

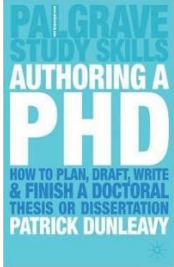
Paper Feedback Presents:

# General Guidelines for Writing

- Write in your own words to maximise the relevance of your paper to the question you have asked or is been asked.
- You should be able to explain what your dissertation is arguing in less than “one minute” regardless of your audiences' familiarity with the subject. You should be able to explain your position on a term paper or formative essay in less than 30 seconds.
- Write the paper in response to a research question, rather than around a vague title or topic.
- Papers are not dissimilar to exam answers. Practice writing several short essays on your topic. Good flow is instrumental.
- Beware of hypnotically repeating a question’s phrasing without analysing the concepts involved.
- Apply techniques for analysing concepts to clarify all the ideas in your paper’s central question. Do not focus just on the overtly technical concepts: pay attention also to the linking ideas which make the question distinctive.
- Brainstorm around the paper's question for a short period, generating ideas without criticising them. Eliminate ideas which are irrelevant and create a whole word file of possible ideas.
- Try writing out the opposite of your research question, or be absolutely clear what your paper's question is not asking.
- Make sure you recognise open-ended questions which need to have limited scope if their relevance is to be maintained.
- Analytical papers need categories to subdivide material, and to select what is relevant for your argument. Use periodization to tackle chronological topics. Or divide a complex subject into systematic subsections, or separate causal processes and devices.
- **REMEMBER CONTROVERSY IS GOOD:** Ask what opposing or different views there could be of the subject. Write a well-organised argumentative paper. What kind of controversy could there be about it? As long as you have counter-arguments for those controversies, you will be fine.

- When writing argumentative papers, take care to use accurate descriptions of the different viewpoints. Also make it quite clear when you are summarising someone else's argument, and when you are stating your own views. Professors love to hear the author's voice; don't hide behind crusty old academics.
- Combinations of argumentative and analytic dimensions can be used to generate a matrix structure for a paper. Examine different ways of ordering paragraphs before you fix it into a finalised paper structure.
- Use headings, paragraphs, and other organisers.
- Write paragraphs as coherent units of thought. Avoid very short ones or two sentence paragraphs, but equally keep paragraphs at a manageable size.
- Sequence materials in your paper so as to make each major set of points at one particular state, to avoid repetition, and to develop the argument cumulatively.
- Never start sentences with "This is..." or "However..."
- Use introductions only to give essential definitions, to respectfully address the research question, and to give some signposts about the sequence of topics covered in the rest of the paper.
- Keep introductions deliberately short. Keep definitions at the minimum needed. Get into the core arguments of your dissertation as early as possible.
- Aim for controlled release of information throughout the paper. Avoid blurting out the substantive argument too early in a crude way. But equally, do not have your core arguments appear only in the conclusions.
- To achieve a good style in writing papers, picture your audience as you write, and choose the simplest, clearest and most concise way of expressing your arguments.
- Use techniques of generating information more systematically and extensively in conducting a document search: scan recent journals comprehensively for articles or book reviews, or use online computer facilities to uncover possible new sources.
- With literature review papers, specify an angle of investigation at the outset. Look for elements in the existing literature which can be brought into an unusual conjunction, or different bodies of literature which might usefully be synthesised (for example, those of different countries or different theoretical approaches, to a common topic).
- With case-study papers, define a clear rationale for the applied work involved, and be clear as to what is the point/argument/goal of your case study. Look at academic case-studies and previous dissertations to get an idea of what may be feasible as comparisons.
- Be cautious about adopting a focus-down model for a case-study paper. An opening-out approach may be easier to manage, and produce a closer connection between a case-study and broader academic themes.
- Write a paper synopsis as early as possible and keep it under development until you begin writing a draft of the full text. Remember you should be able to pitch your paper's argument in 30 seconds.
- Timetable your paper carefully to avoid clashes with exam periods. Ration the time devoted to introductory work; if theory is over specified before substantive research begins it may turn out to be inapplicable to later findings.
- Write up your findings as you go along, before you forget details, or overkill the project and exceed word limits, OR discover that you have chosen the wrong topic altogether.
- Allow at least a quarter of your available time for producing a final draft.
- Document literature sources and quotations carefully from the outset of your project.

- Logistical Issues: If you have not already done so, learn about EndNotes through the LSE library services:  
<http://www2.lse.ac.uk/library/services/training/endnote/Endnote.aspx>



- [Read Patrick Dunleavy's \*Authoring A PhD\*](#)
- If you are a student at the London School of Economics, [find it in the library](#)