Graduate Writing Starter Pack

Graduate writing often includes larger or more complex projects than many students have previously worked on. However, beginning with a clear picture of what is required can help you make strategic choices across your time in graduate school. To be successful, you must *know your material*, *craft your message* effectively for your audience, and *prioritize consistent progress* to meet longer-term goals.

Knowing your Material: Graduate-level writing draws extensively from existing literature. Often, we encounter material long before we have an effective use for it. Or we may have a pile of sources and not be sure how to glean the most useful information from them. To get the most out of your research efforts, you can utilize the resources below:

Finding Sources ([Library Resources](#))
For every field, there is a [discipline-specific librarian](#) who can help you find high-quality and relevant resources. The library is also able to [request sources from other libraries or journals.](#)

Organizing Citations ([Citation Managers](#))
Learn more about the citation managers supported by the TTU Libraries through the guides on their website: [Zotero Guide](#); [Mendeley Guide](#); [EndNote Guide](#).

Conceptualizing your Topics ([Literature Crosswalk](#) – Matteson & Warren, 2020)
As you grow within your discipline, you may find that the same article is applicable to multiple research questions or literature reviews. Tracking variables and results of interest and noting which themes emerge as you read articles (for classwork or research) will help you more easily organize your arguments in not only the current paper, but all future ones on related topics.

Understanding your Discipline (Reverse Outlining: [STEM](#); [Humanities](#))
Before you begin to craft your message, you need to understand not only what information is known and noteworthy in your field, but also how that information is communicated. While you are reading to gain important knowledge in your field, it is also worth the time to understand how fellow scholars organize and highlight information as they build their arguments.

Crafting your Message: Once you have gathered your resources, it is time to synthesize them into your emerging argument. This starts at the sentence level, building towards a holistic argument that ultimately uses the structure favored by your field's publications (see Reverse Outlining, above).

Paraphrasing ([Paraphrasing Resource](#))
Once you have found your sources, synthesizing the material in an ethical and effective way is a vital step in producing credible academic documents. This process requires careful citation, interpretation, and integration of existing research to build on others' scholarship in a way that incorporates your unique contributions and understanding while appropriately crediting theirs.

Organizing your Perspective ([MEAL Paragraph](#))
Every paragraph needs a purpose along with evidence or reasoning that supports its purpose and a connection to the next steps in the broader work. While not every paragraph needs to follow this pattern, using the MEAL (main idea, evidence, analysis, link) technique is a powerful way to consistently accomplish those three goals.

Finding the Words ([Manchester Academic Phrasebank](#))
Also mentioned briefly in the paraphrasing resource above, the Manchester Academic Phrasebank is a collection of useful sentence templates that allow you to readily find a framing that reflects the way you intend your reader to interpret your inclusion of information or arguments. Using these templates is not plagiarism because these sentences do not contain data or arguments; instead, they represent ways to showcase data or support arguments.

Prioritizing your Progress: Complex projects benefit from clear management. Understanding your biggest deadlines, how to break them down into sustainable steps, and most importantly, what motivates you to stay on track, will help you make steady progress throughout your academic career.

Graduate School Timeline ([infographic](#); [formatting checklist](#))
While you are likely working on multiple projects at any given time, the most salient deadlines to the completion of your degree will be those related to your graduation document (e.g., portfolio, thesis, dissertation). The grad school website offers [important information about the graduation process](#), and you can email [the ETD office](#) for clarification about defense-related forms and document formatting.

SMART Goals ([SMART Goals How-tos](#))
With large projects, it is important to develop sustainable habits. By creating goals that are *specific, measurable, attainable, relevant,* and *timely,* you can build momentum through a series of small wins. Understanding your project(s) at this scale can help you track and complete the necessary tasks to achieve your larger goals

Focus Tools
There are several apps that can support your focus and goal tracking. If you prefer working alone, you can support your word count goals with websites like **[Written Kitten](#),** which rewards you with a picture of a cute kitten each time you achieve a certain level of word count progress; **[Write Honey](#),** which allows you to track a daily writing streak based on word count; or **[The Most Dangerous Writing App](#),** which creates a high-stakes environment for bursts of continuous writing. If you prefer to use time-based methods, you can try the traditional **[Pomodoro Technique](#),** or variations like **[Flora](#)** or **[Forest](#)** that allow you to plant virtual (or in the paid version, real) trees. Apps like **[Habitica](#)** gamify tasks based on habits, daily goals and larger projects and can be used alone or with a group to complete quests. And for those of you who work best with others, **[Focusmate](#)** allows you to schedule co-working time blocks for accountability with individuals from around the world.

Local Accountability ([GWC Thesis and Dissertation Boot Camp](#); [GWC writing groups](#))
Finally, the GWC offers two programs that support accountability and community in the writing process. Our *writing groups* are available to all students and post-docs who have a larger writing project (e.g., coursework, publications, thesis, or dissertation) they want to focus on across a whole semester. *Thesis and Dissertation Boot Camp* is available to students who are working on their thesis or dissertation at the proposal stage or later and would like to dedicate three hours for four days in a row to making concentrated project.

Application deadlines happen in the first few weeks of the semester, so check out our website at http://www.grad.writingcenter.ttu.edu to learn more!

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