



# **LSE Study Toolkit**

**Relax about writing**

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**There is a transition to be made from writing to text.**

One could argue that writing has two elements: the task of writing – putting your pen on paper or your fingers on the keyboard to combine words to sentences - and the task of text work - turning scribbles into notes, polishing sentences, structuring a rough piece of writing, organising paragraphs, etc.

**Writing work happens in a process.**

This process is tentative, repetitive and sometimes you might go in circles as you write. Don't beat yourself up about this. It is part of the process. You can use writing to explore questions, thoughts and ideas if you don't worry too much whether every single word you are writing is perfectly relevant and your final text will be brilliant from A to Z.

**If you struggle with perfectionism: Write first, edit later.**

**Try out various techniques to get yourself into writing.**

You might, for example, keep a research diary where the only organisational element is the date, experiment with mind maps, write short one page memos to yourself or explore techniques such as free writing and timed writing (see the books by Bolker or Murray mentioned below for more input on free writing, etc.)

**Write regularly, file obsessively, review patiently.**

**Be realistic about what writing work can achieve.**

Don't pressure yourself to sit down and write a perfect paragraph in one effortless go. Remember that all the learned articles and smart books you read for your research are highly refined end- products which have gone through a long and painstaking process of both writing work and text work. However, you as a reader are only treated to the very end result.

**Break down you writing task into small manageable steps.**

You might start out by deliberately limiting yourself to producing, for example, only 2, then 4, 6 pages of writing in one writing session. Alternatively, you might start out by writing about only one important aspect, or about the two most important sources in the literature, or about the three most important questions you are dealing with - any small steps that allow you to write something that is relevant, but is still entirely doable. It is easier to build up text in such a cumulative approach than to chain yourself to the desk and expect yourself to write 20 pages in one go.

**Don't wait.**

Don't wait until you have read ALL of the literature or until you have analysed ALL of your data or until you know EXACTLY what you wish to say. You can use writing both to establish what is

already clear and to formulate what is still missing. Of course, it can be a bit uncomfortable to have a gap or a tricky question show up quite clearly in your writing, but then this is what you will need to work on anyway. Writing down in whatever rudimentary form what it is that is still missing or what is still not clear can be your first chart into new territory.

### **Talk.**

Talking about your topic can help you to formulate your thoughts, pinpoint what it is exactly you are trying to address and provide you with a different perspective. Is there someone – a friend, a colleague, a reading group - with whom you can talk more or less regularly about your work? Following up such talks with a few bullet-points can over time become a good basis for writing.

### **Give yourself some breathing space.**

Sometimes it is helpful to think about your work and your writing when you are actually not writing and when you are away from your everyday work place. Some people find it helpful to ponder their ideas when walking, having a bath, going for a run, etc. If you are one these people, try to see if going away from your workplace but keeping moving can help you to “chew” on your ideas – if so, plan some time right after the break to write down any ideas that might come up, carry a note book and see if you can incorporate such a leisurely think into your regular work routine.

### **Accept that writing can be difficult.**

Don't beat yourself up just because you struggle. Rather acknowledge yourself for getting it done.

### **Set yourself realistic deadlines and use rewards.**

Break up larger writing tasks into realistic smaller chunks with intermediate and realistic deadlines along the way. And why not reward yourself on a regular basis for making your intermediate deadlines?

### **Work with a writing buddy.**

Can you team up with somebody else who needs to get some writing done? Between yourselves, you can agree on realistic deadlines, when to exchange first instalments of the overall writing task, for example a chapter draft every x weeks, etc. Find out what Murray and Bolker have to say about writing buddies.

### **Useful books on writing (albeit more PhD level):**

Rowena Murray: How to write a thesis. (If you want only to read one book on writing, this is it.) Joan Bolker: Writing your dissertation in fifteen minutes a day.