

When working on longer or more important writing projects, writers often face many of the same issues commonly discussed in connection with writer’s block: information, order, insight, and need. These, combined with the pressures we feel about now having to write texts that are not only longer but also higher stakes projects, often make projects seem overly intimidating. From the very beginning of your work on a thesis, article, dissertation, or book project, you must take steps to minimize the issues that would slow you down or prevent you from finishing.

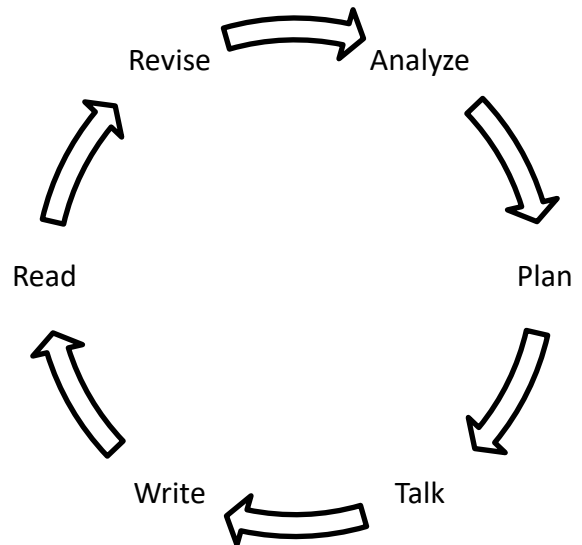
Analyze: go into your project having analyzed several examples of similar projects—



theses/dissertations/articles/books in your specialty. If possible, get examples of these or dissertations from your department or that your advisor/chair directed. Then, you need to analyze their style, format, organization, etc. Keep one or more of these examples handy as you write and revise. If you need help reading as a writer, talk with a Writing Center consultant.

Plan: you need two kinds of plans. One is a plan for the project itself—the core questions you will explore or answer as well as a plan for what that will look like. This plan is often your project prospectus and includes a general overview and description of each chapter. The other plan you need is one to lay out how you will get the writing done. Make a schedule of when you will write each week. Keep the schedule as consistent and regular as possible so your writing time becomes routine.¹

Talk: early on you should be talking with faculty members—particularly your advisor/committee chair—who know your work and the field. The more you talk with them, the more they can help you identify a meaningful and productive project. Then, throughout your work on the project you need to talk with people about your work; talk with peers who are also writing, talk with Writing Center consultants, talk with editors or publishers if possible. If you are not talking about your project you risk producing something that is writer-based rather than reader-based—that makes sense and satisfies you but not those less familiar with your scholarship and research.



Write: the nature of larger projects demands that you write more both in terms of volume and frequency. You need to allow yourself to write text that is messy.² You will not likely produce the volume of writing you need for a larger project if you are constantly worrying about spelling, punctuation, or even if each and every sentence makes sense. Those things can be dealt with later as you revise and edit. You also need to write frequently. Take as little time between writing sessions as possible. This will reduce the time you need to get back into each writing session and will help you keep the project cohesive.

Read: when you are not writing—in those moments when you are doing all the other things life requires—find time to read your work. When working on a big project, you'll likely be reading (and writing about) relevant research throughout your writing process. But you also need to read your own work. Read what you have written both so that you can revise and edit, but also so that you remain familiar with what you wrote in previous sections/chapters and with their structure, tone, and organization. This reading will help you later on when you have to write your concluding chapter(s).

Revise: keep in mind all along that whatever you write will be revised. This will help ease the stress of producing writing and will also lessen any resistance you might feel to the time consuming process of revising. Remember too that you should not—and probably cannot—revise such a long, important project all on your own. Find a trusted reader or two (or a writing group) to give you feedback on small sections or chapters throughout your process rather than waiting until everything is drafted before you revise. Revising as you go will allow you to catch some issues and avoid them in later chapters or sections.

The UNO Writing Center: at any point during a project, you are welcome to schedule an appointment with a UNO Writing Center consultant. You might even have someone on our staff sign you up for recurring appointments so that you are working with the same consultant each week on the same day/time. This will give you a weekly deadline for having writing ready to share and give you someone to talk to about your project.

¹ Adapted from Eviatar Zerubavel's *The Clockwork Muse: A Practical Guide to Writing Theses, Dissertations, and Books*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1999. Print.

² In addition to Lamott's "Shitty First Drafts" from *Bird By Bird* and Ballenger's "The Importance of Writing Badly" which can be found in *The Curious Writer*, writers of theses or dissertations would do well to follow Patrick Dunleavy who writes that the "logic of a first draft is to make text where there was none, to get something written, to get the elements you have in play more or less defined, even if only in a preliminary way and often in the wrong order" (136). Dunleavy, Patrick. *Authoring a PhD: How to Plan, Draft, and Finish a Doctoral Thesis or Dissertation*. New York: Palgrave, 2003.