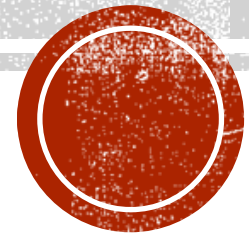


WRITING AND RESEARCH IN UNIVERSITY

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STEP 1: THE FORMALITIES

- Department Style Guides and Word Limits.
 - Harvard Referencing.
 - Double Text Spacing, Justified Paragraphs, and Section (Sub-)Headings.
- Writing Style and Formatting Guidelines.
 - Report? Academic Essay? Reflective Writing?
 - Pre-Determined Structure?
- Choosing the best question.
 - Do I understand the Q?
 - Do I have the skills to answer the Q?
 - Do I like the topic?



DOING RESEARCH: THINK, THINK, THINK

- Thinking of an **interesting question** you want to answer can be deceptively difficult. Ideas can stem from:
 - Lectures or modules.
 - Newspapers or “popular economics” books (i.e., real-world problems).
 - Conversations with peers.
- For undergraduate dissertations, ideas do not have to be revolutionary, but they must be **feasible**.
 - Can you investigate the research problem?
 - Is there data available?
 - How will your answer inform the reader on the “bigger picture”?



HOW TO GENERATE GOOD IDEAS

- Generating ideas is a good start, but some ideas are better than others, so you need to “take stock” and dig deeper.
 - Regular note-taking (i.e., a live doc) allows you to keep track of ideas, their evolution, and the bigger picture. Here, you could document the “key” elements of your research, such as expected results, key themes etc...
- Continuously “tipping away” will allow you to refine your idea to a high level and allow you to identify important components like relevant theory, data, and methods.
 - If possible, it may be desirable to “test-drive” the research question, just seeing if what you want to do can *actually* be done.



THE RESEARCH PROPOSAL

- Research proposals are like a “pitch”, in that they must convey:
 - Clarity in the research purpose and objective.
 - A clear understanding of where the project “fits” in the wider field.
 - An advanced knowledge of how the research problem can be analysed.
 - A convincing argument as to why the research matters.
- A good research proposal can provide the springboard for a good project as many of the key elements needed for a good research paper are also needed for a good proposal.

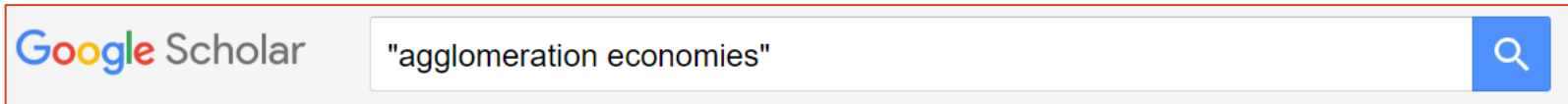


STEP 2: RESEARCHING THE ESSAY

- Identify the key elements of your question, read around these key elements, gather notes, and structure thoughts.

Explain the process of **agglomeration economies** emerging with reference to the **Irish economy** between **1980-2020**.

- Ideas on how you might structure essays/reports will only become fully apparent after you have read/researched extensively.
 - Recommended readings!
 - Google Scholar.

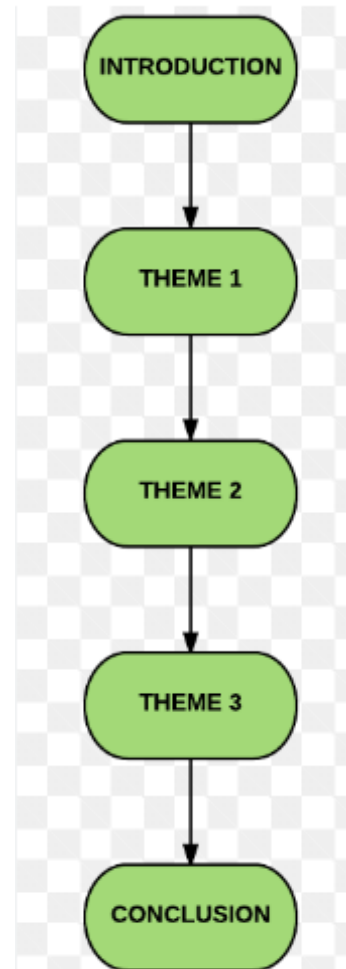


- Cast a wide net first and then narrow focus over time.
 - Never lose track of word count.
 - Be ruthless when cutting material.
 - What information do I need to answer this question?



STEP 3: PLANNING THE ESSAY

- Identify the key talking points of the topic. These will usually emerge as themes commonly addressed within literature.
 - Sort the notes into loose sections to get an idea of what each talking point will be about.
- Start to plan wider essay structure.
 - A few points comprehensively addressed > Loads of points skimmed.
 - Introduction -> Main Body -> Conclusion is always the base layout.
 - Cover Page and Table of Contents are optional.
 - Appendices and Lists of References always go at the end (in that order).
- How you make your plan is totally down to how you work best.



THE RESEARCH PAPER

- Research papers tend to follow the same generic structure, inclusive of:
 - **Abstracts** – In 100-300 words, describe your project.
 - **Introductions** – The big picture surrounding the what/how/why of your research.
 - **Literature Review** – Overviews the empirical/theoretical knowledge in the area.
 - **Data and Methods** – Explains how you test your hypothesis and the data used.
 - **Results** – Presents and described the findings of your empirical model.
 - **Discussion** – Interprets these findings in a wider context.
 - **Conclusions** – Explains how you have addressed the research problem.
- Use already-published papers as a writing template!



ABSTRACTS

- Stand alone document acting as a “trailer” for your report/paper.
 - Key concepts.
 - Key methods.
 - Key results.
 - Key conclusions.
- Everything important about the research should fit in here. Executives do not read full reports, just the summary. For researchers, abstracts are the indication if an article is worth reading further.
 - Your task is to condense all the “best bits” and sell the paper/report. You put its best foot forward while presenting all the vital information.
 - Always somewhere between 100-300 words.



ESSAY SECTIONS: INTRODUCTIONS

- Here, you set the scene for the reader. In this section, you must tell me:
 - What you will do.
 - How you will do it.
 - Why what you are doing is important.
 - Outline how the remainder of the essay/report is structured.
- The thesis statement is arguably the most important element of this section. It explicitly frames the research question.
 - Helpful to provide background context on the topic early on.
 - A nice rule of thumb to follow involves starting big and general, and working your way into the nitty gritty.



TIPS WITH THE MAIN BODY

- The main body contains a lot of information. However, usually, the information is laid out as follows:
 - Immediately after the introduction, you introduce the theory/literature/rationale behind your topic.
 - From here you will talk about the data and methods you use to conduct this analysis and how these methods help you answer your question.
 - Then, you talk about the results of your analysis and their wider implications (i.e., policy).
- If using tables/figures/equations, it is best to talk about the table/figure/equation first and then insert them immediately after the paragraph.
 - Do not throw all the tables/figures/equations at the end! Introduce me to them one by one.
- Appendices can be useful for information that does not have an obvious home.



ESSAY SPECIFICS: THE LIT REVIEW

- Literature reviews serve to provide an overview of the knowledge within a particular area of research.
 - Empirical and Methodological Insights → How do we typically analyse this phenomena? How do variables tend to relate?
 - Knowledge Gaps → What do we already know? How can we contribute to existing literature?
 - Conceptual Framework → In what theoretical realm does this research sit? What are the important theories?
- Not all literature is created equally...



ESSAY/REPORT SECTIONS: CONCLUSIONS

- Here, you tie everything together in one coherent piece. In this section, you must tell me:
 - What you did.
 - How you did it.
 - The key findings and their significance.
- Here, no new information should be used. You should effectively be tidying up everything you have already said into a coherent section.
 - It should be short, concise, and to the point. No new info, no diagrams, generally no referencing.
- The introduction and conclusion should flow well together.
 - The reader should be able to read only these sections and get everything important.



WRITING RESEARCH

- Research must be clear in its objective, unbiased in its evaluation, and professional in its presentation.
 - These are all achieved through language and sentence/paragraph structure.
- Paragraphs are units of thought which convey and present your key arguments/points. They need to have:
 - A seamless beginning-middle-end structure and a central argument.
- Arguments define the purpose of research and must be clear, convincing, and objective.



CREATING ARGUMENTS

- Arguments form the basis of every research project. You seek to justify a point of view/strategy. But the task of “creating an argument” is often misunderstood.
- In the first place, arguments must be:
 1. Convincing? → You did not attempt it, you did it!
 2. Objective? → Evidence on both sides is presented/evaluated, and a coherent narrative is created. (i.e., tone)
 3. Clear? → You have weighed the evidence and provided an “expert” opinion.
 4. Have an answer? → Research questions must be answered.



THE GROUND UP: WRITING

- **Every essay contains the same layers:**
 - Words → Sentences → Paragraphs → Sections → Reports
- **Some guidelines on crafting good sentences include:**
 - Use appropriate vocabulary, grammar, and punctuation.
 - Ensure your sentences are a suitable length and clear in their meaning.
 - Clearly convey how sentences are related within paragraphs. Place sentences in areas which make “sense”.



WRITING: VOCABULARY

- A broad vocabulary will ensure written pieces are not boring and repetitive. However, this can be a fine line.
- Either way, your written vocabulary should develop along the following lines:
 - Keep it broad, but not too broad (elegant variation).
 - Keep it simple and clear, not simplistic and inaccurate.
 - Become familiar with writing “tones”.
 - There should be no colloquial phrases/words (i.e., stuff/things, really/very etc...).



WRITING: SENTENCES

This sentence has five words. Here are five more words.
Five-word sentences are fine. But several together become monotonous. Listen to what is happening. The writing is getting boring. The sound of it drones. It's like a stuck record. The ear demands some variety.

Now listen. I vary the sentence length, and I create music. Music. The writing sings. It has a pleasant rhythm, a lilt, a harmony. I use short sentences. And I use sentences of medium length. And sometimes when I am certain the reader is rested, I will engage him with a sentence of considerable length, a sentence that burns with energy and builds with all the impetus of a crescendo, the roll of the drums, the crash of the cymbals—sounds that say listen to this, it is important.

So write with a combination of short, medium, and long sentences. Create a sound that pleases the reader's ear. Don't just write words. Write music.

- Each sentence must be clear in its meaning and logically placed.
- Clear sentences are easy to read and understand. To achieve this, you need:
 1. Precise Language.
 2. An engaging Tone (i.e., Active Voice).
 3. Appropriate Sentence Length.
 4. To write for the reader.



WRITING: PARAGRAPHS

- Paragraphs are like mini essays. They are a unit of thought, not a unit of length.
- Paragraphs must include a beginning, middle, and end, as well as:
 1. A central theme, mainly indicated through a topic sentence.
 2. A logical **flow**.
 3. Signposts between sentences and across paragraphs.
- Paragraphs can be constructed differently depending on the task at hand. Across essays, many paragraphs **should** look a bit different.



THE FINAL BITS: REFERENCING

- Cite as you go. If you didn't know the information beforehand, or if it is not common sense, cite it! Citations go at the end of sentences.
 - You don't need a new citation for every sentence, but a citation every 100-150 words is **usually** appropriate.
 - Not all sources are created equal.
- Learn the departmental referencing style (Harvard) for the key sources.
 - Journal Article / Book Chapter / Website.
 - Platforms like CiteThisForMe are ok, but are liable to make mistakes.
- You can cite the same source 100 times in the essay, but that is only 1 entry in the list of references (which goes on its own page).



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