Research Capacity Building Workshop
12. Writing a Literature Review

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*.
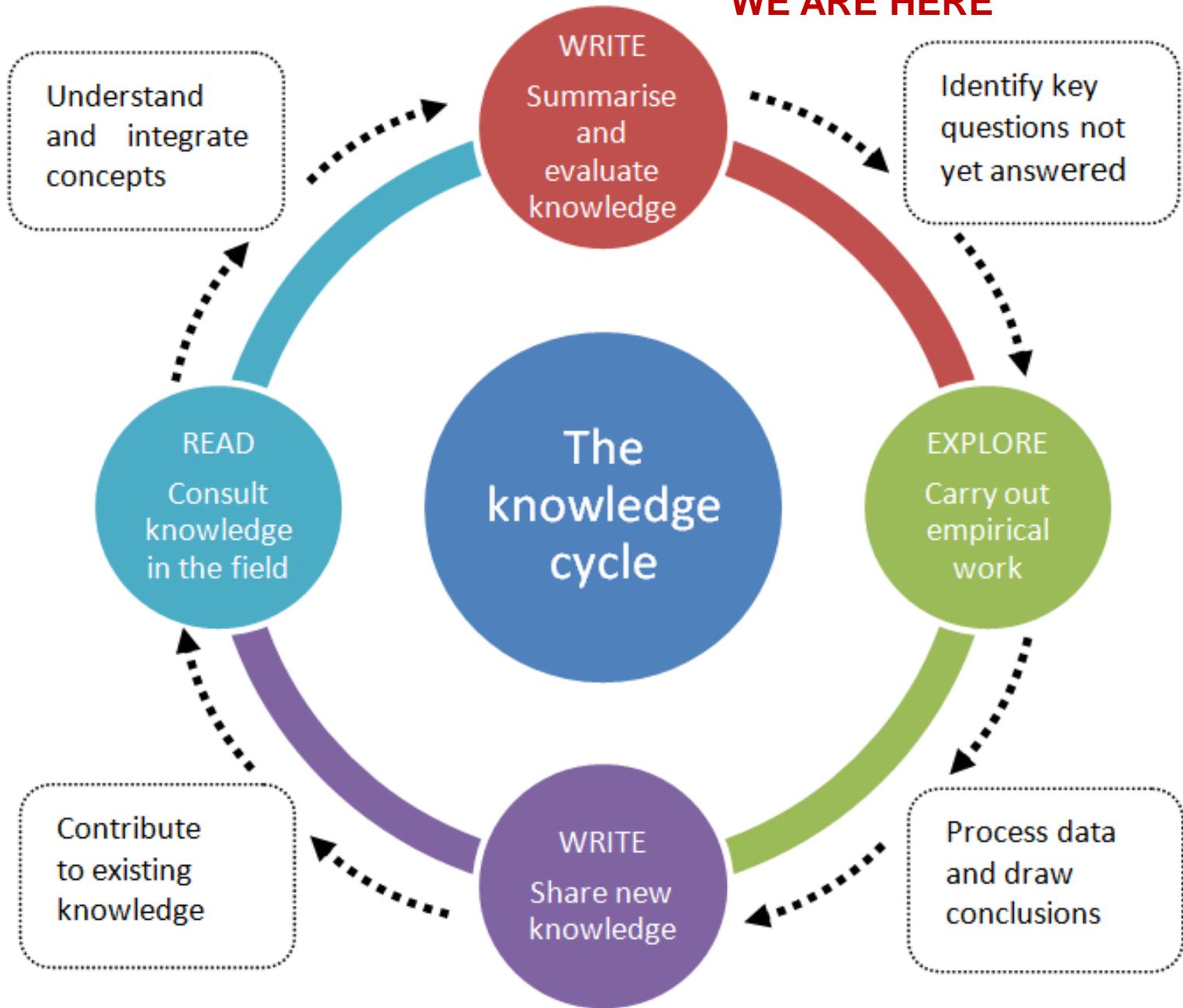
Materials are posted there online after workshops.

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: *WRITING A LITERATURE REVIEW : 18 May 2012*.

Issues dealt with in the workshop

This session will deal with the practical aspects of writing a literature review, including the following:

- Identifying the purpose of a literature review
- Forging an argument from what you have read
- How the review process, reading and writing intertwine
- Keeping on track
- Name dropping
- Citing to write and writing to cite - how to weave in what you read
- Use of direct citations – the "patchwork effect"
- "Endgame" – literature search at the end of the review (where you find the literature you wish you had found at the beginning of your project.)

Recap: Some purposes the literature serves (i.e. when cited in your thesis)

- Contextualises your research in terms of the body of knowledge available.
- Summarises research in the field.
- Gives insight into the disciplinary matrix of the field.
- Acts as an exemplar of scholarly writing.
- Models research orientations and methodologies.
- Can be used to reference a fact or opinion.
- Can be used as evidence to support your argument.
- Demonstrates knowledge of the field or area.
- Demonstrates you have mastered certain research conventions. [From *Research Reading Skills Part 1*]

Recap: Be critical of what you read (i.e. How convincing is it as evidence?)

Literature in the field is "evidence" but *it's just something else said.* Researchers should be critical of the literature and point out shortcomings (critique). This can be done on the basis of:

1. how convincing the writer's evidence is (writer's experience, empirical basis - e.g. size of sample, generalisability - motives, approach)
2. criticism or opposing views in the literature
3. your own experience/empirical work.

[From *Research Reading Skills Part 2*]

This is a *writing* process!

Writing a literature review is a *writing* process, and needs to follow the stages of writing. The most common mistake is to patch the summarised texts of what you have read together as if what those authors had written constituted your review. The readings provide the *evidence* for the argument presented in your review, they are *not* the actual review: *you* have to *write* that!

Note: You always read more than you need.

Time frame for writing the literature review

The literature review is written before, during and after the thesis is completed.

The whole process of mastering readings in the field takes place long term – from proposal to the finished thesis.

You have to separate reading and writing: you must master the content – have facts at your disposal - *before* you can write (although at end you can just pop in last-minute references because you have mastery of the *process*.)

Writer's block, or "freezing"

Writers tend to "freeze"(or "choke") when writing the literature review.

Common blocks:

- It's a problem getting off the starting block.
- What do you include/leave out?
- Once the words are on the page, they look permanent, and are hard to move.
- What other people wrote always looks better than what you wrote.

  Advice: EndNote nails things down – in writing, you have to free things up!

STAGES OF THE WRITING PROCESS

1 Prewriting - Consider purpose and reader,
CONTEXTUAL   gather data, let it mull round.
                 -DATA GATHERING

2 Draft writing - Suggest structures or outlines,
IDEATIONAL   jot down ideas or fragments,
                     write larger pieces.
                     -IDEA GENERATION

3 Major editing - Reread and structure for reader,
INTERACTIVE   order, add, delete (go back to 2
                     if necessary).
                     -IDEA ORGANISATION/STRUCTURING

**4 Minor editing
   and polishing** - Check for correctness, check
SOCIAL   format and minor editing
                    conventions.
                    -EDITING

5 Evaluation - Assessment (by writer and
REFLEXIVE   others) in terms of purpose.
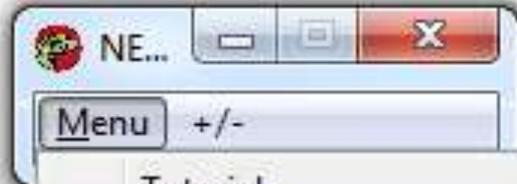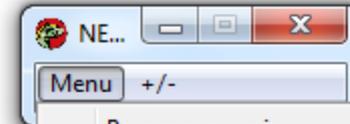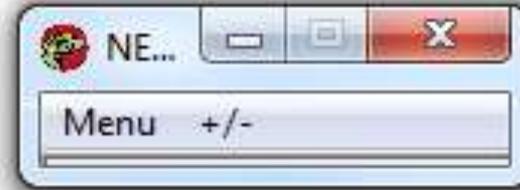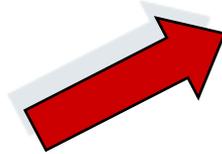   **-EVALUATING**

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Stages of the writing process

1. Prewriting: Consider purpose and reader, gather data, let it mull round. [*DATA GATHERING*]

2. Draft writing: Suggest structures or outlines, jot down ideas or fragments, write larger pieces. [*IDEA GENERATION*]

3. Major editing: Reread and structure for reader, order, add, delete (go back to 2 if necessary). [*IDEA ORGANISATION/ STRUCTURING*]

4. Minor editing and polishing: Check for correctness, check format and minor editing conventions. [*EDITING*]

5. Evaluation: Assessment (by writer and others) in terms of purpose. [*EVALUATING*]

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Writing Tutor Program

Menu +/-

Menu +/- (expanded)

- Program overview
- Tutorial
- About composing
- Assess your writing expertise
- Teacher's advice

HELP WITH COMPOSING
- Preparing to write ▶
- Writing rough drafts ▶
- Revising for your reader ▶
- Editing and proof-reading ▶
- Evaluating your writing ▶

- Mind map
- Flow chart
- Help with writer's block
- Inner dialogues
- Composing on computer
- Ideas database
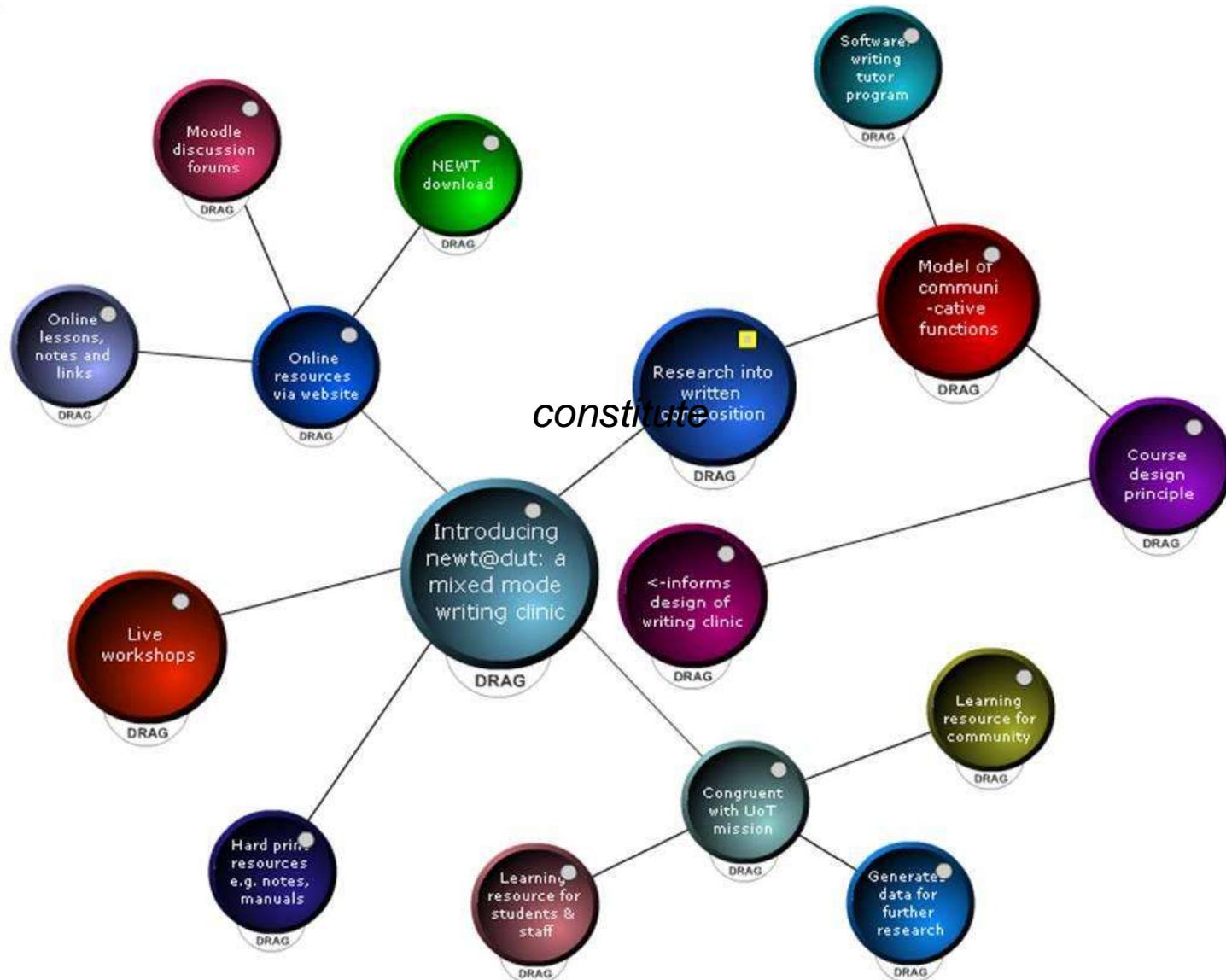- Readings database
- Working notes

Menu +/-

- Tutorial
- Preparing to write ▶
- Writing rough drafts ▶
- Revising for your reader ▶
- Editing and proof-reading ▶
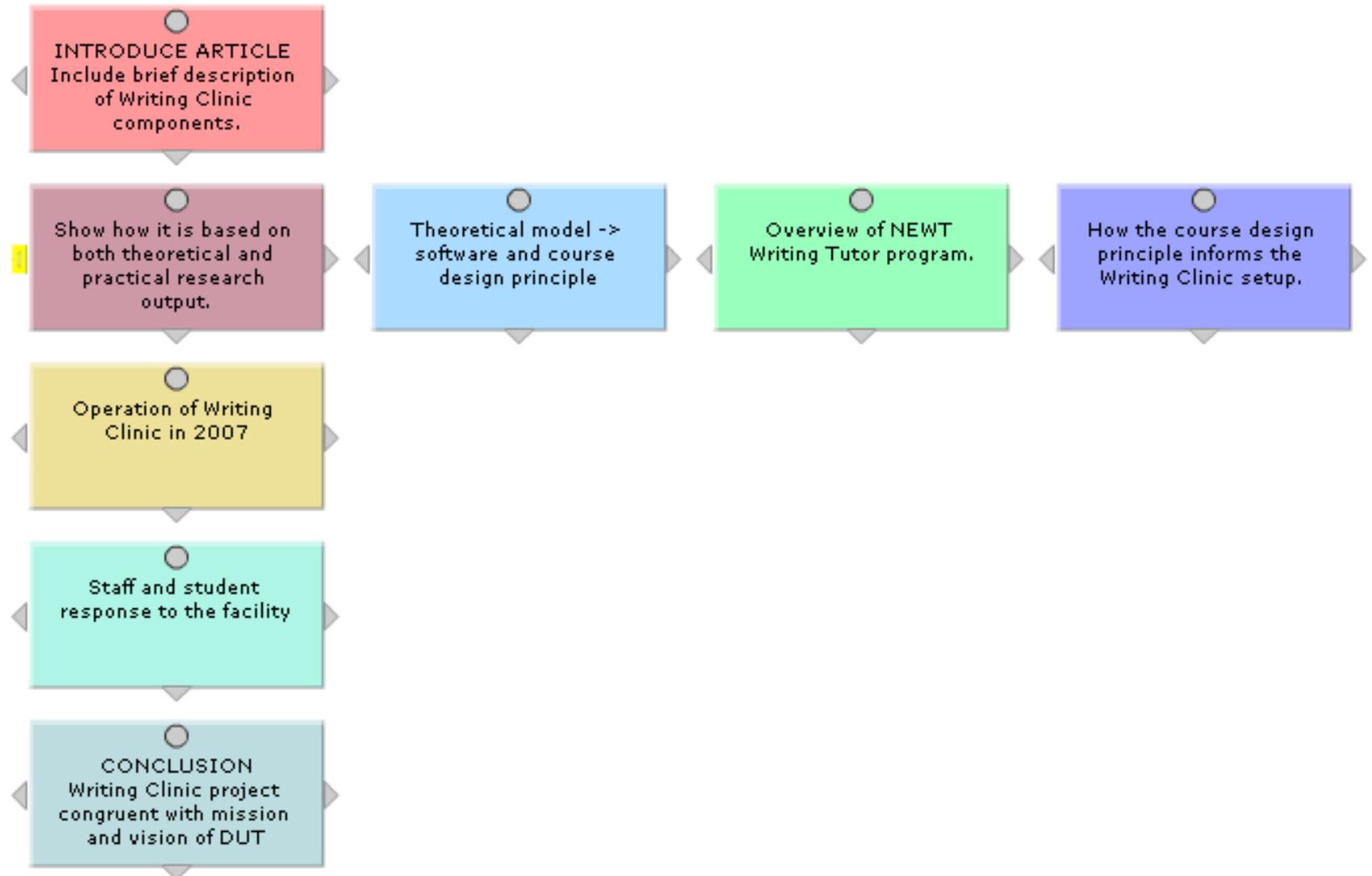- Evaluating your writing ▶
- EXPAND

The mind map helps the writer to generate ideas.

The flow chart helps the writer to structure them.

INTRODUCE ARTICLE
Include brief description of Writing Clinic components.

Show how it is based on both theoretical and practical research output.

Theoretical model -> software and course design principle

Overview of NEWT Writing Tutor program.

How the course design principle informs the Writing Clinic setup.

Operation of Writing Clinic in 2007

Staff and student response to the facility

CONCLUSION
Writing Clinic project congruent with mission and vision of DUT

Download of the Writing Tutor Program

A copy of the writing Tutor Program can be downloaded from Unit 14 at:

http://dutmoodle.dut.ac.za/moodle/course/view.php?id=130

Download the zip of the Writing Tutor Program, save to your desktop, unzip, and install on your hard drive. This version should work on Windows XP or Windows 7, but not on Vista. *PLEASE BE PATIENT, THIS IS A PROTOTYPE WHICH IS BEING TESTED OUT.*

1. Preparing to write

FUNCTIONS: *CONTEXTUALISING/DATA -GATHERING*

Consider purpose and reader, gather data, let it mull round.

Purpose of thesis: to argue a case for your project being a legitimate attempt at adding to knowledge in the field

Purpose of literature review: to review what research has been done and make a case as to why yours should be done (i.e. identify gap in knowledge).

1. Preparing to write contd.

The logical place for the research problem/research questions is at the end of the literature review.

Audience of the thesis: academic peers, evaluators (i.e. examiners), other researchers (i.e. academics and students).

Note: A good literature review is of value to other researchers in summarising current knowledge in a field or research area.
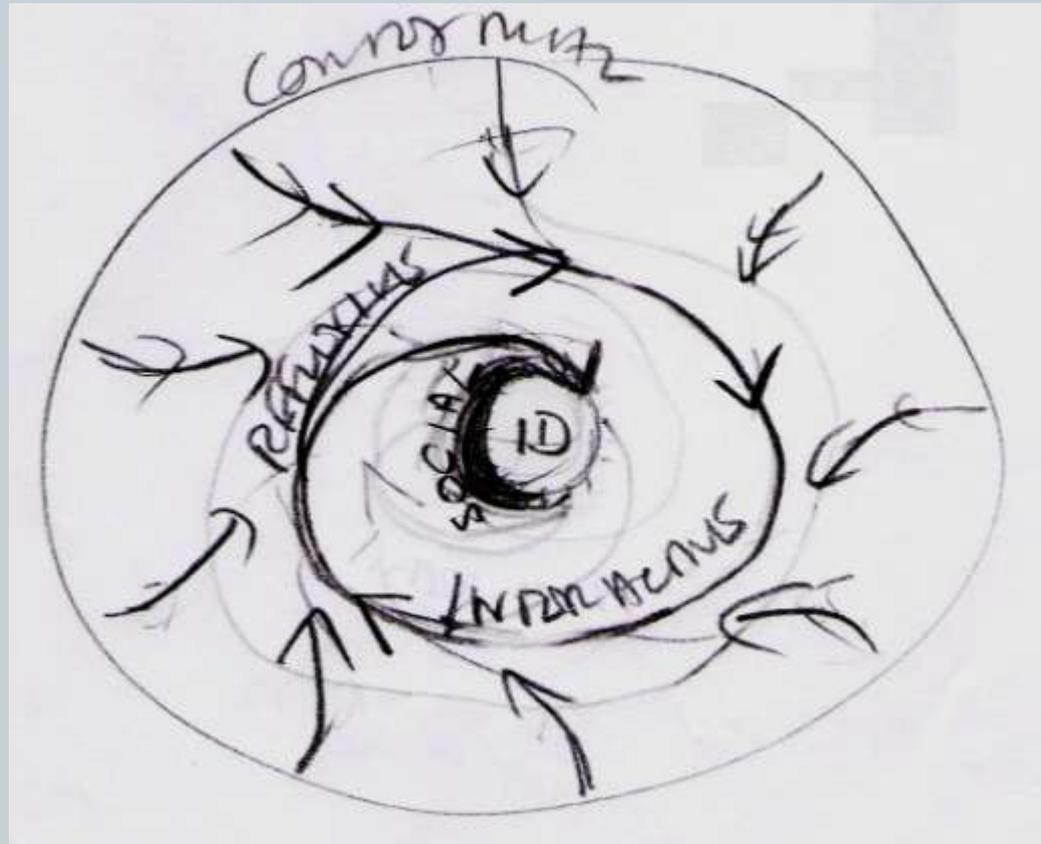
2. Draft writing

Suggest structures or outlines, jot down ideas or fragments, write larger pieces.

Here you have to get away from the tidy notes and databases and ….

…go a bit wild!

Drawing helps to conceptualise

Take a fat, rough pencil and get away from the b....y computer!

Get the ideas down in any order!

Plans/sketches/maps help you to get a grasp of the whole concept.

Plans are good, but they should be used as a quick guide to see what can go in where, not to nail ideas down!

Write first - structure later!

Turn off the spelling checker.

There's no such thing as a bad idea. (Doesn't mean you actually have to do it/write about it, though!)

Nature hates a good idea. Save, backup and/or file whatever you get down. *Never throw anything away!*

Forging an argument from what you have read

Draft writing is the stage at which you forge an argument from what you have read.

The argument is not in your readings or summaries: *it is in your head.*

Your argument is a mental construct which is generated from the data which you feed into your mind (the GIGO principle applies).

As you jot down your plans, you are in effect creating the argument.

3. Major editing

FUNCTION: *IDEA ORGANISATION/STRUCTURING*

Reread and structure for reader, order, add, delete (go back to 2 if necessary).

Conventionally "creative" writers tend to stick at this stage, as if ideas were just perfect the way they came out. This is because they mistake idea generation for the whole writing process.

The most creative part of the writing process is where writers flip back and forth between writer and reader roles.

4. Minor editing and polishing

FUNCTION: *EDITING*

Check for correctness, check format and minor editing conventions.

Fine editing and proofing should not be done until the chapter (or a large section) is complete. While placing of references can be marked when drafting, inserting citations from EndNote should *not* be done until drafting is finished, as it can slow down the process and block idea generation.

Label, date and save corrected chapters carefully.

Minor editing and polishing tips

Draft when you are fresh, and do the proofing and cleanup later when you are tired or "brain-dead".

Draft in single space – ideas flow better - but do it in the font you are going to use for the final copy.   This makes polishing so much easier.   Also get into the habit of using correct spacing when fast-drafting: this is hell to spot and fix later.

Lots of ideas can be fixed or tweaked when proofing: it forces you to look at what you wrote (as opposed to what you meant).

5. Evaluation

FUNCTION: *EVALUATING*

Assessment (by writer and others) in terms of purpose.

Most writers find it extremely hard to evaluate what they have written: listen to supervisors' feedback, and *ask* if you are not sure which criteria they are applying.

Find out the criteria for thesis assessment to help you to see whether your thesis fulfils these criteria.(DUT criteria: on last page of Form PG 10.)

Key evaluation criteria for the lit. review

- Does it show how the proposed topic fits into the body of knowledge already known?
- Does it mention seminal works in the field/area?
- Has it mentioned/reviewed previous/similar studies (i.e. have enough other theses been read)?
- Has it critiqued other studies?
- Has a "gap" been identified (i.e. as to what has not yet been done)?
- Does it argue a case for the proposed study?

N.B. *The above points make up the purpose of writing a literature review.*

How the review process, reading and writing intertwine

"... ideas generally seem to be spawned in data" Shaughnessy 1977:245).

The ideas you absorb when reading the literature are the "data" which feed into your own (later) generation of ideas in draft writing.

It is not just a case of summarising what other people wrote: *you are fuelling your own creative mechanism.*

It is writing drafts which brings new ideas to birth: *what was implicit in your thinking becomes explicit.*

Keeping on track

It is very easy to go off track and to be diverted from your purpose by other writers' ideas. How to keep on track:

- At the draft writing stage, make sure you have identified the main elements of your review, and see that you deal with them (order is not so important at this stage).
- Later ordering of ideas (major editing) is *very* useful in seeing what you have left out or need to explain further.
- Finally, creating a Table of Contents (minor editing and polishing) provides a good check as to whether your content is complete and your ordering is logical.

Citing to write and writing to cite...

...how to weave in what you read:

You argument may be sound, but you may have left out some important studies/authors – how do you fit them in?

As Pienaar (2009) points out, Verhoef and Du Plessis's *Multilingualism and educational interpreting: innovation and delivery* (1st impression, 2008, latest impression, 2010) is so far the only volume dedicated to this area of interpreting. Verhoef and Du Plessis's pioneering work goes some way towards delineating this area, as follows (Makhubu 2012: 25).

The thesis writer then included *all* of the chapter authors, as this was the only work so far in her field.

The "patchwork effect"

Over-use of direct citations can create a "patchwork effect" which is not only unsightly but can extend the length of your literature review unnecessarily.

An example of this is posted at:

http://dutmoodle.dut.ac.za/moodle/mod/resource/view.php?id=3718

Try to use your own words where possible.

Name dropping

Following on from the idea of using your own words, "name dropping" can be much more impressive than using verbatim citations. By this, I mean listing several authors after a general statement, which suggests familiarity with the readings as well as the ability to generalise, as follows:

> Structures in critical realism are the explanatory source of the interaction which generate various behaviours (Crothers, 1998; Frazer, 1995; Joseph, 1998). [From Govender 2012: 79]

You can pop in a whole lot of authors at the last minute in this way, provided that you are familiar with your sources.

Endgame

"Endgame" – literature search at the end of the review (where you find the literature you wish you had found at the beginning of your project.)

It is important to do a literature search when the complete thesis is finished so as to be able to include the most recent studies: you can be sure the examiners will "google" to see what comes up in your field. Make sure you do the same!