

“Editing the Thesis: Welding and Polishing”

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Where are you in the process?

▶ Are you assembling?



▶ Welding?



▶ Or polishing?



Keep the whole car in view

- ▶ What is your “so what” sentence?

The overall view

- ▶ Wallace & Wray, *Critical Reading and Writing for Postgraduates*
- ▶ Evans & Gruba, *How to Write a Better Thesis*
- ▶ Walters, *The Readable Thesis: A Guide to Clear and Effective Writing*
- ▶ Your supervisor, too, should be assisting the systematization of your approach (keeping the whole car in view)
- ▶ Your abstract, introduction, and discussion should connect and tell an unfolding story

Assembly: Gathering the parts

- ▶ Chapters should be logically connected
- ▶ Think of ‘swinging from the monkey bars’



- ▶ Take care with the close of each chapter (and section) as it should provide a springboard to the next

Welding: Connecting sections

- ▶ Section headings and subheadings play an important role.
 - ‘Verbal’ headings
 - And/or numbering systems
 - 2.1
 - 2.2
 - 2.3
 - 2.3.1
 - 2.3.2
 - 2.3.3 etc...
- ▶ Must show connections and add worth
 - Every paragraph does not deserve a number!
 - Neither does every sentence!!

Be consistent

- ▶ Between sections, terminology must be consistent.
 - Eg. Stick to 'social cohesion' over 'community connectedness'
- ▶ If you choose to use certain terms interchangeably, you must explain that initially
- ▶ At polishing stage, read for repetitiousness

Finding 'the through story'

- ▶ Don't start polishing before you've welded!
- ▶ Overview-read with eye to structure before concentrating on detail
- ▶ Useful technique: reverse outlining

Reverse outlining

- ▶ Read paragraph by paragraph
- ▶ For each par, jot down the key idea
- ▶ At the end of the section, jot down the key idea of the section as a whole
- ▶ Repeat for next section
- ▶ Then write down key idea of the chapter as a whole

Examining the reverse outline

- ▶ Do all pars HAVE a key idea?
 - If not, insert it in the form of a topic sentence
- ▶ Does each par have only one key idea?
 - If more than one, you need to create more than one par
- ▶ Do the key ideas show repetition?
 - If so, try reordering pars.
 - Is there overlap? Edit
 - Is there complementarity/development? Good – but maintain distinctness

Examining the reverse outline...

- ▶ Are the key ideas in logical order?
 - If not, reorder pars
- ▶ Are there gaps in the key ideas or their logic?
 - If so, create and insert new pars
- ▶ Review: are all your intended key ideas present and accounted for?
 - If not, you've identified the gaps to fill

Topic sentences are gold

- ▶ Is each key idea clearly identifiable and clearly expressed?
 - If not, encapsulate it in a *pithy topic sentence*
 - Usually in first position
 - Sometimes following a transition
 - Sometimes at end of paragraph
- ▶ *If your paragraph does not have a topic sentence, compose one. Do it now.*
- ▶ Topic sentences still need appropriate development.

Final connecting welds

- ▶ Internal references or signposts good in moderation
 - Eg. "As outlined in section 4.4..."
- ▶ Be wary of overdoing it
 - Numbs reader
 - Might indicate structural confusion

Polishing

- ▶ Four main pieces of advice:
 - ▶ A) Don't try to say too much
 - ▶ B) Make it clear who's doing what
 - ▶ C) Tackle disjointedness
 - ▶ D) "Omit needless words"

A) "Don't try to say too much"

- ▶ In the thesis overall
- ▶ In each paragraph
- ▶ In each sentence!

- ▶ Keep in mind guidelines for paragraphs

- ▶ Diagnose overstuffed sentences
 - Break complex periodic sentences into shorter units
 - Use enumeration or listing
 - Keep sentence length short (but vary appropriately)

B) "Who's doing what?"

- ▶ Clearly identify the subject of the action
 - Through sentence structure
 - Through using clear pronouns
- ▶ Identify and query every use of "this" – what is the antecedent?
 - Eg. "X does Y, and Z has postulated A. This goes to show..."

 - "This will lead to more robust data"
 - ▶ "This method will..."
 - ▶ "Purposive sampling will..."



C) "Tackle disjointedness"

- ▶ Ensure sensible sentence order.
- ▶ Use transitions.
- ▶ Use parallelism.
- ▶ Organise detail carefully.

Ensuring sensible sentence order...

- ▶ Keep subject and verb close together in your sentence
- ▶ If you attribute a statement to someone, reveal source at the beginning
- ▶ Read sentences aloud to check the logical order

Using transitions...

- ▶ I've already discussed the 'monkey bars' connection between chapters and sections
- ▶ Also use transition between sentences, to show how they're related (*see handout*)
 - 'Additionally...'
 - 'On the other hand...'
 - 'Subsequently...'
 - Transitions are particularly important when you're discussing critics' views

Using parallelism...

- ▶ Parallel structures help us read more efficiently and understand more quickly
 - "Just as every student is required to study English, mathematics, and history, so art should be accorded the same weight in the overall education of the child."
 - "Just as every student is required to study English, mathematics, and history, so every student should be required to study art."
 - "The study found important personality traits to be excitability, being aggressive, curiosity, and if the subject was imaginative."
 - "The study found important personality traits to be excitability, aggression, curiosity, and imaginativeness."

Organising detail...

- ▶ Sometimes, sentences are complex because the data is complex
- ▶ Consider:
 - Enumeration (or actual numbering)
 - Listing, using punctuation to help (and always making lists parallel!)
 - Inserting tables

D) "Omit needless words!"

- ▶ Concision takes time, precise vocabulary, and a commitment to revision
- ▶ Be alert to prunable areas:
 - Bombastic overstatement
 - Eg. "The method outlined in section 3 represents a major breakthrough..."
 - Avoid 'obviously' and 'clearly'
 - Don't slam others
 - But don't genuflect...
 - Apologies
 - Eg. "Although these results are very small-scale..."

More prunable areas...

- Insecurely 'academic' writing
 - "Categorically, the school boards of today assume substantially greater responsibility for addressing social maladies to which their constituents may be vulnerable"
 - "School boards take more responsibility for social problems today."
- Sentences beginning "It is," or "There are"
- Value statements and words like:
 - Bad, good, terrible, ludicrous
 - True, pure, 'ideal solution'
- Strings of adverbs: replace with strong verbs

More prunable areas...

- Jokes and puns
- Cliches (eg. "in today's fast-paced society...")
- Vagueness (just about/something like)
- Qualifiers (sort of, kind of, rather, quite, very)
- Strings of adjectives
- Redundant words (*see handout for common wordy phrases and unnecessary nominalisations*)

Revise intelligently

- ▶ Be systematic:
 - Check order of sentences and/or clauses
 - Smooth connections between sentences, paragraphs, sections, and then chapters
 - Prune as you go
- ▶ Consider revising in hard copy!
- ▶ When you're not sure if you're improving your prose, or just changing it, let go and let it sit for a while
- ▶ Borrow someone else's eyes

Closing

- ▶ Do you have any specific writing questions?
- ▶ Are there particular areas you want to polish?

