

# Dissertation Writing Strategies

## Strategies for Overcoming Writer's Block

### REFERENCES

- Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life* by Anne Lamott. New York: Anchor Books/Doubleday, 1994. A great read, full of humor and excellent, down to earth, practical advice about beginning, getting through and finishing a project.
- If You Want to Write: A Book About Art, Independence and Spirit* by Brenda Ueland. Saint Paul: Graywolf Press, 1987. An uplifting, cheerleading tome for writers. Contains examples of how people overcame various life circumstances to write or write better, culled from Ueland's many years teaching writing.
- One Continuous Mistake: Four Noble Truths for Writers* by Gail Sher. New York: Penguin, 1999. Sher incorporates classic Zen Buddhist teachings in a philosophical guide that emphasizes developing a writing practice that relies upon consistent effort rather than state of mind.
- Procrastination: Why You Do It, What To Do About It* by Jane B. Burka, Ph.D. and Lenora M. Yuen, Ph.D. Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1983. Tackles one of the main factors that feeds writer's block. It emphasizes not the elimination of procrastination, but developing "freedom of choice about procrastinating, so that you will worry less and feel more in control of your life" (xi). Good chapter on time management from which the "unschedule" used in the workshop was culled.
- The Artist's Way: A Spiritual Path to Higher Creativity* by Julia Cameron with Mark Bryan. New York: Putnam, 1992. This book is a 12-week course in freeing the creative self. Aimed at artists and writers but can be used by anyone seeking to "unblock" their creative energy. Involves keeping a daily journal.
- The Observation Deck: A Tool Kit for Writers* by Naomi Epel. Chronicle Books, 1998. This attractive combination of 50 cards and a brief book give simple yet creative suggestions that provide inspiration to begin writing and/or fuel to help keep going during the rough spots.
- Writing Down the Bones: Freeing the Writer Within* by Nathalie Goldberg. Boston: Shambhala, 1986. Written from a Zen Buddhist spiritual perspective, this book emphasizes moving through the fears that prevent us from writing. Contains a diverse range of writing exercises.
- Writing With Power: Techniques for Mastering the Writing Process* by Peter Elbow. New York: Oxford University Press, 1981. A friend working on her dissertation keeps this book by her bedside and reads it every night.
- Writing Your Dissertation in 15 Minutes a Day: A Guide to Starting, Revising and Finishing Your Doctoral Thesis* by Joan Bolker, Ed.D. New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1998. A thorough book that gives suggestions for time management, as well as all the steps involved in completing a dissertation. Although geared towards dissertation writing, it includes chapters on publishing the dissertation as a book and as separate articles.

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**Grant Proposal Advising & Outreach Program**  
**Graduate Division, University of California, Berkeley**

**I. SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY ON DISSERTATION WRITING**

**A. Online Resources**

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**DISSERTATION WRITING: STRATEGIES AND PITFALLS**  
**Fall Meeting of the Dissertation-Year and President's Postdoctoral Fellowship Programs**  
**University of California Office of the President**  
**Friday, October 1, 2004**

**Sabrina Soracco (scandi@socrates.berkeley.edu)**  
**Academic Services, Graduate Division, University of California, Berkeley**

**I. SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY ON DISSERTATION WRITING**

**A. Online Resources**

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For information on how to subscribe to “The All-But-Dissertation Survival Guide” newsletter, go to: <http://www.ecoach.com/>

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## Select Publishing Resources on the Internet

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<http://www.utexas.edu/utpress/authors/dissrev.html>

### Instructions for Final Manuscripts and Permissions

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<http://www.unc.edu/~unc/ncg/public-d.htm>

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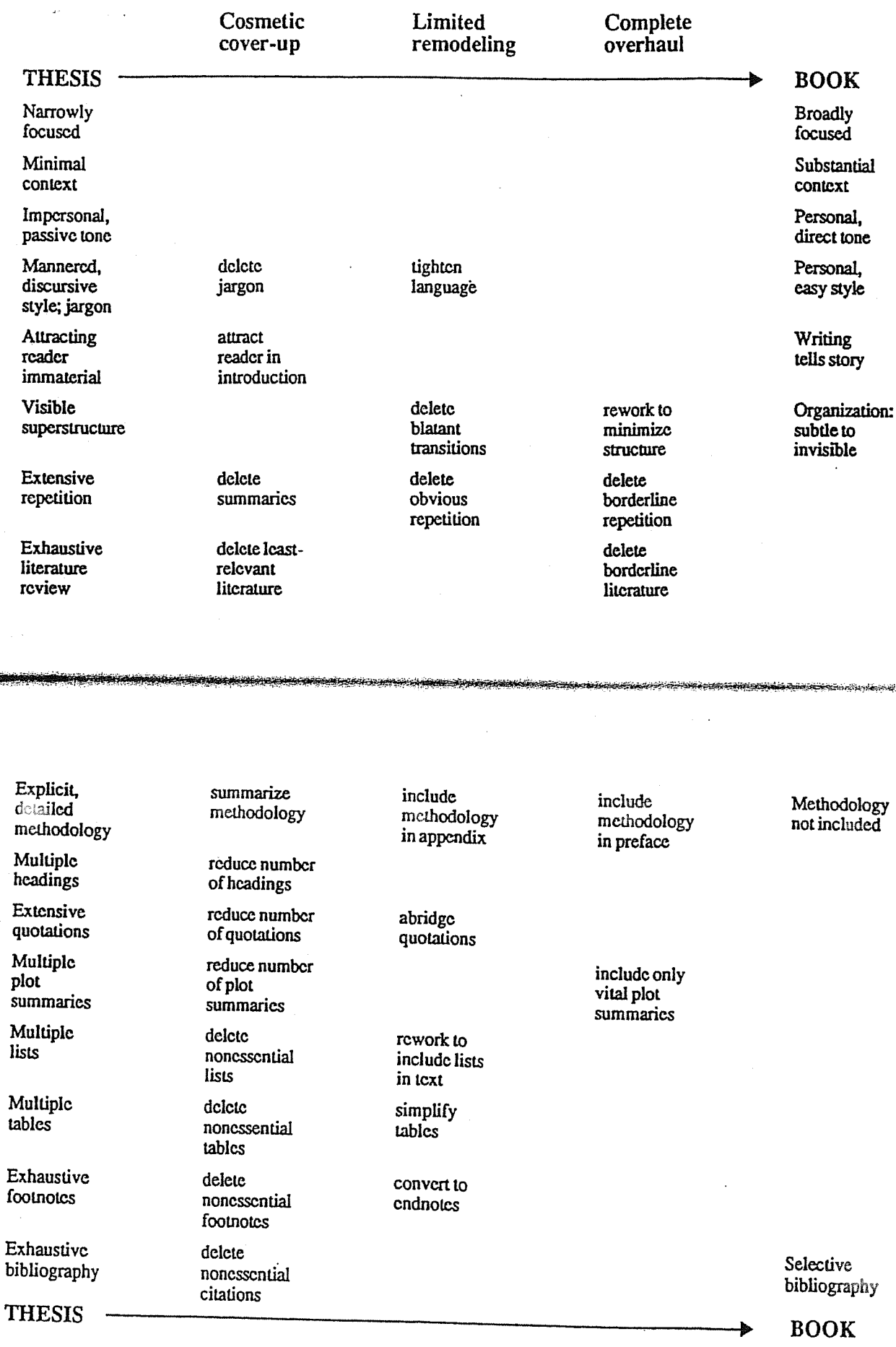


Figure 1. The thesis–book continuum

40

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## Checklist For Revising Dissertations For Book Publication

(from the University of Texas Press website)

1. **Eliminate the review of literature.** A book manuscript is not for your dissertation readers; it's for your colleagues, who have done their homework and will do you the courtesy of assuming that you have also.
2. **Outlining.** You have probably divided each chapter into sections and each section into subsections. This shows that you know how to outline or write a brief, but for most books the outline should disappear into the fluidity of a context. The book should flow; it should not hop from stone to stone.
3. **Repetition.** Does the beginning of each chapter and major section announce what you are going to say—and then, at the end, do you announce that you have said it? Remove repetition.
4. **Footnotes.** Dissertation writers, afraid that their judgment carries no weight, are apt to footnote almost every statement. But the author of a book must accept responsibility. Delete half your footnotes.
5. **Bibliography.** Having cited everybody who has written anything pertinent, the dissertation writer gathers them into a list and calls it a bibliography. But a useful bibliography must do more than alphabetize footnotes. A judicious bibliographical essay, grouping major references into sections according to their importance to your topic, can be part of what readers will pay for when they buy your book.
6. **Too much?** When beginning writers don't know quite how to make their points—when they are teaching themselves the techniques of writing as they compose their material—they are apt to fumble a great deal, and the result is wordage by the yard. They don't know when to stop or how to move on. Re-examine your dissertation critically—others will. Ruthlessly cut out the flab. Don't depend upon the editor to do this. A flabby manuscript may never survive to get into the editor's hands. Read questionable passages aloud. If they sound stilted or obscure, they probably are.
7. **Too little?** A thorough, definitive study or a superficial treatment? Has the treatment been stretched beyond the scope which the topic warrants?
8. **Up to date?** "If accepted for publication, I plan to update." Better do it now, before the material is submitted. The reviewer has no way of gauging the effectiveness of work yet to be done.
9. **Is it readable?** The strictures surrounding dissertation writing seldom produce readable writing. Stuffiness, passive voice, attribution, and polysyllable jargon are roadblocks in the path of readership. Again, read it aloud. Does it sing or sag?
10. **Research.** It is also essential that a scholarly publication include original research performed by the author. Moreover, this research should be consistently organized according to a sound theoretical perspective.

# Dissertation Writing Strategies

## Strategies for Overcoming Writer's Block

### REFERENCES

- Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life* by Anne Lamott. New York: Anchor Books/Doubleday, 1994. A great read, full of humor and excellent, down to earth, practical advice about beginning, getting through and finishing a project.
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- The Observation Deck: A Tool Kit for Writers* by Naomi Epel. Chronicle Books, 1998. This attractive combination of 50 cards and a brief book give simple yet creative suggestions that provide inspiration to begin writing and/or fuel to help keep going during the rough spots.
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- Writing With Power: Techniques for Mastering the Writing Process* by Peter Elbow. New York: Oxford University Press, 1981. A friend working on her dissertation keeps this book by her bedside and reads it every night.
- Writing Your Dissertation in 15 Minutes a Day: A Guide to Starting, Revising and Finishing Your Doctoral Thesis* by Joan Bolker, Ed.D. New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1998. A thorough book that gives suggestions for time management, as well as all the steps involved in completing a dissertation. Although geared towards dissertation writing, it includes chapters on publishing the dissertation as a book and as separate articles.

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