Motivation and writer’s block

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Outline

• Motivations
• Writing a lot
• Dealing with writer’s block

Freewriting

• May start with organizer (Mind Map)
• Fill with text
• No judgement
• No correction
• Leave out words that „don´t come“: (XXX)

Beginning to write:

• At the beginning: production, not perfection

„Revising while you generate text is like drinking decaffeinated coffee in the morning: noble idea, wrong time. Your first drafts should sound like they were hastily translated from Icelandic by a nonnative speaker.“

Silvia, 2010, S. 76
Practice

• Create a structure for a paper on:
  • Why PhD students should earn more than their advisers
  • Why cannabis should be legalized
  • Why unhealthy food and drinks should be banned

In general:

• Being able to write has to do with routine

• Routine is acquired through:
  – Writing
  – Reading scientific papers

• Don’t wait for inspiration, schedule times

„Inspiration“ vs. „Plan“

“Inspiration” vs. “Plan”


On different styles

• Strategy 1: Flow writing: just write whatever comes into your mind, no theme, no guiding principle (Breton, Kerouac, Nizon)

• Strategy 2: one idea-one text: attention to one idea with flow writing afterwards (Martin Walser)

• Strategy 3: multiple versions: one idea, different versions of text (Dürrenmatt, Chandler)

Girgensohn, 2007
On different styles

- **Strategy 4**: multiple versions: text is produced by multiple corrections of an original draft being put together to another draft (Kraus, Huxley, Balzac)
- **Strategy 5**: planned writing: plan before writing: two phases: planning and writing (Zukcmayer)
- **Strategy 6**: generating ideas outside of text: long phase before getting to write: developing ideas and playing with passages in the head before writing it down (Rousseau, Hesse, Baudelaire)

Girgensohn, 2007

On different styles

- **Strategy 7**: step by step approach: production of text in different phases, often recommended, hardly ever used
- **Strategy 8**: unsystematic writing: writing in small steps without following any logic. Developing fragments being put side to side (Bachmann, Grass, Mann, Böll)
- **Strategy 9**: creating islands: writing different fragments and connecting them later on (Kafka)
- **Strategy 10**: very small fragments: small texts written around a theme. No cohesive text (Wittgenstein, Lichtenberg)

Girgensohn, 2007

Get to know your writing style

- Places where I can write best?
- What are my best times for writing?
  - Am I using them, or do I have other appointments?
- Disturbances?
- Awake enough?

Creative thinking: How?

- Where do you get ideas?
  - Shower: 13.5%
  - At the sofa: 12.1%
  - Jogging: 7.1%

- What disturbs you?
  - Distress: 36.7%
  - Disruptions (Colleagues, boss, ...): 23.5%

IQudo study, 2010, n=500
Phases of writing: Identifying problems

• Getting started
• Producing ideas, scheduling time
• Search for literature
• Setting a goal
• Structuring writing
• Writing a first draft
• Getting feedback
• Revising
• Publication

Introduction: try to answer these

• 1. Start:
  – What is interesting about my topic
  – Why is my topic relevant?
  – Why am I motivated to do research?

• 2. Relevant theories, past knowledge:
  – „gap in the literature“ (?)

• 3. Based on my motivation and the need to conduct research:
  – What will I do to answer the questions raised?

• 4. Hypothesis

Setting the scene

• If you know there’s a project ahead, start with collecting notes, writing down sentences, or create a „note“ file, where you put in keywords or thoughts
• Put everything together and then record a speech about what you want to add
• Keep a notepad or smartphone nearby as you go to sleep

Typical problem: Procrastination

• Avoid procratsination by scheduling (and sticking to it)
Typical problem: Perfectionism

- Don’t block yourself
  - By not starting (“everything has been written already”)
  - Not wanting to go on (“I’m not good enough”, “Nobody will be interested anyway”)
  - Not finishing the job (“I’m nearly finished”)

Writer’s block

- Prepare for starting to write by reading what you have written last and then carrying on
- Read your draft and think how you continue from what you have written last to your next paragraph
- Create a picture: draw your ideas and sort them
- Freewrite, no perfectionism. After taking a break you can highlight crucial points with a textmarker
- Before you end your day’s writing work: make a note on how you will continue tomorrow

Writer’s block

- Write to a 7 year old to explain what you want to write about
- Keep record on your success: use a To-Do List, naming every step you need to take in order to get the job done and everything you already achieved

Writer’s block

- Vary times and places where you write
- Take a break: tell a friend about your writing project: it helps clarify things
- If there’s a block: FREEWRITE
- At this point:
  - What do I need to do now?
  - Where am I now?
  - Which is the next idea I need to put on paper?
Practice

• Please try by starting with...

„I’m sitting at this desk again, and I just can’t think of anything with which I could start. It’s always the same....“

– What do I need to do now?
– Where am I now?
– Which is the next idea I need to put on paper?

Getting feedback from oneself

• Distance yourself from the text
• Print in another font and size than you normally use
• Put it away for a few days, before you read through it
• Read it out aloud (uncovers long sentences)
• Imagine a typical reader:
  – What does he want to know?
  – Which knowledge does he have, which questions will come up?
  – What does the reader need to understand from the text?
  – What is the reader interested in?

Getting feedback from oneself

• Read each text three times:
  • Once fast, looking for consistency, following a line of reasoning
  • Once a little slower: looking into wording and structure of sentences
  • Once really slow: looking for grammar, spell check

Nulla dies sine linea
Plinius

Thanks for listening and writing