

Creating a Writing “Roadmap”

(Based on Dr. Ingre Meborn’s “How to prepare a thesis/dissertation roadmap”)

Writing a thesis or dissertation can be overwhelming. Developing a writing plan with a clearly stated focus helps to reduce overwhelm as well as stress and potential writer’s block.

Dr. Meborn’s process has two steps. In step one you outline your overall plan for your research and thesis.

Step One: Big Picture Planning

1. In one sentence write what is your thesis/dissertation about. It should be in plain language and no more than 50 words.
2. Write how your thesis/dissertation contributes to knowledge (100 words)
3. Why is your study/research important
4. What are your research questions.

These steps should be done early, and you should keep them visible. Tape them to your wall. Have them at the start of your thesis draft. Refer to them frequently. Your “about” statement and your research questions will keep you on track, and the “how” and “why” of your study helps to keep you motivated.

Step Two: Create an actionable writing plan

It is easier to start writing and make progress if you have a direction and know what you want to communicate. This “big picture” planning helps with that. Keeping the big picture visible also helps to reduce overwhelm. You are not fixing the entire system, instead you are addressing one aspect of an issue/problem in your discipline/area of study and your big picture keeps you focused on that.

Mapping your thesis, is the next step. The first step is for you to read through your entire thesis and identify sections that are almost done, sections that are started and have a basic plan but need more work/writing, and sections that still need to be figured out/planned and written.

Thesis Title:

Due Dates

Date the first complete draft is due to your advisor:

Date the thesis is due to your committee:
 Date the thesis must be submitted to Grad Studies:
 (Recommended submission deadlines via Grad Studies - <https://umanitoba.ca/graduate-studies/student-experience/thesis-and-practicum/submit-your-thesis-or-practicum#thesis-submission-deadlines-and-requirements>)

List of Chapters with approximate page count
 Chapter 1 – Introduction (5 pages)
 Chapter 2 – Literature Review (currently 45 pages – need to cut it down)
 Chapter 3 – Methodology (15 pages)
 Chapter 4 – Analysis (20 pages)
 Chapter 5 – Discussion (35 pages)

<p>Chapter to work on at the Writing Retreat Include title and synopsis</p>	<p>List subsections or themes or include an outline of the chapter.</p> <p>Identify the state of each section of the chapter.</p> <p>Areas that are almost complete are left as normal font.</p> <p>Areas that you will work on during the retreat should be in bold.</p> <p><i>Areas that you might get to but will probably require too much work during the retreat should be italicized.</i></p>	<p>In this column, provide notes on what you plan to do in your bolded sections.</p> <p>These notes don't need to make sense to other readers.</p>
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Example of a “map” for a M.Ed Thesis

<p>Chapter 2 – Literature Review</p> <p>Provide state-of-the-art research on my topic. The 4 areas that I will cover are – the development of the concept of commons (economic), the</p>	<p>Economic Commons</p> <p>Information Commons</p> <p>Learning Commons</p> <p>Learning/Information Commons in Libraries/Students Affairs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reverse outline all written material and identify gaps - Write section on the differences between learning and information commons
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<p>development of the commons in PSE institutions, The development of physical learning commons, the evolution of commons online, Also, a list of definitions used through the thesis.</p>	<p>Learning/information Commons online</p> <p>Definitions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Definitions are listed and material is gathered, but all definitions need to be written - I have notes for the “online” portion and done some thinking around it, but need to actually write this section. This is central to thesis so will spend sig. time working on this section.
<p>Chapter 2 The Study/Methodology</p>	<p>Introduction</p> <p>Guiding Questions and variables of Interest</p> <p>Conceptual framework</p> <p>Research methodology</p>	<p>Review variables and ensure language is clear and can be followed. Is there overlap? Do the variables make sense?</p> <p>Articulate the elements of the framework</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Work on transitions between ideas
<p>Chapter 5: Discussion</p>	<p>Commons Descriptions</p> <p>Homes Pages</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do a reverse outline of this section - Use the list of universities and review to make sure all universities in the studies were included - Need work on “services” and - Write a description of UM VLC and UBC web services.

Additional Writing Resources for Mapping

Reverse Outline

A reverse outline can help you identify issues with organization and flow, missing content, and gaps in reasoning. This process is particularly useful when writers are overwhelmed and/or having trouble identifying what they need to work on next in a large document.

How to do a reverse outline (University of Wisconsin)

<https://writing.wisc.edu/handbook/reverseoutlines/>

Snowflake Method

The Snowflake method is helpful if you don't have an outline or are struggling to figure out what direction to take next in one (or more) of your chapters.

Dr. Meborn outlines the process as:

Begin expanding your chapter outline by including a short synopsis of around 300 – 400 words. This is essentially an abstract for the chapter.

Ask yourself:

- What are the main points this chapter needs to cover?
- What resources/evidence will I need to draw on to demonstrate these?
- How does this chapter relate to my overall argument?

When you have the synopsis ready, **make a list of provisional subheadings** under the chapters.

This is the second level of organization: These subheadings should show the order in which you plan to arrange material you are writing. Add a provisional word count for each subheading (ideally you should have no more than 2 pages between each subheading).

Under each subheading, try to put **a third level of detail to your plan**. This should be a series of sentences that act as a “storyline:” they capture what each paragraph under the subheading will cover. You can start this third level with a messy list of whatever you think should go under the subheading. This can be notes to yourself, reminders, bits of data and analysis, lists of literature – whatever you like.

Remember, as a general rule academic writing should contain some or all of the following elements:

- “Knowledge claims” or “truth statements”

- Inferences/speculation/propositions
- References to prior work
- Definitions
- Evidence/examples
- Acknowledgement of counterarguments /examples
- Conclusions

Now, try putting this detail into the map format above. Make sure you chase up as much of this detail as you can before you come to Bootcamp.