

# TIPS FOR MANAGING GRADUATE READING AND WRITING

## READING:

- Develop an organized system for keeping track of your sources
- Keep notes on everything you read by summarizing in your own words
- Keep a reading/thinking log: write about what you just read, about your thoughts, questions, conclusions, hunches, etc. This is the seedbed for your ideas
- Reread your notes from time to time and write about what you've discovered so far and questions that you still need to answer.
- To improve focus, keep your research question(s) in mind as you read
- Read according to different purposes: Skim to get the gist, scan to find specific info, preview and then read closely for details.
- Use reading aids where available: abstracts, intros, headings, prefaces, intro by the editor, etc.
- Read some theses in your field
- Take a workshop or see a Learning Specialist on increasing your reading speed

## WRITING:

- Understand the nature of the writing process: writing goes from global to specific
- Use lots of idea generating strategies: brainstorming, clustering, free writing, flow charts, 5 W's, analogies, stories, talking to friends, etc.
- Break your paper into sections and try to make a plan for a section before writing it
- Start off by writing a ROUGH draft of a section:
  - Write like you talk; consider using the first person (which you can edit out later)
  - Imagine a friendly reader, not your advisor or committee

## WRITING CON'T

- Don't impose any constraints on yourself as you write - it doesn't have to be "good!"
- Consider writing without your notes and elaborating more later
- Keep a clear purpose in mind as you write each section: ask, "What do I want to do to my reader in this section and how can I best do that?"
- Revise over time (Focus on one area at a time: content, organization, language)
  - Read your work like a critical reader: Why do you say that? How do you know? So what?
  - Check organization by making topic sentence outlines, hierarchic trees of main ideas, etc.
  - Edit language for clarity and correctness: prefer ordinary words (aside from vocab of your field), active voice, and moderate sentence length; eliminate most adjectives and adverbs; get help if you need it
- Expect lots of feedback (and directions for revision!) after you submit a draft to your advisor
- Don't ever delete any part of your paper from your computer - just move it to a storage file
- ALWAYS back-up your work
- See a Learning (Writing) Specialist at any point in the process for help and inspiration!

## MANAGING YOUR TIME:

- Allocate a set number of hours per week for thesis work; also allocate "time-off" for fun, exercise, and "living." Be sure to honour your scheduled "time-off"
- Make a weekly plan for what to accomplish: set realistic, specific goals for each week
- Make a list of tasks to accomplish those goals
- Schedule times for reading/writing
- Keep an ongoing "to do" list as need arises
- Reward yourself for meeting goals
- Avoid distractions
- Deal with procrastination (see Handout)