

“Starting an Effective Dissertation Writing Group”

Hume Writing Center Graduate Student Workshop

Dr. Sohui Lee and Dr. Chris Golde

Stanford University



DISSERTATION WRITING GROUP STARTER KIT

This starter kit provides concrete suggestions for establishing and maintaining an effective dissertation (or other academic) writing group.










Getting Started with Dissertation Writing Groups	2-4
Introduction to Dissertation Writing Groups (DWG) and how to make them work.	
Ten Things to Discuss When Starting a Dissertation Writing Group	5-6
Think about these questions in advance. Agreement on all of them is essential to an effective group.	
Writing Group Ground Rules Agreement	7
A worksheet to complete during the first DWG meeting. How will your DWG operate?	
Personal Goals Worksheet	8
A worksheet to complete before the first DWG meeting. What do you want to accomplish?	
Writing Inventory	9
A worksheet to complete before the first DWG meeting. Helps you make explicit how you write. May provide clues to things you want to change.	
Group Work Inventory	10
A worksheet to complete before the first DWG meeting. What do you like in a group? Useful for setting ground rules.	
Schedule	11-12
A worksheet to complete before the first DWG meeting to find a common meeting time.	
DWG Log	13-14
A worksheet to complete after the first DWG meeting. What did you accomplish? You may want to use this after every meeting	
Activities for Writing Groups	15-18
A handout from The Writing Center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Used under Creative Commons License.	
Asking, Giving and Taking Feedback	19-21
Tips for constructive feedback.	
Revision Strategies	22-24
A worksheet and handout of tips to help you more efficiently apply feedback and revise your writing.	
Dissertation Writing Bibliography	25-26
These books are useful for dissertation writers (but don't succumb to reading books as a form of procrastination). Remember, the best way to write is to write.	

GETTING STARTED WITH DISSERTATION WRITING GROUPS

Dissertation Writing Groups help advanced graduate students complete their work by providing a supportive environment for the exchange of critical feedback. These support groups have helped many students navigate the dissertation writing process and improve the quality of their dissertations along the way.





BENEFITS

The benefits of a group usually far outweigh the cost of time and energy. Feedback on your dissertation writing is the obvious benefit. There are other less obvious payoffs.

-  A group is a source of emotional support. Because you are all going through the same process, you can understand, vent, bolster, encourage, sympathize and crack the whip.
-  A group helps keep you accountable to your progress goals. Fellow students are excellent procrastination detectors.
-  A group can become a community of support in a time that can be quite isolating.
-  By meeting with other students, without faculty involvement, students develop skills creating a supportive intellectual community, in giving and taking feedback, and creating original work.
-  Peer mentors are often harder critics than faculty. Practicing a proposal defense or conference presentation in a group can help iron out all of the kinks. A group of students familiar with your work ask harder questions than most faculty members! It is confidence building to satisfy your peers.
-  A writing group can supplement input from faculty. Students are able to give each other more time than most faculty members can. In addition, here are not power imbalances between students in the same way that there are between faculty and students.
-  A group can open up possibilities for research collaboration.
-  Group members can be sources of new resources, perspectives and ideas.
-  A writing group can help you better understand your own “peak” hours of effectiveness.

PREDICTABLE PITFALLS

There can be negative aspects to group work. Occasionally conflicts of personality or expectations arise, and must be addressed. Remember, if the group does not meet the needs of a participant, for whatever reason, it is OK for that person to leave the group.

-  The higher education system has its competitive aspects. For example, we compete for the attention of faculty, for fellowships, for plum TA/RA opportunities, for conference presentation slots, and ultimately for jobs. One should not ignore the challenges of competing with those students with whom we work most closely and cooperatively. Clear communication about expectations (Do you tell each other about newly discovered opportunities? Do you share bibliographic information and sources? Do you practice job talks in front of each other or the rest of the group?) and anxieties (acknowledging the presence of competition) is crucial for maintaining trust.
-  Conflicts about intellectual property rights are increasingly prevalent. If you are studying topics similar to that of other students in your group, it is important to air these issues. How do you acknowledge and cite each other? Who retains the "rights" to ideas developed within the group?
-  Participants may have different levels of commitment to the group. Some members may demand more from others than they give back. One person may be habitually late. What happens if someone reneges on a commitment, such as not providing writing or skipping a meeting? Set aside time occasionally to revisit group ground rules and expectations.
-  The time of renewal for a group, when considering adding new members, can be a difficult period. Discussions of who to include must be conducted with candor and confidentiality. The integration of new members requires patience.

BEFORE THE FIRST MEETING

This Starter Kit includes six worksheets and three handouts. Be sure that each group member has a copy of the Starter Kit.

READ "Ten Things," "Activities" and "Feedback" handouts.

FILL OUT Personal Goals, Writing Inventory, Group Work Inventory, & Schedule Worksheets. These will help you break the ice, learn about each other's writing needs and group interactions, and start to plan a structure and schedule for your group that will work for everyone.

BRING Ground Rules Agreement, DWG Log worksheets to fill out during the meeting.

DURING THE FIRST MEETING

INTRODUCE YOURSELVES to one another. Use the **four worksheets** to discuss personal writing goals, writing habits, experiences and expectations for your writing groups, and schedule. These conversations are crucial for setting group rules for your group, getting to know each other's preferences for working together, and each member's writing issues.

ESTABLISH THE GOALS AND PROCEDURES for your group. Use the "Ten Things" handout to start your conversation on procedures. Use the "Ground Rules" worksheet to keep a record of your group's decisions. While the Group can and most likely will change the ground rules over time, a recorded list of initial Ground Rules will help members remember and stick to the rules that were agreed upon.

SET THE SCHEDULE for the first set of meetings. Be sure you determine when, where, and who.

FIVE MINUTES OF REFLECTIVE WRITING is a great close for each meeting, including the first session. One model is the "Dissertation Writing Group Log" worksheet. This will help members reflect on the feedback during that meeting and incorporate the feedback by the next meeting. For writers whose work is not being read, they could still note their own "take away" from the group discussion, and their strategy to concretely implement these lessons.

TEN THINGS TO DISCUSS WHEN STARTING A DISSERTATION WRITING GROUP

Successful writing groups have negotiated a shared understanding about the answers to these questions. There are no right answers, but all members need to agree. The goal for is to help each member of the group keep moving forward and finish the dissertation. Write down the answers to these questions in the Writing Group Ground Rules Agreement form.

1. **How often will the group meet, for how long, and where?** Once a week, twice a week, every other week? 60, 90 or 120 minutes? Classroom, coffee shop, library, lounge?
2. **How big will the group be?** We suggest a group of four or five members. This provides sufficient diversity, but allows each member to get feedback every 2-3 weeks.
3. **What are the rules for group membership?** Do members' dissertation topics have to be related or not? Same department or across departments? At the same stage of the dissertation? When are new members added? How are new members identified?
4. **What format will you follow at each meeting?** How much time is spent on the dissertation process and how much on writing feedback? A possible two hour meeting schedule:
 - 10 minutes for around the group updates, 2 minutes per person.
 - 30 minutes of feedback each for Person A and Person B.
 - 10 minutes of silent reflective writing
 - 10 minutes to preview next week's agenda
5. **What are the "formal" roles for the group and who will play them?** A facilitator keeps the discussion on task. A convener sends reminders, sets locations and calendar, and holds a copy of the Ground Rules. A time keeper monitors agreed upon time allocations. A note taker writes down key points made during feedback. Do positions rotate?
6. **What kinds of work will the group read?** Loose ideas, free writing, outlines, rough drafts, polished drafts, drafts that have been seen by outside readers? Dissertation-related only? Or grant proposals, interview protocols, survey drafts, posters, conference papers, CVs and job letters?
7. **When, how and how much work will members submit for feedback?** How many days are needed for thoughtful feedback? Central drop-off point, personal delivery, e-mail, Web page? How many pages can be given?
8. **What kind of feedback is reasonable to expect?** How much time should readers plan to take? Is it reasonable to ask for detailed editing of grammar and word choice?

9. **How will members respond to each other's writing?** Will a request for feedback accompany the text? Will readers comment directly on the draft, on a separate response sheet, via e-mail, or make oral comments in the meeting? At the request of the writer or the preference of the reader?
10. **What is the initial commitment?** During the startup phase of every group there is a settling-in period as the group jells. Give it a little time before deciding whether the group is useful. At the end of a quarter is a good time to revisit ground rules and shift members.

WRITING GROUP GROUND RULES AGREEMENT

Group Name:

Agreed to on this date:

Participant Signatures:

1. How often will the group meet, for how long, and where?	
2. How big will the group be?	
3. What are the rules for group membership?	
4. What format will you follow at each meeting?	
5. What are the formal roles and who will play them?	
6. What kinds of work will the group read?	
7. When, how and how much work will members submit for feedback?	
8. What kind of feedback is reasonable to expect?	
9. How will members respond to each other's writing?	
10. What is the initial commitment?	

PERSONAL GOALS

What are your goals as a writer? (This answer can include the kinds of writing you would like to do, the kinds of audiences you would like to reach, the writing skills you would like to master, and so on.)

What is your main reason for joining a dissertation writing group? (feedback, better writing progress, expanding network of resources, learning from others, etc.)

How do you think you can help others in your writing group?

What, for you, would be the best possible outcome of your involvement with this writing group?

WRITING INVENTORY

What is your biggest challenge or obstacle as a writer?

What kinds of critiques about your writing style have you received from professors, friends, or other readers?

What is your greatest strength as a writer? What do other people normally praise about your writing style?

What do you do before you write? What do you do to prepare to write? How do you get yourself mentally ready? Do you have a routine? **How might you improve your preparation?**

What do you while you write? For instance, do you tend to write carefully, word by word? Or, do you write everything out first, without thinking too much? **How might you improve this stage of the writing process?**

What do you after you write? What do you do to reflect back on and revise the writing you've done? **How might you make this final stage of the writing process more efficient?**

GROUP WORK INVENTORY

Describe a memorable experience with working in a group that you had in the past. Was it a positive or negative experience? Why?

List five to ten things that can make a dissertation writing group work situation terrible.

List five to ten things that you think would describe the ideal dissertation writing group work situation for you.

If a dissertation writing group is going to work together successfully, everyone really needs to
...

SCHEDULE

Fill with an “X” in any time commitments that you regularly have (class, work, the gym, etc.) **Highlight any spaces that would be ideal times for you to meet regularly with your dissertation writing group.** Then answer the questions which follow.

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
8 AM							
9 AM							
10 AM							
11 AM							
12 PM							
1 PM							
2 PM							
3 PM							
4 PM							
5 PM							
6 PM							
7 PM							
8 PM							
9 PM							

How often would you like to meet with a writing group? Weekly? Every other week?

In general, would you prefer to meet in the morning, the afternoon, or the evening?

Do you have a car or access to public transportation? How far/long would you be willing to drive/walk/take a bus to meet?

Would you like to meet in the same place every time or to rotate places?

Would you prefer to meet on campus? If so, where?

Would you like to meet somewhere totally quiet (a classroom, the library or someone's home) or somewhere with a little more activity (a coffee shop or restaurant)?

Would you prefer to meet somewhere that has food/coffee/drinks available? Somewhere that allows or disallows smoking?

DISSERTATION WRITING GROUP LOG

Date: June 19, 2008	Meeting Time: 5-7pm
<p>Feedback/discussion during group meeting:</p> <p>Discussed my introductory chapter to dissertation. Book review section needs to be expanded. There was some problems with transition, especially in the theory section.</p> <p>Feedback on Alison's chapter on Dickens was interesting. I like how she introduced her chapter with a quotation from the text! I might borrow that. Group provided some excellent suggestions on how she might improve her organization with subheadings. I'd like to use this technique too.</p> <p>Plans for your writing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> --Expand book review section by two more reviews (1 or 2 pages longer). --Review the first line of every paragraph and ask if I need to connect the ideas to the previous paragraph with a transitional phrase or word. --Add subheadings to all my major sections! --Work on "micro" revision: circle every "to be" verbs! Sharpen sentences. 	

DISSERTATION WRITING GROUP LOG

Date:	Meeting Time:
Feedback/discussion during group meeting: Plans for your writing:	

Date:	Meeting Time:
Feedback/discussion during group meeting: Plans for your writing:	

ACTIVITIES FOR WRITING GROUPS

TOUCHING BASE

Mutual support can be one of the most important functions of a writing group. Sometimes encouragement and the knowledge that others are interested in and committed to your work and your progress as a writer can be just as helpful as feedback. To that end, your writing group may want to reserve some time in each session to "touch base" or "check in" with one another. During this time you could:

- Describe your writing activities since the last group meeting in terms of pages written, parts of a project completed, or hurdles overcome.
- If you haven't written much since the last meeting, you could talk about the kinds of pre-writing activities you have undertaken (research, reading, editing previous work, meeting with a professor or advisor, etc.). Or you could talk about the obstacles to writing that have hindered your progress (writer's block, having three tests this week, needing to gather more data before you can write, etc.).
- Explain how work that was discussed during the last meeting is now evolving in response to group comments. You might explain which comments you chose to act on, or tell how a section of the piece has been reorganized or rethought in response to the group's feedback.
- Share your writing plans for the coming week or two so that your group members will know what kinds of writing they will see and so that you can help one another stick to your goals.
- Decide, as a group, on a theme for the next meeting - brainstorming, drafting, proofreading, style, writer's block, etc. Choosing a writing issue to tackle together will help you understand the challenges each member is facing at the moment and enable you to plan meetings that will help group members meet those challenges.

SYSTEMS FOR SHARING WORK

Some writing groups ask members to distribute their work in advance of the group meeting, particularly if the piece of writing in question is lengthy. You might distribute your writing at one meeting for discussion at the next; leave writing in people's mailboxes; drop writing off at people's dorm rooms, carrels, or offices; or send writing via e-mail, either by pasting material into an e-mail message or by including it as an attachment. Readers can offer the most helpful feedback when the writer has provided a list of questions, trouble spots, or issues for them to consider in their responses.

RESPONDING TO WORK THAT YOU READ OUTSIDE OF THE GROUP

The following ideas might help you respond to work that has been distributed beforehand:

- Group members could write comments and suggest editorial changes on their copies of the paper and give those to the writer during the group meeting.

- Group members could prepare a written response to the paper in the form of a letter to the writer, a paragraph, a written discussion of the work's strengths and weaknesses, or on a form developed by the group.
- Group members could respond verbally to the piece, each offering a personal, overall reaction to writing before opening the discussion to a broader give-and-take.
- You could go through the piece paragraph-by-paragraph or section-by-section, with each reader offering comments and suggestions for improvement.
- The author could come prepared with a list of questions for the group and lead a discussion based on those questions.
- One group member, either the author or (perhaps preferably) a different member of the group, could keep careful notes on key reactions and suggestions for the author's future reference.

RESPONSES TO WRITING PRESENTED DURING THE GROUP MEETING

Some groups prefer to bring writing, particularly shorter pieces, to the group meeting for immediate discussion. You might bring a draft of an entire paper, a section of a paper, or just a sentence or two that you can't seem to get "just right." Many of the above ideas will work just as well for writing that has been presented during the meeting of the writing group. However, since writing presented during the meeting will be new to everyone except the author, you might try these additional strategies:

- Read the paper aloud to the group before launching discussion. The author could read, or another member of the group could read while the author notes things that sound like they might need revision. You could either read the entire text or break it into chunks, discussing each after it is read.
- Group members could also read silently, making notes to themselves, before launching the discussion.
- Read the first paragraph or first section aloud and have everyone in the group briefly write down what he or she thinks the paper will be about or what he or she thinks the thesis of the paper is. Share those responses in discussion.

SHARING WRITING WITHOUT THE ANTICIPATION OF FEEDBACK

Sometimes, especially with new writing or writers needing a boost of confidence, it can be helpful to share writing without anticipating feedback. This kind of sharing can help writers get over fears about distributing their work or being judged.

- For writers undertaking long projects, sharing a piece can serve to show the rest of the group the progress made since the last meeting, even if the author doesn't need feedback right now.
- Sharing a piece of writing without expecting feedback can provide the writer with a deadline to work toward without generating anxieties over whether or not the piece is "good enough" to share.

- Sharing writing early in a writing group's work together can be a no-pressure way to get to know one another's projects and writing styles.

BRAINSTORMING AS PART OF THE GROUP PROCESS

Writing groups can provide not only feedback and a forum in which to share work, but also creative problem-solving for your writing troubles. Your group might try some of these brainstorming ideas:

- Identify a writing problem that one group member is having. Ask each group member to free-write possible solutions.
- Cut up a copy of a paper that needs organizational changes so that each section, main idea, or paragraph is on its own slip of paper. As a group, move the pieces of paper around and discuss possible options for reorganizing the work.
- After reading a piece, generate a list of items that the group might like to know more about. Organize these questions into categories for the author to consider.

Writing during writing group meetings

Your writing group may choose to write during some of its meetings. Here are some ideas for what to write:

- If everyone in the group has a major deadline approaching, use one session as a working meeting. Meet in a computer lab or other location in which everyone can write and work independently, taking breaks periodically to assess your progress or ask questions.
- Use some writing group time to free-write about your writing project—new ideas, to-do lists, organizational strategies, problems, or sentences for your drafts would all be appropriate topics for free-writing.
- Free-write about the writing process (you could all write about "How I start to write" or "The writing environment that works for me" or "When I sit down to edit ...") and share your responses with one another.
- Write about the dynamics of the writing group as a way of getting everyone's ideas out on paper. You could free-write about the kinds of feedback that help you, what you like about each other's writing, your frustrations with the group, and your suggestions for improving the way the group works.
- Spend a few minutes of each meeting practicing a new writing or editing technique you would like to explore.

READING DURING WRITING GROUP MEETINGS

Just as writing during group meetings can prove beneficial, reading can sometimes help writing groups work together better:

- Pick a book on writing such as *Bird by Bird*, *Writing with Power*, *Writing Down the Bones*, *Writing Without Teachers*, or *Writing Your Dissertation in Fifteen Minutes a Day* and assign

yourselves sections to read for each meeting. Discuss the reading during some part of the group's meeting each time.

- Read about a particular writing topic such as editing techniques or writer's block during the group meeting, and then spend the session working on that aspect of one another's writing.
- Bring a piece of writing (an article in your field, an article from a journal or magazine that you enjoyed, or a piece of fiction) that you think is especially well-written. Read over it as a group and talk about what the author did in the piece that made it so effective.
- Bring pieces of data or evidence that you are using in your writing and share them with the group. If the group becomes familiar with the things that you write about, they may be better able to help you write about them effectively.

BRING IN A GUEST

Just as guest lecturers in courses sometimes spice up the classroom experience, guests in writing groups can enliven the discussion:

- Invite a friend's writing group to have a joint meeting with yours. Share writing from all participants and also talk about writing group strategies that have worked for each group.
- Invite a professor or other guest writer to your group to talk about his or her writing process and to offer suggestions for improving your own.
- Bring in a friend who is working on a project related to the project of a group member. This may help your group member develop a network of people interested in his or her particular topic and may also show your friend how helpful a writing group could be.
- Invite a Writing Center tutor to attend your meeting.

PLANNING

Your writing group can also help you plan your writing schedule for the week:

- Discuss your writing goals, both broadly and for the immediate future. Ask your group if those goals seem realistic.
- Ask group members to e-mail you with reminders of deadlines and encouragement.
- Create a group calendar in which you all set goals and deadlines for your writing. This calendar could be for a week, a month, a semester, a year, or more. The Writing Center publishes a planning calendar each semester.
- Give each other writing "assignments" for the next meeting.

This handout section "Activities for Writing Groups" was created by The Writing Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill <http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/WritingGroups/groupact.html>



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 2.5 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.5/).

ASKING, GIVING, TAKING FEEDBACK

Feedback is the core of what Dissertation Writing Groups do. It is often cited as one of the main reasons why people join Dissertation Writing Groups in the first place. Feedback is a way for people to learn how their writing effectively communicates ideas, but feedback itself is a communicative art. When vaguely worded, people who ask for feedback may not get the specific answers they need. When harshly phrased, people who give feedback may not get their message across. When unwilling or unprepared to listen to feedback, people who receive feedback may not experience the benefits of the process.

ASKING FOR FEEDBACK: THE FEEDBACK REQUEST

WHEN SUBMITTING WRITING AHEAD OF TIME, notify your readers in advance what they ought to look for before they read your dissertation section or chapter in a feedback request. If you circulate the text via email, send the document with a cover letter or a note in the text of the email. The feedback request would include the following:

- **SUMMARY AND GOAL:** Provide a brief summary of your argument (one sentence) and what you would like to accomplish in this piece or in this stage of writing.
- **BIGGEST WEAKNESS:** Explain what you think is the biggest weakness in the chapter or section.
- **PRIORITIZED FEEDBACK LIST:** Help your readers prioritize their response by providing a short list of the kind of feedback would be most helpful at this stage. The most effective requests for feedback are explicit about “macro” writing issues involving ideas, structure, sequence, transitions/flow) or “micro” writing issues such as grammar, syntax, diction, appropriate field language) that the writer wants to improve on. Identify specific areas that you’d like them to target (sections of the chapter, introduction, conclusion) and how they should focus on it. Identify what you don’t want your readers to focus on. It is sometimes helpful to tell your readers that you are aware of some writing issues (such as citation styles) but that you would address later in the writing stage.
- **REALISTIC REQUESTS:** Be realistic in your request. Don’t ask your readers, for instance, to proofread and correct every grammatical error. They are not editors and will not want to be treated as such. For such service, you should contact your department or the Hume Writing Center for a list of professional proofreaders or editors who can be hired.

BEFORE THE GROUP MEETING: Print out your cover note. When meeting with your Writing Group, you might review what you had written so that everyone is reminded of the kind of feedback you would like.

GIVING FEEDBACK

How you deliver feedback is as important as how you ask for feedback. In a dissertation writing group the relationship that you build amongst the members should be one of trust, respect, and engagement. Your style of giving feedback should help to cultivate these feelings through **four positive approaches**: supportive, specific, descriptive, and prioritized feedback.

Ineffective/Negative Feedback	Effective/Positive Feedback
<p>Attacking: hard hitting and aggressive, focusing only on the weaknesses of the other person.</p>	<p>Supportive: feedback delivered in a non-threatening, encouraging manner.</p> <p><i>Say something positive</i> about the piece first. (“To me, the best-written part of this piece was . . .”; “The most interesting idea in this chapter was . . .”)</p> <p><i>Acknowledge your understanding of the writer’s goal</i> based on your careful reading of the feedback request. (“I realize that your main point was . . .”)</p>
<p>General: feedback with general statements, aiming at broad issues which are not defined</p>	<p>Specific: Focus on specific writing areas or issues.</p> <p><i>Explain issues</i> by pointing to concrete areas of the writing.</p> <p><i>Provide a solution/suggestion</i> to help improve it by explaining how you have handled such problems. (“When I have a problem with transitions, I usually . . .”)</p>
<p>Judgmental: feedback criticizes the writer. (“You aren’t very good at conclusions.”)</p>	<p>Descriptive (audience perspective): Describe the problems in the piece of writing itself from the perspective of the reader, whether it is yourself or another imagined/real audience.</p> <p><i>Speak from your perspective.</i> (“This conclusion didn’t really work for me”; “My reaction to this was . . .”)</p> <p><i>Speak from a reader’s perspective.</i> “Your dissertation committee might understand this line like this. . .”; “Hawthorne scholars might question some assumptions here. . .”).</p>
<p>Scattered: feedback focuses on too many writing issues or touches on issues that the writer does not want to discuss at this stage.</p> <p>Too many suggestions are overwhelming and disheartening to the writer.</p>	<p>Prioritized: Prioritize what you want to say so as not to overwhelm the writer but also to address their main concerns.</p> <p><i>Select only two or three major “big points”</i> to cover verbally during Writing Group discussions.</p> <p><i>Write a list of additional “big points” and “little points”</i> that the writer could take away with him/her after the Writing Group discussion.</p> <p><i>Tailor your comments to the writer and the needs</i> listed in their feedback request. While your big points may cover issues other than those listed in the writer’s feedback request, be sure to include some responses to the matters that the writer is most worried about.</p>

TAKING FEEDBACK

Now that we reviewed how to ask for feedback and how to give feedback through four positive approaches, we should also consider how we should take or receive feedback. For some people, it is difficult to receive feedback because they experience it as pure criticism. Being so guarded, they formulate a response even before the feedback is completed. While you will not accept or act on all feedback, you should try to be positive and open in the manner you take them if you are to maximize the feedback experience. The following are some suggestions for taking feedback effectively.

- **Listen to the entire feedback first.** Write down notes and questions. Listen without frequent interruption or objections. Try to respond or ask follow-up questions only after the speaker has finished. Remember that your Writing Group is trying to help you become a better writer and finish the dissertation.
- **Be an active listener.** Listen carefully and try to understand the meaning of the feedback.
- **Be engaged.** In anything is unclear, restate your understanding of what you thought the speaker said.
- **Be respectful.** Try not to be too defensive. While one reader's response may be the result of that reader's own misunderstanding, their perspective as a reader deserves attention. If several readers agree that a section is confusing, the problem probably lies in the writing.
- **Keep a feedback log.** Use your "Dissertation Writing Group log" to keep track of the kinds of feedback you get in your writing. Do readers often suggest changes in organization? Do people frequently tell you that they don't understand words that you use? Do readers praise your clarity?
Identify patterns of the kinds of feedback you receive again and again so that you can locate problems and strengths in your writing.
Address the problems with writing guides, your Dissertation Writing Group, or visiting the Hume Writing Center.

REVISION STRATEGIES




1. What is revision to you? (what are all the things you do when you “revise”)

2. How do you revise? (What is your process of revising?)

MACRO-REVISION AND MICRO-REVISION

Almost all published writers—whether poets, novelists, scholars—re-write their works. Revision is so crucial to the writing process, that some believe it is when *real* writing starts. Revision isn't just about correcting grammatical errors and improving flow. Revising is also a creative part of the writing process that asks you to critically rethink your writing strategies. It is the part of the process when the ideas become more fully formed, meaning clarified, arguments better supported or rearranged to be more persuasive.

DWG writers can more efficiently and more effectively revise their work after receiving feedback, if they break down their revision strategies into two types, macro-revision and micro-revision.

-  **Sort your feedback answers** in two “macro-revision” and “micro-revision” to-do lists
-  **Apply the macro-revision suggestions first.** Then the micro-revision suggestions.
-  **Re-read again** (a day or so later?), focusing on macro-revision issues. Then micro-revision issues.

MACRO-REVISION focuses on the presentation of the “big picture” and addresses global writing issues. When revising, macro-revision should be done first. As you target your essay for macro-revision, you will bring ideas into sharp focus by reviewing the organization of the section, chapter, or entire “book,” reassessing evidence, and sharpening the idea: Macro-revisions include the following activities:

1. **Rearranging your writing to improve argumentative flow:** move sections or sentences around to present the most rhetorically effective case, highlight an argument better, and improve the logical progression of argument.
2. **Subtracting--“Trimming the fat”:** eliminate sections that don't fit in the argument to exclude extraneous or tangential arguments that can distract the reader.
3. **Adding--Bringing in new examples and including more explanations:** identify “gaps” in argument to bridge the ideas better, illustrate a point better.
4. **Improving transitions and making main points consistent:** make explicit connections between ideas (between sections or between paragraphs); review how reader is reminded of the thesis argument or central idea throughout the piece; make sure that evidence and data are connected to the topic argument.

MICRO-REVISION focuses on the “little things” which matter a lot in writing: the language choice, syntax, and grammar directs us through your ideas, but also sets the mood of the writing and help shape what readers think of you as a writer and scholar. Working on micro-revision before macro-revision is not efficient because you may end of up deleting sentences

and paragraphs that you worked so hard to polish. Micro-revisions include the following activities:

1. **“Cleaning up”**: proofread for grammatical and typographical errors.
2. **“Sharpening”** sentences or words: find a better phrase or word to make your writing smoother, more vivid, and more expressive. This includes replacing some passive verbs with more descriptive action verbs, improving the syntax of sentences and phrasing to improve writing style.
3. **“Tightening”** sentences—writing less to say more: cut out extraneous words, condense points to clarify meaning and make sentences more concise.

Review your answer to #1. Sort your revision “to do” list between “Macro Revision” and “Micro Revision.” Use this list to guide you through your first cycle of macro-revision and then your cycle of micro-revision. The check list or to-do list will help you 1) keep track of all your revision activities, 2) help keep focus, 3) give you a sense of “work done.”

MACRO REVISION	MICRO REVISION

BIBLIOGRAPHY

DISSERTATION AND THESES

Howard Becker. Writing for Social Scientists. How to start and finish your thesis, book or article. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press; 2nd edition, 2007)

Rather than focusing on writing per se, this book has useful chapters on Editing by Ear, Risk, and Getting it Out the Door.

Joan Bolker. Writing Your Dissertation in Fifteen Minutes a Day: A Guide to Starting, Revising, and Finishing your Doctoral Thesis. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1998.

One of the classics on writing a dissertation (although it takes more time than the "hook" in the title suggests!). Lots of sensible advice.

John W. Creswell. Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches. London, UK: Sage Publications, Inc., 2003.

Particularly aimed at social science and education audiences.

Joseph Gibaldi. MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers. Sixth Edition. New York: Modern Language Association, 2003.

Classic manual for writers in the humanities.

Kate L. Turabian, Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, Joseph M. Williams, and University of Chicago Press Staff. A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations, Seventh Edition: Chicago Style for Students and Researchers. University Of Chicago Press; 7th edition, 2007.

A classic on style.

Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association. Fifth Edition. Washington, D.C.: APA, 2001.

Manual for APA style, used by writers in psychology, sociology, business, and economics.

PROLIFIC ACADEMIC WRITING

Robert Boice. Professors As Writers: A self-help guide to productive writing. New Forums Press, 1990.

Written by a well known researcher on faculty careers, this book has lots of good advice applicable to graduate students.

Robert Boice. Advice for New Faculty Members. Nihil Nimus. Allyn and Bacon, 2000.

Nice book based on his years of research of advice to new faculty members. The subtitle, everything in moderation, sums up the advice. This is about how to do enough without killing yourself. Equally applicable for graduate students, particularly the advice on writing.

W. Brad Johnson and Carol A. Mullen. Write to the Top!: How to Become a Prolific Academic. Palgrave Macmillan, 2007

A matter of fact book of 65 suggestions organized into 11 chapters. The basic message is to start and keep writing.

Anne Lamott. Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life. Anchor Press, 1995

A lovely book by a brilliant writer, it is aimed at writers of all genres. The book's title derives from a family story. The night before his not-yet-started paper on "Fifty Birds" was due, her brother panicked. Dad's advice, "Just take it bird by bird." The same holds true of dissertations. As does the advice in the chapter called "Shitty First Drafts."

Elizabeth Rankin. The Work of Writing. Insights and strategies for academics and professionals. Jossey-Bass, 2001.

Good advice about getting feedback and revising. Includes examples and scenarios.

Paul J. Silvia. How to Write a Lot. A Practical Guide to Productive Academic Writing.

Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2007.

Seemingly written only for those in the psychology field, this book has lots of no-nonsense advice based on psychological theory.

PUBLISHING A DISSERTATION

William Germano. From Dissertation to Book. University Of Chicago Press, 2005.

Particularly applicable for fields in the humanities and "book focused" social sciences, this book discusses rethinking and reconceptualizing a dissertation into a book.

Kathleen A. Kendall-Tackett. How to Write for a General Audience: A Guide for Academics Who Want to Share Their Knowledge with the World and Fun Doing it (APA Lifetools).

Washington D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2007.

Provides advice on beating procrastination, which is helpful for the writing stage. Also practice advice for pitching one's book, working with editors, and negotiating a book contract.

This Dissertation Writing Group starter kit was a collaborative project created by Sohui Lee, Ph.D. (Hume Writing Center) and Chris Golde, Ph.D. (The Office of the Vice Provost for Graduate Education) at Stanford University.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 2.5 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.5/)