

## 11 Leads on How to Write Your Final Paper

### 1. Start writing early:

Writing does not start with the actual text! Before you start composing your paper you should use writing to communicate with yourself and to develop written ideas and thoughts. The tools for this you can learn by using an academic writing journal – a book you should always carry with you. The journal is a kind of academic diary. In your diary you write all your ideas, draft questions, outline thoughts, reflect your writing process, note what books you need to get and so on.

### 2. The difference between topic and title/main question:

Your title/question narrows down your topic so that it becomes a clear excerpt that can be discussed in your paper. “China and its international relations” for example is a topic. A main question or title for this topic could be: “The construction of the international relations between China and Germany between 1960 and 1985”. Rule of thumb is: If your title has less than 7 words, it’s too broad!

### 3. Effective reading:

Start with a brief overview to orientate yourself within the topic. Use up to date literature. Read the table of content and the introduction to get an insight into the book and then decide which texts are relevant for you. Before you start reading make sure you know what you want to find out with this particular text. Never read without writing. Make excerpts of the relevant aspects. Express the relevant in your own words, do not just write down quotations or key words. This way you will find out what is unclear to you. The aim of excerpting is that you will not need the book when writing the paper. It seems to be a lot of work but saves you a lot of time later on. To organise your excerpts, it is advisable to use literature maintenance program i.e.: bibliographix, endnote, literat.

### 4. To talk about the topic:

Use every possibility to talk about your topic with friends, colleagues, etc. because ideas develop easier in exchange. Form groups in which you continuously talk about your topics. Consult writing tutors. Know that you have the right to be supervised by your professor!

### 5. Realistic organisation of time:

Find out what time of day suits you best for writing. Use this time effectively instead of writing E-Mails or else. It is really important to find a good working rhythm (rule of thumb: 4 hours of disciplined work are enough for one day!). If you cannot keep up with your schedule adjust content and complexity to your conditions. If you find yourself distracted over and over again (cleaning, watching TV ...) use self-reflective writing to find out why. It can be helpful to note what you have done and what you want to continue in your journal.



#### **6. Create working conditions:**

Make sure that you have a quiet working space where you cannot be distracted. Turn off your cell phone or work at the library.

#### **7. Health:**

Periodical breaks, exercise and healthy nutrition contribute to a successful paper!

#### **8. Creative techniques:**

Methods i.e. Brainstorming, Mind Mapping, Clustering etc. are explained in many books about academic writing. They can help you to formulate thoughts and to structure them. And if you are stuck at some point, try something new: Write a poem about the Chinese international relations or a fictional dialogue with the author of the text that you have trouble with.

#### **9. Quickly drafting a raw first version and taking time to revise in private:**

Write the draft of your paper quickly without thinking about phrasing. Know that this first version is not the final one! Schedule plenty of time for the revision of your first version! Examine your text after certain aspects. For example: in one procedure pay attention to the structure of your paper, find the central theme. In another step analyze if your language is appropriate, rework colloquial phrases. Define terms and concepts. Shorten long and complicated sentences and avoid passive constructions. Check quotations and references. Let someone else read your paper and ask for specific feedback on certain aspects. Calculate as much time for revising as for writing itself.

#### **10. Proofreading on a printed version:**

Print your reworked paper and give it to someone to proofread (orthography, grammar, punctuation, layout...)

#### **11. Get Feedback:**

You put a lot of effort and time into your paper. Therefore ask your advisor/professor for detailed feedback so that you can learn from this experience. A good feedback does not just point out weaknesses it also indicates your strengths! Reflect your working process in your journal: What worked well? What could you do better in the future?

#### **Literature:**

Kruse, Otto: Keine Angst vor dem leeren Blatt. Ohne Schreibblockade durchs Studium. Campus Verlag, Frankfurt/New York, 1998.

Pyerin, Brigitte: Kreatives wissenschaftliches Schreiben. Tipps und Tricks gegen Schreibblockaden. Juventa, Weinheim und München, 2001.