing, moving and rewriting large chunks of text) when revising than do novices.
- Skilled writers are better at detecting problems in their text, diagnosing the problems and putting them right. (Generally, however, writers find it harder to see problems in their own writing than they do in others' – hence the importance of a critical friend as we saw in the interview data.).

Grabe and Kaplan (1996, p. 240) give their own summary of the behaviours of good writers. Some characteristics of ‘good writers’ are that they:

- **plan for a longer time and more elaborately;**
- **review and reassess their plans on a regular basis;**
- **consider the reader’s point of view when planning and composing; and**
- **revise in line with global goals and plans rather than merely editing small, local segments.**

Grabe and Kaplan (1996, p. 118) also, rather cruelly, identify behaviours of ‘less skilled writers’. Mainly, they begin to write ‘much sooner’ with less time taken for initial planning, producing less elaborate ‘pre-writing notes’. They do not or cannot make major revisions or major reorganisations of their content and they do not make use of major ideas in their writing which could act as overarching guides for planning, composing and making the piece more coherent (Scardamalia and Bereiter, 1987).

SUCCESSFUL WRITING

Woods (1999) provides an excellent discussion of what he calls successful writing. One of his criteria for good writing is what he calls ‘attention to detail’. He quotes the novelist David Lodge who describes how he learnt to ‘use a few selected details, heightened by metaphor and simile, to evoke character or the sense of place’ (quoted in *ibid.*, p. 13). This art, or craft, applies equally well to writing for a thesis, especially in the social sciences or humanities. Woods also talks of the importance of being able to express these in writing. The ability to connect or synthesise ideas is actually an aspect of creativity which sometimes shows itself in academic writing and research. It might be the ability to connect and interrelate one’s own findings with existing research or theory, it might be a synthesis of ideas from two completely different domains of knowledge, for example using literature from a seemingly unrelated area, or it might be the application of a theory or model from one field to a totally new area. Syntheses or connections of this kind can be risky, and require a degree of self-confidence, but done well they can be illuminating and original.

In discussing the writing up of qualitative research, Woods (1999, pp. 54–56) also talks of the importance of including ‘other voices’ in the text, besides that of the author. One of the objectives of social science research is to give people a voice or a platform, and this must be reflected in the written medium through which the research is made public. Giving people a voice, however, leads to some difficult choices. Every write-up is finite. Do you include lengthy statements or transcripts from one or two people, or many shorter points from a larger variety? (See Woods, 1999, p. 56 for discussion.)

A final point made by Woods concerns the importance, when writing, of not missing the humorous side of research, for example by including an ironic comment from an interviewee.

Structuring writing

Sprent (1995, p. 3) puts forward the terms ‘macrostyle’ and ‘microstyle’. The latter is concerned with style and structure at the level of words, sentences and paragraphs; while macrostyle is concerned with larger blocks and structures such as sections, chapters and the use of tables and figures. This distinction can be useful in thinking about writing and this section examines elements of both.

There is considerable debate about how much structure authors should include in writing a report, thesis, book or article. Here we consider structure at four levels: overall contents structure; within chapters; paragraphing and sentence level.

HEADINGS, SUB-HEADING, SUB-SUB-HEADINGS ...

Headings are valuable signposts in guiding a reader through a text and maintaining their interest or concentration. But it is always difficult to decide how many *levels* of heading to use. It is essential to use some headings, even if it is just chapter titles.

Students need to be clear, when writing, about the level of heading they are using at any given time. Headings are then given a level (level A, level B and level C) and each level uses a different font or typeface.

For example:

Level A: CHAPTER HEADINGS (upper case, bold)

Level B: Sub-headings (lower case, bold)

Level C: *Sub-sub-headings* (lower case, italics)

Writers then need to be (or at least try to be) clear and consistent about which headings they are using and why. If a writer goes ‘below’ level C this can be difficult. Writers, and readers, begin to flounder when they get past the sub-sub-level.

CHAPTER STRUCTURE

Headings and sub-headings can help to structure a chapter and break it down into digestible chunks. But there is also a useful rule, followed by many writers, which can help to give a chapter a feeling of coherence or tightness. This rule suggests that a chapter should have three (unequal in size) parts:

- a short introduction, explaining what the author is going to write about;
- the main body, presenting the substance of the chapter; and
- a concluding section, rounding off the chapter.

This overall pattern works well for many writers, and readers, especially in a thesis. It is rather like the old adage associated with preaching: ‘Tell them what you’re going to say, then say it, and then tell them what you’ve just said.’ For many types or genres of writing it works well and assists coherence. However, if overdone it can become tedious.

One other way of improving coherence is to write link sentences joining one paragraph to the next or linking chapters. For example, the last sentence (or paragraph) of a chapter could be a signal or an appetiser leading into the next.

CONNECTING PHRASES AND SENTENCES

One of the important devices in writing is the logical connective. Connectives are simply linking words and can be used to link ideas within a sentence, to link sentences or to link one paragraph to the next. Examples include: ‘First’, ‘Secondly’, ‘Thirdly’, ‘Finally’; also ‘However’, ‘Nevertheless’, ‘Moreover’, ‘Interestingly’, ‘Furthermore’, ‘In addition’, ‘In conclusion’, ‘Thus’, and so on.

Connectives can be valuable in maintaining a flow or a logical sequence in writing; but be warned – readers can suffer from an overdose if they are used too liberally, especially if the same one is used repeatedly. Ten ‘however’s’ on the same page can become wearing.

All the tactics and strategies summarised above have the same general aim: to improve clarity and communication. Table 8.1 gives a summary of four useful strategies which can be used in writing, whether it be an article, a book, a thesis or a conference paper.

Table 8.1 Four useful strategies in structuring writing

Strategy	Meaning	Examples
Signposting	Giving a map to the reader; outlining the structure and content of an article, book or chapter; that is, structure statements	This chapter describes ... The first section discusses ... This paper is structured as follows ...
Framing	Indicating beginnings and endings of sections, topics, chapters	First, ... Finally, ... To begin with ... This chapter ends with ... To conclude ...
Linking	Joining sentence to sentence, section to section, chapter to chapter ...	It follows that ... The next section goes on to ... As we saw in the last chapter ... Therefore ...
Focusing	Highlighting, emphasising, reinforcing, key points	As mentioned earlier ... The central issue is ... Remember that ... It must be stressed that ...

Signposting is particularly important in a long thesis. Signposts should refer back to the previous chapter or section; they tell the reader what to expect and they often pose a question or introduce a theme that the forthcoming section, paragraph or chapter is going to explore.

PARAGRAPHING

Different writers and different readers see paragraphs in different ways. If you give different readers a page of un-paragraphed prose and ask them to divide it into paragraphs, they are unlikely to break it down or categorise it in exactly the same way. A paragraph should ideally contain just one main theme or concept or category – but concepts come from people, and people vary (Henson, 1999, p. 64). It is really up to the writer to make these partly arbitrary decisions on paragraphing. The main criterion is that each paragraph should centre on one idea: ‘when the author progresses to a new idea, a new paragraph should be used’ (Henson, 1999, p. 66). As authors move from one clear idea to another, Henson suggests, a new paragraph should be used. But this is easier said than done, especially in the heat of the writing process. It takes prac-

tice, it is an art (Henson, 1999, p. 66) and personal preferences will vary from one writer to another (and between editor and author sometimes).

Henson gives some useful tips on paragraphing (pp. 37–8). He suggests that short paragraphs help the reader – the reader should be able to remember in one ‘chunk’ all the ideas contained in a paragraph. His rule of thumb is that half a side of double-spaced typed text is enough for most readers to retain. Henson also suggests that whilst reading through what you have written, you should see if each paragraph follows from and advances upon the ideas in previous paragraphs. If not they should be re-ordered. This process, of course, is greatly helped by the cut-and-paste facility in word-processing programs.

Getting it off your desk and gradually exposing your writing

Reading your own work is important but is no substitute for having another eye on it, first perhaps from a critical friend, then your supervisor and later (if possible) from an ‘outsider’. The writer’s own tacit, implicit knowledge of what one wishes to say makes it hard to identify the missing elements or steps in one’s own writing that are somewhere in ‘the head’ but have not made it out onto the paper. These may be missing episodes in an account, or missing steps in an argument, so that the writer seems to jump to a conclusion without adequate premises. The Greek word ‘ellipsis’ (meaning ‘cutting short’) seems neatly to sum up these omissions. Readers can spot a writer’s ellipses more readily than writers can spot their own. Readers can also identify sentences that are clumsy or simply do not read well or ‘sound right’. It is also easier to spot long-windedness or repetition in someone else’s writing than in your own.

It is worth leaving your writing ‘to stand’ for a few weeks before rereading it yourself, but the outside reader is essential too. Richardson (1990) talks of the value of ‘getting early feedback’ on your writing. This can be achieved by giving an ‘in-progress’ seminar or paper to fellow students, or in a departmental seminar, or using some other public forum such as a conference. Wolcott (1990, p. 46) suggests that reading your own words aloud to yourself can help but, even better, a friend or colleague (it would need to be a good one) could read them to you so that you can listen and concentrate on ‘what has actually reached paper – the experience you are creating for others, out of your own experience’. When the oral reader stumbles or ‘gasps for air’ (as Wolcott puts it) then it is time to ‘get busy with the editing pencil’.

Editing, drafting and redrafting

I spent all morning putting a comma in, and the afternoon taking it out again. (Attributed to Lord Byron, in Woodwark, 1992, p. 30)

Most writers on writing seem to agree on one thing: do not try to edit and write at the same time (Becker, 1986; Henson, 1999; Smedley, 1993). Haynes (2001, p. 111) identifies two parts to the writing process: the compositional and the secretarial. In the first stage, writers should concentrate on getting words onto paper, generating text, trying to get the subject matter clear in their own minds and covering the ground. The secretarial stage involves sorting out the structure and layout, correcting things like spelling and punctuation, and tinkering around with words and sentences. Haynes describes the first stage as ‘writing for the writer’, the second as ‘writing for the reader’. This second stage is perhaps where the writer really needs to be aware of the intended audience; in the first stage, the writer can care far less about what anyone will think about it, and this slightly carefree attitude can encourage freer writing.

The act of editing can interfere with the activity of writing. Smedley (1993, p. 29) observes that ‘when people first sit down to write, they begin a sentence and immediately take a dislike to the way it is worded and start again’. This is the editor interfering with the writer. Both are essential, but both should be kept in their places. ‘The writer writes, the editor edits.’ She suggests leaving the first draft for a day or a week and coming back to it with your editor’s hat on this time. Editing involves seeing if it makes sense, feeling for how well it reads, asking if things could be put more neatly and succinctly and cutting unnecessary words. She argues for a number of drafts: ‘Write without editing, then edit, then re-write without editing, then edit once again. When you exhaust your own critical eye as an editor, enlist the assistance of your spouse, your colleagues, your students, your trusted friends ... and ask them to be brutal’ (Smedley, 1993, p. 30).

Becker (1986, p. 20) believes that writers can ‘start by writing almost anything, any kind of a rough draft, no matter how crude and confused, and make something good out of it’.

This could be called the pottery model of writing – start by getting a nice big dollop of clay onto the working area and then set about moulding and shaping. This model may not work for everyone though. Zinsser (1983, p. 97) talks of feeling that he writes rather like a bricklayer. His thoughts, written at the time by someone who had just discovered the value of the word processor, are worth seeing in full:

My particular hang-up as a writer is that I have to get every paragraph as nearly right as possible before I go on to the next one. I'm like a bricklayer. I build very slowly, not adding a new row until I feel that the foundation is solid enough to hold up the house. I'm the exact opposite of the writer who dashes off his entire first draft, not caring how sloppy it looks or how badly it's written. His only objective at this early stage is to let his creative motor run the full course at full speed; repairs can always be made later. I envy this writer and would like to have his metabolism. But I'm stuck with the one I've got.

Towards the final stages of editing and revising, a piece of advice given by Harry Wolcott (1990) seems very helpful. He tells of how the idea came to him when he was assembling a new wheelbarrow from a kit: 'Make sure all parts are properly in place before tightening'. Before you start tightening your writing, he argues: 'Take a look at how the whole thing is coming together. Do you have everything you need? And do you need everything you have?' (p. 48).

His list of necessary parts includes a statement of our own viewpoints and opinions. We may prefer not to or simply not be willing to, but he believes this will be construed as a 'typical academic cop-out' – a failure to answer the question 'so what?'

We may prefer not to be pressed for our personal reactions and opinions, but we must be prepared to offer them. It is not unreasonable to expect researchers to have something to contribute as a result of their studied detachment and inquiry-oriented perspective. Wolcott, 1990, p. 49

In completing a doctorate, people should be expected to voice their own views and draw out the 'so what?' implications. They can do this with due modesty and deference to past literature and research, but without overdoing the usual statement of humility and inadequacy. Wolcott (1990, p. 69) even argues that a study of even a single case should lead to some judgement and opinion. In answer to the sceptic who challenges 'What can we learn from one case?' Wolcott gives the answer 'All we can'.

Watching every word and sentence

I have made this letter longer than usual because I lacked the time to make it short. (Blasé Pascal cited in Woodwark, 1993, p. 36)

A good old-fashioned guide by Bett (1952) gives simple advice: 'the essence of style is the avoidance of (1) wind (2) obscurity. In your scientific writing be simple, accurate

and interesting. Avoid like the plague ‘as to whether’ and ‘having regard to’, beloved of the drawers-up of legal documents. Avoid ‘tired’ words. Avoid ‘slang’ (p. 18).

One of the old clichés, which is a tired one but does have some truth in it, is ‘make every word work for a living’. Zinsser (1983, p. 98) offers one practical way of removing what he calls ‘clutter’. He suggests reading the text and putting brackets round every word, phrase or sentence that ‘was not doing some kind of work’. It may be a preposition that can be chopped out (as in ‘free up’, ‘try out’, ‘start up’, ‘report back’); it may be an adverb that is already in the verb (as in ‘shout loudly’ or ‘clench tightly’); it may be an unnecessary adjective (as in ‘smooth marble’). Brackets could also be put round the kinds of qualifiers that academics and politicians tend to use, such as ‘tend to’, ‘in a sense’, ‘so to speak’, or ‘in the present author’s view’ (the latter is also circumlocution). Entire sentences could be bracketed if they repeat something already said (unless it really needs reinforcing) or add irrelevant detail (too much information perhaps). By bracketing the words or sentences as opposed to crossing them out, the reader/editor or writer can then see whether the text can really do without them – if so, then delete.

Incidentally, Zinsser (1983, p. 103) also emphasises the value of short sentences. He talks of how, in writing his own book:

I divided all troublesome long sentences into two short sentences, or even three. It always gave me great pleasure. Not only is it the fastest way for a writer to get out of a quagmire that there seems no getting out of; I also like short sentences for their own sake. There’s almost no more beautiful sight than a simple declarative sentence.

Haynes (2001, p. 93–6) gives excellent and witty advice on circumlocution. He identifies common examples such as ‘at this moment in time’ (meaning ‘now’), ‘until such time as’ (meaning ‘until’), ‘is supportive of’ (meaning ‘supports’) and ‘is protective of’ (meaning ‘protects’). He suggests that two common causes of circumlocution are the use of euphemisms (for example ‘going to meet their maker’ instead of ‘dying’) and *pomposity*. There is no shortage of the latter in academic writing. Authors may attempt to impress their audience with a pompous tone and choice of words. They perhaps hope to appear knowledgeable and ‘academic’. The end result is often the use of inappropriate and pretentious language. Haynes suggests that this may happen when authors ‘feel superior to their audience’, but also occurs when ‘authors feel insecure either because they are short of material or they do not have a secure grasp of the subject’ (p. 94). It is certainly something to beware of, either as a reader or a writer. Every sentence, in a book or article or thesis, should make sense.

Proofreading and presentation

Spellcheckers are marvellous things but they need to be handled with care:

Candidate for a Pullet Surprise

*I have a spelling checker
It came with my PC
It plane lee marks four my revue
Miss steaks age can knot sea*

*Eye ran this poem through it
Your sure reel glad two no
Its vary polished in its weigh
My checker tolled me sew
(Dr Jerrold H. Zar, 1992)*

Spellcheckers are no substitute for human proofreaders, especially if that human is *not* the writer. In my experience of writing and reading, the five more common areas where vigilant proofreading is needed are:

1. Missing apostrophes, for example 'The pupils book was a complete mess. Its true to say that apostrophes are a problem'.
2. Unwanted apostrophes, for example 'The pupil's made a complete mess.' It's bone was a source of amusement' (The use of 'it's' for 'its', and vice versa, is a common mistake.) The best selling book by Lynne Truss is an excellent and witty guide to punctuation: *Eats, Shoots and Leaves*, London: Profile Books, 2003.
3. Referencing: referring to items in the text which are not listed in the list of references at the end, and vice versa, that is, listing references which are not included in the text.
4. Commonly misused words: effect/affect; criterion/criteria; phenomenon/phenomena; their/there.
5. Sentences that do not make sense. There is a danger, particularly for new writers who are striving to display their initiation into academic discourse, of 'shooting from the hip' with newly acquired buzzwords. Jargon can be valuable; terms such as 'ontology', 'epistemology', 'paradigm', 'triangulation' and 'validity', can all refer to important concepts, but they can easily be strung together to form a grammatical but totally meaningless sentence.

Presentation is no substitute for substance, but it is a *necessary* prerequisite for a positive reception (though not a *sufficient* one).

Many editors suggest proofreading from the bottom upwards, to avoid getting carried away by the content and flow of the text you are reading. Many people talk of testing your written sentences by ear: how do they sound and feel? Read aloud, read upwards from the bottom, line by line.

Tools of the trade and sources of guidance

McCallum (1997) suggests that the two main tools for a writer are a ‘big fat dictionary’ and a good thesaurus. A copy of the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (it comes in two large volumes or some prefer the electronic version on disc). The writer also needs a good word processor and a healthily sized screen, although some writers genuinely still prefer a pen and notepad for composing.

Other guides and sources of information can be useful and many can be found on the World Wide Web. In seeking advice on English usage, *The King’s English* by H.W. Fowler, originally published by Clarendon Press in Oxford in 1908, is now on the web through Bartleby of New York (www.bartleby.com). A paper equivalent (almost) is *MHRA Style Book*, from the Modern Humanities Research Association in London. This is a guide of about 80 pages on style, spelling, referencing, indexing, proofreading – indeed almost anything to do with preparing articles, papers or books for publication. One specific issue that comes up frequently is e-referencing, that is, referring to electronic sources. One of the best guides on this comes from the University of Bournemouth. They have an excellent site on referencing in general with a good section on how to refer to e-journals, personal electronic communications, CD-ROMs, and so on (www.bournemouth.ac.uk/using_the_library)

Approaches, styles and formats

Traditionally, within the social sciences, academic writing, particularly as represented in theses and dissertations, but also in peer reviewed journal articles and monographs and edited collections, has tended and been expected, to follow a basic format, with certain variations being acceptable for specific genre conventions (see, for example, Van Maanen, 1988, on ethnographic styles). To some extent, within this chapter so far, what we have had to say about writing has assumed this format which, essentially, consists of:

- an abstract;
- an introduction;
- a literature review;
- a justification for the methodology and methods;
- a description of the research setting/context/population;
- the presentation of findings;
- discussion of those findings;
- a conclusion;
- appendices where relevant (copies of questionnaires, interview schedules, transcripts and so on); and
- a list of references presented in a specific manner, usually according to the Harvard system.

All formats and styles of writing reflect understandings about the nature of knowledge. Thus, this traditional form, arising from the positivist paradigm, demands that social scientific writing be 'objective', realistic, neutral and unbiased and requires that the writer/researcher should not be personally present in the text, for fear of contaminating it with their subjectivity. However, we agree with the views expressed by Roland Barthes and Maggie MacLure, that: 'the writing of realism is far from being neutral, it is, on the contrary loaded with the most spectacular signs of fabrication' (Barthes, 1967, p. 73); and that, 'texts are often at their most persuasive when they don't seem at all rhetorical, but rather pass themselves off as fact or realistic description' (MacLure, 2003, pp. 80–1). What we are saying here is that all words and vocabularies are socially and politically located and value laden. Choosing one word over another, this style in preference to that, involves and implicates deep and far reaching meanings. It is not just a matter of tinkering with the surface.

Taking this view involves acknowledging that it is difficult, if not impossible to disembodify or disassociate the writer from the text since at the least they will be writing in a style by and with which they want to be identified. It also means accepting that the traditional style of academic writing is just one form of narrative, one way of telling the story. Such a stance opens up a range of possibilities for those (postmodernists, post-structuralists, whatever) who feel that different narrative structures seem more appropriate for communicating their understandings and accounts of their research because they fit better with their epistemological, ontological, ethical and value positioning.

The beginning of the twenty-first century is an exciting place for researchers to be because, providing they are unequivocally explicit to their readers about what they are

doing and why and are able to justify their approach, and if they have a supportive supervisors there are a host of what Laurel Richardson calls 'creative analytic practices' (2000, pp. 929–36) to make use of. Getting the support of your supervisor and also enlisting sympathetic examiners is crucial if you are going to adopt what might be termed as 'alternative' (that is to the traditional) approaches.

Essentially, these 'creative analytic practices' are produced as academic scholarship, as legitimate ways of presenting social science research, thinking and theorising, and they have extended the boundaries of understanding primarily by acknowledging and, where appropriate, privileging subjectivities and the place of the effect and emotion in all aspects of social life. Narrative forms that evoke identification and/or empathy, and hence promote understanding, do seem to be highly appropriate in social research when human experience is the focus. The aim is to re-present subjective experiences and perceptions and, starting from the premise that all re-presentations are just that, not actual life as lived because that can never be completely and accurately captured, these 'alternative approaches' sometimes take explicitly fictional or poetic forms. Usually, however, they will come with some form of analytic introduction, commentary or discussion that relates the story to theory. And they should, in our view and as we have already noted, always make their 'fictionality' explicit.

Alternative approaches include: autoethnography, ethnographic fiction, performance ethnography, and poetry (for a range of examples see Banks and Banks, 1998; Brady, 2000; Clough, 2002; Ellis and Bochner, 1996; Richardson, 1997; and 2000; Wolcott, 2002).

AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

Autoethnographies are accounts in which writers/researchers tell stories about their own lived experiences, relating these to broader contexts and understandings in much the same way as life historians analyse life stories in the light of historical, sociological or/and psychological theories and perspectives. In some cases autoethnographies focus on aspects of the research process, for instance, reflecting on the writing process or on the researcher's experiences in the field. In most cases, autoethnographers will employ literary devices in order to evoke identification and emotion.

ETHNOGRAPHIC FICTION

Ethnographic fiction (see Banks and Banks, 1998; Clough, 2002) is a narrative form in which fictional stories, which could be true, are told within an accurate cultural/social

framework. In many respects this is much what novels do, with the difference lying in the intention. Novels are written to entertain and maybe to educate; ethnographic fictions are written as scholarship and are intended to further understanding of aspects of social life. They frequently, but not always, come with some form of analytic introduction, commentary or discussion that relates the story to theory. Some writers have used fictional forms in order to protect and preserve the anonymity of their informants and research settings, in other cases elements of different 'real' characters and/or contexts have been combined to create a composite.

POETRY

Some writers use poetic forms to re-present interview transcripts because they believe poetry comes closer to speech patterns and rhythms: others chose it for its power to reflect emotions. Poems rarely stand alone.

DRAMATIC PRESENTATIONS

Performance ethnography is an attempt to re-present an experience without losing the experience. In some cases there will be a script, in others the actors improvise around themes. Inevitably it raises all sorts of questions about the nature of social science. How it is actually presented varies. Sometimes it will be prefaced or followed by discussion, on occasion it may be undertaken in order to give others the opportunity to 'experience' particular situations and emotions.

MIXED GENRES

Mixed genre work can be considered as a form of triangulation in which scholars take from literary, artistic and scientific genres in order to try to give as rich a picture of the situation they are concerned with as possible. Mixed genres can make it easier to re-present the multifaceted nature and the multiple realities there in any area of social life. Research into children's experiences of their first few weeks in secondary school might, for instance, include poems, pictures, photographs, essays, journal entries, autoethnographic writing by the researcher, the school prospectus and other documents as well as theoretical analysis. Some writers may adopt a mixed genre approach in order to 'hedge their bets' and increase the likelihood of their work gaining acceptability and publication.

ALTERNATIVE STYLES: IN CONCLUSION

That all writing is narrative writing is widely accepted. However, in the context of research, 'narrative' is generally understood to refer to qualitative research that uses and tells stories. Many people who use explicitly narrative approaches do so, at least partly, out of a political conviction that social research should be accessible and interesting, because they believe that it should seek to capture something of the sense of life as it is lived, and because they want to avoid the negative ethical and power consequences of assuming the sort of authoritative voice that denies the possibility of multiple realities. Having said this it is important to reiterate that it is only possible to re-present, not re-create experiences, perceptions and emotions.

Researchers and writers who want to go further in pushing the boundaries of what is regarded as legitimate scholarship often experience tension between writing as they want to and getting their work into the public domain. Bill Tierney suggests that we should,

refrain from the temptation of either placing our work in relation to traditions or offering a defensive response. I increase my capacity neither for understanding nor originality by a defensive posture. To seek new epistemological and methodological avenues demands that we chart new paths rather than constantly return to well-worn roads and point out that they will not take us where we want to go. (1998, p. 68)

This is a courageous view. However it is important that narrative research, whatever form it takes, should be able to demonstrate both its scholarliness and its honesty.

In summary: some useful guidelines on writing

As a final section, we have collected together 16 pieces of advice on writing. They have been distilled from a variety of sources:

1. Do not procrastinate by waiting for the 'perfect opportunity', or the 'ideal writing conditions' such as a free day or a period of study leave, before you start writing. They may never come.
2. Read lots of different styles of writing. The more you read, the more you pick up, the wider your vocabulary will become and your own personal literary style-bank will increase. Anything that you may read can give you ideas for writing. Do not limit your reading to academic authors. Writers of fiction

use a vast range of styles and techniques that you can adopt and adapt to make your writing more interesting and, hence, more likely to be read!

3. Do not edit as you write that is, as you go along. Wait until later. Composing and revising/editing are different activities (like growing and cooking: Elbow, 1973).
4. Treat writing as a form of thinking. Writing does not proceed by having preset thoughts which are then transformed onto paper. Instead, thoughts are created and developed by the process of writing. Writing up your work is an excellent, albeit slightly painful, way of thinking through and making sense of what you have done or what you are doing. This is a good reason for not leaving writing until the end; writing should begin immediately.
5. Break a large piece of writing down into manageable chunks or pieces which will gradually fit together. We call this the 'jigsaw puzzle' approach – but an overall plan is still needed to fit all the pieces together. The pieces will also require linking together. The job of writing link sentences and link paragraphs joining section to section and chapter to chapter, is vital for coherence and fluency.
6. Share your writing with a trusted friend – find a reader/colleague whom you can rely upon to be reliable and just, but critical. Look for somebody else, perhaps someone with no expertise in the area, to read your writing and comment on it. They, and you, should ask: Is it clear? Is it readable? Is it well-structured? In other words use other people, use books, for example style manuals, books on writing. Do your own proofreading, but always ask someone else to cast an external eye.
7. Draft and redraft; write and rewrite – and do not either expect or try to get it right first time. Writing should not be treated as a 'once and for all' activity. Getting the first draft on to paper is just the first stage. Then 'put it in the ice box and let it cool' (Delton, 1985, p. 19).
8. Remove unnecessary words; make each word work for a living. After the first draft is on paper go back and check for excess baggage, that is, redundant words and circumlocution.
9. Avoid tired and hackneyed metaphors; watch out for overdoses of idioms such as 'horses for courses' or 'wood from the trees'.
10. Think carefully about when you should use an *active* voice in your sentences and when a *passive* voice may or may not be appropriate. The passive voice can be a useful way of depersonalising sentences but sometimes naming the 'active agent' helps clarity and gives more information.

11. Be honest with your reader. Feel free to admit, in writing, that you found it hard to decide on the 'right way' to, for example, organise your material, decide on a structure, get started, write the conclusion, and so on. Do not be afraid to say this in the text (Becker, 1986).
12. Vary sentence length. Use a few really short ones now and again, for example, four words. These can have impact.
13. Edit 'by ear'; make sure it sounds right and feels right. Treat writing as somewhat like talking to someone except that now you are communicating with the written word. Unlike talking, the reader only has what is on paper. Readers, unlike listeners, do not have body language, tone of voice or any knowledge of you, your background or your thoughts. Writers cannot make the assumptions and short cuts that can be made between talkers and listeners. Have your readers in mind especially in the later stages of drafting. Better still, visualise one *particular* reader. What will they make of this sentence?
14. Readers need guidance, especially to a long thesis but equally with an article. In the early pages, brief the readers on what they are about to receive. Provide a map to help them navigate through it.
15. Above all, get it 'out of the door' (Becker, 1986) for your 'critical friend' reader to look at. Do not sit on it for months, 'polishing' it. Get it off your desk, give it to someone to read (including your supervisor), then work on it again when it comes back.
16. Finally, two of the most common obstacles to writing are (a) getting started and (b) writing the abstract and introduction. You can avoid the former by not trying to find the 'one right way' first time round (Becker, 1986), and the latter by leaving the introduction and abstract until last. Writing with a word processor helps to ease both.

We hope that this chapter has offered some guidance, reassurance and insight to those who read it. Our parting messages are: the writing process is a complex one; it is in some senses a struggle for many people; reflecting on our own writing processes is a valuable activity; it is enjoyable and helpful to share these reflections with peers; there is a range of styles and approaches to planning and composing – but there is no one right way of writing. In the next chapter we go on to consider, in a more procedural style, the production of the actual thesis and the 'production values' inherent in that process.

Cameo: Me and my writing process

Kathryn Roberts

Getting started

You've searched the literature, you've carried out your primary research, you've read everything you can find about your subject, you just can't put it off any longer – you HAVE to start writing ...

The very thought of writing at doctoral level can be daunting. There's a self-imposed pressure to get every chapter, every paragraph and every sentence, completely perfect, first time, every time. But that's not going to happen. It didn't happen for Shakespeare – why would it happen for you?

I like writing. I get a tremendous sense of achievement when I commit another 1,000 words to paper, and get another 1,000 words closer to my target. But for some reason – and I know I'm not alone in this – I will sometimes do *anything* to avoid sitting at my desk and putting pen to paper. When faced with the prospect of doing some more work on my doctorate, I'd often find that the most mundane of household tasks would take on irresistible and urgent proportions – I *must* do the dusting (I hate dusting), I really *must* clean the oven (an awful job), it really is time I cleared the garage out (I hate spiders) – anything, just to put off the evil moment for a bit longer.

And it's not just the mundane which distracts you. At times, you'll be overwhelmed by a sense of indignance: why should I sit at my desk when everyone else is getting on with their lives? I need a life too. Yes, of course I want my doctorate, but I mustn't lose touch with my friends, family, and the landlord of my local, must I? The landlord needs me to keep him in business. And what about the Imps? Lincoln City FC NEED my support on a Saturday afternoon, I'd be letting them down if I didn't go to the match, and that fresh air is better for me than sitting at my desk, right?

The list of distractions is endless, but if we're honest, it's only as endless as we allow it to be. Sooner or later, you realise that no one is going to come along and write your thesis for you, so you have no choice (because your pride won't let you give up) but to just get on with it.

Where to work

It's important to create a suitable environment to work in – preferably somewhere where you can leave mountains of paper, 'arranged' no doubt, in an order which is a mystery to everyone but yourself – so that you can pick up where you left off with the minimum of ceremony.

When to work

You'll know as well, what time of day is likely to be your most productive. For me, that was, and still is, between around 10.00 p.m. and 2.00 a.m. – later if I don't have work the next day. Why? Probably because the quality of TV programmes takes a noticeable nosedive between those times (although if you trawl through the cable channels carefully enough, you can usually find something to watch ... No! Stop it! You're allowing yourself to be distracted again!).

Getting into intense writing mode is so rewarding – your brain works overtime and you wonder if you'll be able to switch it off, but the satisfaction derived from committing a few more thousand words to paper, and getting a few more thousand words nearer to your goal, makes the effort worthwhile.

Pen or keyboard?

In the early stages of my doctoral studies, I made the mistake of thinking that I should be able to write straight on to the computer. I'm more than competent on the keyboard, and I assumed that that would be the most efficient way of writing. However, I soon discovered that the quality of my writing was not as good when I tried to work in this way, so I reverted to writing everything in longhand first.

On the face of it, this might seem to be a more time-consuming approach, but this isn't necessarily so. Once I accepted the fact that I was unable to express myself effectively by composing straight on to the PC [personal computer], I developed a routine of writing a section, or chapter, in longhand, writing probably 15–20 pages, before attempting to commit it to electronic format. This meant that when I did come to type up what I'd written, I'd developed a better feel for what I was trying to say in that particular section, and the typing up process became the main editing process. I've spoken with fellow doctoral students who've told me about the 10–12 drafts of their theses which they've produced along the way – that, to me, is enough to put anyone off embarking on this particular journey. By editing my handwritten words during the typing up stage, I found that rewrites were rarely necessary. My

handwritten paragraphs were nearly always full of crossings out and arrows, indicating where various sentences or sections should be moved to and from, as it's almost impossible to write perfectly first time, so by the time I came to write up my work, I could concentrate on improving my sentence structure, and ensuring that what I'd written flowed well.

So, don't feel inadequate if you're unable to write straight on to the PC, and don't assume that writing longhand is ultimately a more time-consuming first stage. If it eliminates the need for multiple drafts and redrafts, it can actually save time.

The bibliography

If you leave the bibliography until the end of the writing process, it'll turn into a monstrously large task. You can spend hours searching for the full reference relating to a quote which really *must* stay in your thesis.

But you can avoid this scenario quite easily by creating a bibliography file when you first start writing. For each text, article and website I used, I didn't just make a note somewhere, I recorded it in detail, in the correct format and sequence, in a separate bibliography file on the computer. I'm convinced that this saved me a huge amount of time in the long run. As the editing process progresses, you'll almost certainly want to discard some quotes which you initially considered to be vital to your message, but these can easily be deleted in the latter stages – you just need to run a check on the author's name or a keyword, using the 'Find' facility and remove from the bibliography file, any reference to sources which haven't made the final draft.

In conclusion

Now I have completed my doctorate, I consider myself to be a leading authority on 'how to avoid your doctorate' – maybe there's another thesis in there somewhere ...? If you're more disciplined than I am, congratulations! But if you examine your own situation and recognise the propensity to stray from the task, take heart – you can still get there.