Online Forum

Go to the address: http://dutmoodle.dut.ac.za/moodle/

Click on the category *RPS Research Capacity Building*, and click on course *Research Matters*.
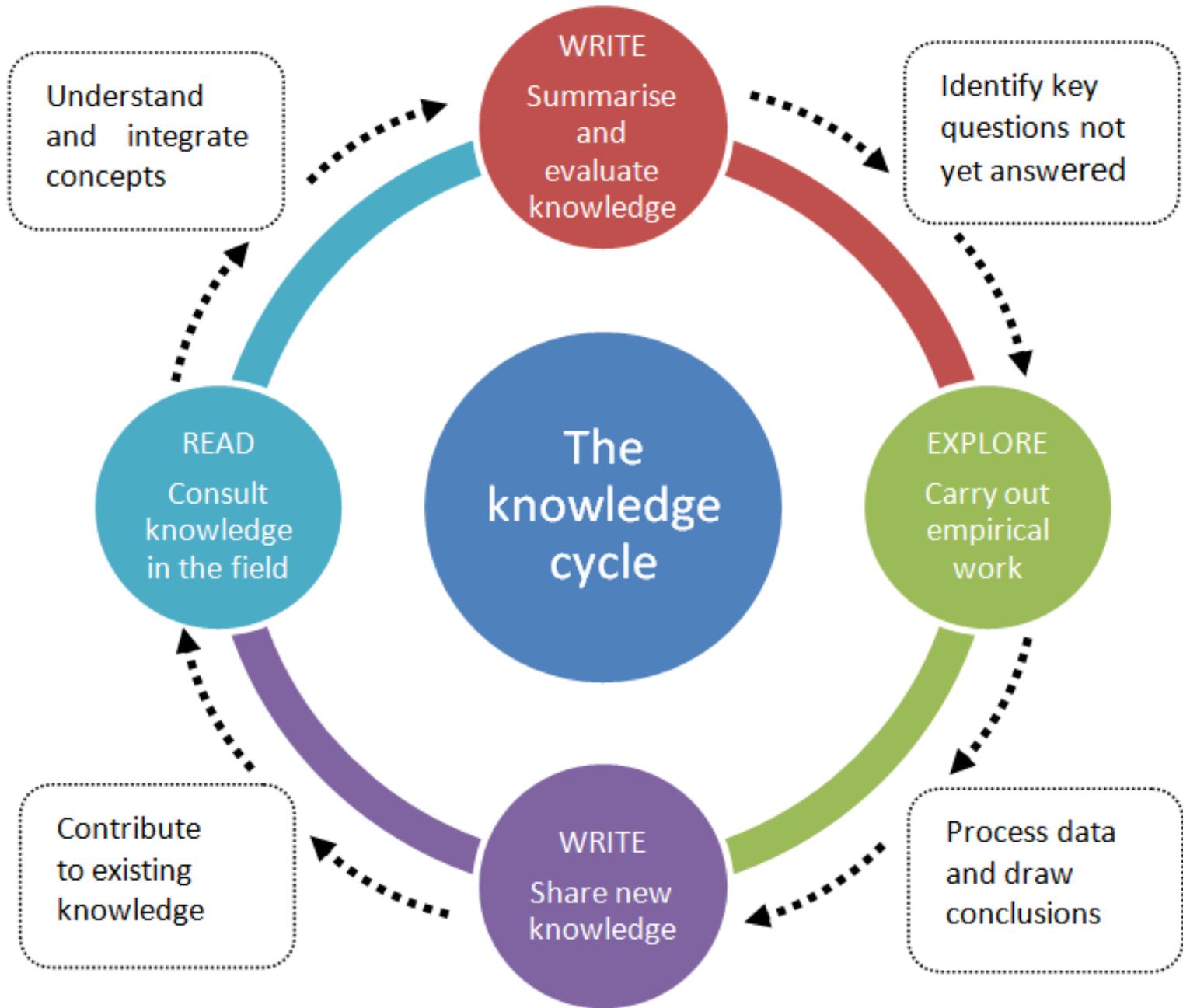
Materials are posted there online after workshops.

To log in:

User ID: staff or student number

Password: research

Once on *Research Matters*, go to the "Social forum", and respond to the message EDITING AND PROOF-READING: 13 April 2012. *When finished, start reading Elizabeth van Aswegen's article, which is posted as a resource in Unit 12.*

WE ARE HERE

The knowledge cycle

WRITE — Summarise and evaluate knowledge

Understand and integrate concepts

Identify key questions not yet answered

READ — Consult knowledge in the field

EXPLORE — Carry out empirical work

Contribute to existing knowledge

Process data and draw conclusions

WRITE — Share new knowledge

Today's programme

What editing and proofreading does/does not entail.

The supervisor's role in editing and proofreading.

Editing and proof-reading checklist.

Various typing and language conventions will be discussed, including:

- Commonly misused terms
- Use of past and other tenses
- Use of "I" and passive voice
- Conventions of direct and indirect speech
- Pompous or bombastic language
- How much explaining is needed
- Judicious honesty
- Verbatim and long citations
- When the page number of a source must be given
- Sweeping claims ("proves") vs. hedging ("suggests")

Why are editing and proof-reading important?

If universities of technology are to assume their proper place in the South African higher education hierarchy, research has to be rigorous, uncompromising in standards, and *impeccable in presentation* (van Aswegen 2007: 1148, my emphasis).

What is the language editor's job?

From van Aswegen 2007 (1139-1140):

The editor's job is not to produce a defensible thesis, it is to produce a thesis that . . .[flows] and is at least clean (Editors' Association of Canada 2006).

If editors respect the academic purpose of thesis writing and the priority of the supervisor, we can help students (and ourselves). As one member told us: "We are a valuable resource for students as long as we edit these papers in an ethical way – a way in which … the work that students submit is indeed their own, only more polished" (Editors' Association of Canada 2006).

What is the Supervisor's job?

There seems to be an unwritten assumption by many supervisors (in fairness, not all) that no aspects of writing and/or bibliographic citation fall within their bailiwick. Academics are not necessarily language specialists, and may not be conversant with the finer distinctions between 'due to' and 'owing to', 'less' and 'fewer', 'affect' and 'effect', or what a split infinitive is and why it should be avoided. Supervisors should, however, be alert to consistency in respect of English vs. American spelling, usage ('data are' or 'data is'), hyphenation ('co-ordinate' or 'coordinate', 'macro-economic' or macroeconomic'). Supervisors should also be conversant with the terminology (and its spelling) of their disciplines, and should at least have a nodding acquaintance with the conventions of capitalisation, punctuation, symbols, and bibliographic citation (van Aswegen 2007: 1145-1146).

Supervisors need to be aware of language (and other presentation) errors and should ensure that these are corrected.

Distinction between editing and proof-reading

There is a need to distinguish between proof-reading (which can be farmed out) and editing, which is the job of the Supervisor if an editor is needed to clarify the meaning of the piece of writing. A proof-reader unfamiliar with the field is not in a position to say exactly what the thesis text means (or should mean), and it would be unethical for a proof-reader to contract to do this job, as it verges on "ghost writing".

Who assists with clarifying meaning?

The Supervisor is the only one in a position to assist the thesis writer with clarification of meaning, for two reasons:

- Subject expertise – the Supervisor should understand what the writer is trying to say in a thesis and should be able to judge when it has been sufficiently explained.

- Ethics – only the Supervisor knows how much work the student put into the thesis and how much further assistance is justified.

Proof-reading

Proof-reading deals mainly with *identification of errors in a text* (and suggestions as to the option/s):

- Spelling
- Punctuation
- Layout (including spacing – word, line, paragraph; headings, numbering, and pagination; table of contents?)
- Language:

  e.g. Grammar: concord, tenses, co-ordination and subordination; conjunctions/connectors; idiomatic usage (correct prepositions); language conventions.

Grey areas….

- Style:

  e.g. Marathon sentences, inappropriate words or language, precision, slang.

- Academic conventions:

  e.g. How to use references, set out a bibliography, use of technical or specialist terms.

  Moving into….

Editing

This refers not only to improving the expression (including larger structuring) of a piece of writing but also to clarifying the meaning of the piece so that it communicates better.

Proof-readers

Good professional proof-readers are very expensive, and cheap - or free - ones are ...(well, go and look at most theses in the library).

Just make sure exactly what they check and what you will have to check yourself (i.e. do they check page numbering, decimal numbering of headings and figure/table numbering both in the caption and text? Table of contents? References? Whether sources cited are in the References?)

Proofreaders contd.

A proof-reader is not meant to check when you have left out a section (your problem) nor when you have whole paragraphs repeated verbatim in other places because you were careless when cutting and pasting (examiners *do* notice this, and they do *not* like it!) A proof-reader is not expected to know what you really meant, just to ensure that it is grammatical, and punctuated and spelt correctly (i.e. so that it becomes quite clear that you wrote rubbish).

Problems of problems of postgraduate students in respect of research writing

From van Aswegen (2007: 1141, adapted):

- Many postgraduate students are writing in their second language.

- Many supervisors are supervising in their second language.

- Only 20 per cent of current Grade 12 learners entering higher education have a Grade 12 level of literacy.

- 80 per cent of learners entering higher education are functionally illiterate (*Cape Times* 2004).

- Tertiary-level students' comprehension of academic texts is roughly 40 per cent (*Burger* 2004).

Problems of problems of postgraduate students contd.

- Many postgraduate students have little or no idea of sourcing material beyond the institutional library and the Internet.

- Style guides on referencing and research writing are available on the Library Service Intranet and Research and Technology Promotion website. In many cases, supervisors and students pay scant attention to these institutional guidelines; attention to the detail of scholarly writing is often also less than sedulous.

Common errors in citations and bibliographies

- Textual references without corresponding items in the bibliography.
- Textual references without accompanying page numbers (or incorrectly cited page numbers).
- Bibliography not in alphabetical order. Items incorrectly filed.
- Incorrect spelling of authors, titles, publishers.
- Transposing author's surname and first name.
- Vagueness about the use of et al. for three or more authors (and note that the possessive of et al. [in textual references] is not et al.'s!)
- No indication of editor or editors.
- No indication of edition, if not first.
- Incorrect date of publication (impression/reprint rather than edition date cited).
- Inconsistent use of sentence case and title case in titles of books, titles of journal articles and titles of journals.

Common errors in citations and bibliography contd

- Confusion in respect of italicisation of titles of books and title of journals (titles of journal articles incorrectly placed in italics).
- Underlining instead of italicising titles (obsolete manuscript style).
- Insufficient details given for newspaper articles.
- Confusion between publisher and printer.
- Confusion about place of publication (especially countries, cities, US states, UK counties).
- Omission of page numbers of journal articles and chapters in books.
- Incorrect corporate author (frequently no author) cited in government publications and legislation (e.g. Acts of Parliament).
- Unnecessary details cited for publishers.
- Insufficient detail provided for conference papers.
- Confusion regarding the correct citation of Internet items.

Common errors in citations and bibliography contd.

- Date of downloading of Internet citations omitted.
- Changing American spellings of book, journal article and journal titles to UK or SA English; ditto US spelling/punctuation in quotations.
- General inconsistencies in respect of format (van Aswegen 2007: 1143).

To which I add:

- Leaving out the author.
- Leaving out the title.
- Using the identical style for each bibliography entry to the style in which it was quoted in another source.
- Listing the identical book or article twice and labelling it "a" and "b".
- Listing the identical author and title twice under a different year.
- Not listing works by same author in correct year order (i.e. oldest first).

Exercise: Spot the errors!

Go to the message "Spot the errors in the bibliography!" and reply to this message, saying how many errors (and what kind) you can identify in the Bibliography file.

Typing conventions

Most postgraduates are generally fairly computer literate and familiar with Microsoft Word; however they are not always familiar with typing conventions and layout, and frequently produce documents typed in disparate fonts, and with inappropriate margins, inconsistent line spacing, incorrect page numbering, etc. Theses are often incorrectly typed in US English (e.g., behavior, program, analyze). It is important to default language to English (UK) or English (SA), otherwise Microsoft Word reverts to US English each time the document is accessed. If the writer is preparing a manuscript for publication in a US journal or book, American spelling and punctuation rules obviously apply (van Aswegen 2007: 1144).

Basic typing conventions

- Page size is consistent (e.g. A4).
- Margins are consistent.
- Font type is consistent.
- Two spaces are left after each full stop at the end of a sentence.
- Paragraphs are signalled by hitting "Enter" twice *(don't leave "half lines"!)*
- Double inverted commas are used except for a quote within quotes and in the case of the apostrophe.
- Headings are consistent (in font size, case and spacing) , and are consistently numbered.

Basic typing conventions contd.

- Ensure that one space only is left between words (and *no* space is left between a word and the comma or full stop.)
- Use 1.5 or double spacing in the thesis text.
- Indent long citations, and use single spacing and no inverted commas.
- Use black font only for thesis text.
- Do not use fancy fonts or a variety of different fonts.
- Start each chapter on a new page.
- Correct punctuation of the following: etc., e.g. and *et al.* (don't use "etc." unless it's in a transcript.)
- Decide whether "data" is singular or plural and stick to this.

Remove gremlins

- Remove 10 pt Multiple paragraph spacing and Calibri 11 font from your documents ***from the start***, and keep removing them each time they creep back.

- "6 pt" "8 pt" "10 pt" etc. spaces should not be added under (or above) paragraphs except (if you wish) for headings, bullets and indented citations.

- Break long internet addresses as follows:

  "After a slash, before a period"

- Numbering: 2.1 *not* 2.1., 2.1.1 *not* 2.2.1. Don't go to four decimals[1] – use a. b. c., and (i) (ii) (iii) after that.

[1] *Unless it is customary in your discipline.*

Language conventions

- Commonly misused terms
- Use of past and other tenses
- Use of "I" and passive voice
- Conventions of direct and indirect speech
- Pompous or bombastic language

Commonly misused terms

Use of Thesaurus: not all synonyms are used in certain contexts (e.g. "expatiated" for "explain", "plethora" for "many", "simultaneously" for "at the same time").

Students often use contorted expressions which are not verbs of "saying" to introduce direct or indirect speech:

- She further elaborates that…
- He elucidates that…
- …enlighten us on the results…

Commonly misused terms contd.

* He goes on to articulate…
* …the desegregation of schools which have been adhered to in Part one of this study.
* Torres purports that…
* Creswell elaborates further that…
* …… in the ensuing sections….
* Babbie *et al.* (2001) elaborate that…
* Creswell alludes that data derived from….

My pet hate: "allude"

"Allude" is used to refer to something or somebody indirectly, without giving a precise name or explicit identification.

e.g. I presume you are alluding to the alleged financial discrepancy.

IT IS USED INCORRECTLY AS A VERB OF SAYING:

e.g. Creswell alludes that data derived from....

You cannot "allude that...."! (The correct prepositional use is "allude to".)

Use of past and other tenses

- The abstract sums up what was done in the research (not in the thesis), and should be mainly in straight past tense.

- A summary (or introduction) of chapters shows what happens in the thesis (or chapter), and should be in present tense (avoid future tense, i.e. "This chapter will deal with…" This can get complicated!)

- Present tense should be used for what authors say, except when their views have changed over time.

- The data collection should be expressed in past tense.

Use of "I" and passive voice

In a "register which is largely objective and impersonal, but not inflated or pretentious" (van Aswegen 2007: 1144) "I" tends to be avoided.

In self study "I" needs to be emphasised.

Passive voice tends to make the text more formal, but can lead to some ridiculous contortions.

Conventions of direct and indirect speech

Direct speech uses a verb of saying followed by a colon or comma and with the exact words spoken placed in inverted commas (except in the case of long, indented citations).

Indirect speech uses a verb of saying followed by "that" and with the words paraphrased and not in inverted commas (unless a specific word or phrase is used verbatim).

Pompous or bombastic language
Van Aswegen on Research writing style

The requirements for research writing are generally no different from those for most other types of writing: clarity and precision; avoidance of ambiguity; adherence to accepted standards and current usage of grammar, spelling, punctuation and paragraphing; avoidance of clichés and unnecessary obfuscating jargon; appropriate tone; a register which is largely objective and impersonal, but not inflated or pretentious; and writing which is concise, avoiding verbosity and circumlocution (van Aswegen 2007: 1144).

Pompous or bombastic language

...the researcher observed trends emanating from the study in the answers prevalent in the questionnaires...

What are the aims of the study saying?

The core aim of analysing this qualitative data was to achieve the objectives of the study.

It is emphatic from the pie graph in figure 5.6 above that the almost 80% of the respondents were clear.

Figure 3.2 depicts that...

...were distributed more or less equitably across..

This suggested that the majority of respondents gave prominence to their children learning the English language.

Pompous or bombastic language contd.

...the desegregation of schools which have been adhered to in Part one of this study.

While competence was not the focus of this study but, disturbed by various incidental evidentiary data gathered, urged this study to delve deeper into this phenomenon.

Thus, in an attempt to excavate a more holistic picture of a given phenomenon, ...

This fixation on means and ends in the education milieu with conopunia has led to a very myopic view that deprives modes of rationality based on critique and understanding.

This ratified the contingency of English proficiency at interviews claimed...

"Lost in translation!"

From the foregoing discussions, it can therefore be extrapolated that teachers, given the definition of intelligence which includes the ability to master and use a range of academic skills, like reading (McDonough in Ellis, 1985; Gardner, 1985), based on Krashen's theory (cited in McLaughlin, 1987) where it is argued that writing competence comes from large amounts of self-motivated reading, which is considered to provide the comprehensive input for writing, encouraged learners to read.

Other conventions

These are not really language rules, but academic conventions:

- How much explaining is needed
- Judicious honesty
- Verbatim and long citations
- When the page number of a source must be given
- Sweeping claims ("proves") vs. hedging ("suggests")

How much explaining is needed

Do not explain as if the reader did not know what you were talking about!

In a thesis, the idea is to explain in enough detail to show that *you* know what you are talking about.

The only time detailed explanation is needed is when:

- a fine distinction is necessary (e.g. with complex definitions) ;
- the researcher is explaining a complicated new idea;
- there is the danger that confusion might arise.

Judicious honesty

The researcher is not required to explain all false trails and things which did not work or irrelevant details, but is expected to get to the point and explain what *did* work.

However, a failed first attempt can be useful to cite as a "pilot study" .

EXCEPTION:

In artefact development, things which did not work are part of the development.

Verbatim and long citations

Verbatim and long citations should be avoided, as they suggest either that the writers could not understand what they read, or that they were not able to describe it in their own words. It also suggests that the literature has not been internalised or evaluated sufficiently. *It is the mark of an inexperienced researcher to make excessive use of verbatim citation.*

When the page number of a source must be given

The page number of a source must be given for:

- a direct citation (short or long) from a book or article;

- a specific point or argument from a book or article;

- a figure or table from a book or article.

Hoffstee suggests that, for Internet texts without page numbers, thesis writers should put the estimated page in square brackets after the author and date (2006: 252).

Reference:

Hoffstee, E. 2006. *Constructing a good dissertation: a practical guide to finishing a master's, MBA or PhD on schedule*. Johannesburg: EPE.

Sweeping claims vs. hedging

Sweeping claims ("proves") vs. hedging ("suggests").

In social science research, the most one can say is that the evidence "suggests" that something is so (be sure to give limitations).

Even in positivist research in the natural sciences, "proof" is debatable - most "laws" are in fact the most likely explanation based on observation, and were not necessarily "proved" empirically (see Franck 2002: 5-6).

Reference:

Franck, R. 2002. *The explanatory power of models: bridging the gap between empirical and theoretical research in the social sciences*. Norwell, MA: Kluwer Academic Publishers.