How great is GREAT?

Dr Madeleine M. Laming
With assistance from
Dr Cecily Scutt, Dr Karin Strehlow and Dr Craig Whitsed

Centre for University Teaching and Learning

Murdoch University
The GREAT Program

- offers a range of short courses and workshops designed to assist PGR, PG and Hons students in their academic development
- workshops are available to students in all disciplines
- some are specifically designed to cater for PGR students at different stages of candidature
  - putting preliminary ideas onto paper
  - structuring an argument
  - analysing data
  - final revision of the thesis
Sequential development

**Early stage**
- topic formulation
- writing an argument
- audience
- preliminary lit review

**Mid to late stage**
- supported writing
- revision

**Early to mid stage**
- planning
- refining argument & lit review
- chapter writing
- conclusion
Words on Paper (WoP)

- A series of six weekly seminars for early stage HDR students
  1. What you really think
  2. Being original
  3. Beginning your literature review
  4. Thesis structure
  5. Writing for your audience
  6. Writer’s block

- Covers concepts and skills relevant to confirmation and/or first year of candidature
- Expectation that students will attend all six
Paragraphs on Paper (PoP)

• four small-group sessions of 2.5 hours each
  1. writing introductions
  2. literature reviews
  3. writing chapters
  4. conclusions
• focus is on providing research students with the opportunity to do some sustained writing in a supportive environment
• typical session includes:
  • brief discussion of relevant topic
  • 45 minute sustained writing
  • discussion and questions
  • 45 minute sustained writing
  • discussion and goal for the following week
The Writing Space (TWS)

• a structured quiet writing space aimed at supporting research postgraduates to get some thesis writing done
• students may attend for one, two or three hours of quiet writing
• ideally students have already completed Words on Paper and Paragraphs on paper
• designed for later stage HDR students
  • less need for guidance
  • more need for dedicated time
Integration

• Sequence is explicitly designed to help candidates to
  • write early
  • use writing as central to their scholarly thinking
  • develop a *practice of writing* that will assist them to thesis completion and beyond their candidature
• Integrated, sequential structure is the key
Shifting focus

**WoP**
- Mapping, planning & identity formation
  - grappling with my argument & being original
  - planning my thesis & getting started
  - Identity formation ‘myself as researcher’

**PoP**
- Engagement & motivation
  - drafting techniques
  - writing for content
  - moving forward
  - creating a peer network

**TWS**
- Commitment & support
  - shared experience
  - expert & peer support
  - dedicated space and time
Teaching philosophy

• The underlying principles of this teaching philosophy are:

  1. people *learn by doing*, not by being told things

  2. the primary role of the teacher is to be supportive, enthusiastic, and positive. Nevertheless there are very specific practices and techniques that can be taught & modelled (Elbow, 1973; Goldberg, 1986; Goldberg, 1990).

  3. any project worth over three years of someone’s life is worth their best self. It is worth their while to find a project that will allow them to engage with *what they truly think* (Cameron, 1995; Boice, 1994).
Effectiveness?

• Influential in several ways:
  • teaching and modelling of writing techniques for generating new material
  • encouraging students to think on the page
  • focus early development of the central questions of a research thesis

• combination of approaches seems to have an excellent effect on student motivation & productivity

• students develop social support networks

• interdisciplinary workshops broaden world view
References & more

References & more


Thank you

m.laming@murdoch.edu.au