For Sheila and Rosemary

Thanks for the encouragement
All rules for study are summed up in this one: learn only in order to create.

Friedrich Schelling
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Organizing a Chapter or Paper: the Micro-Structure

George said: ‘You know we are on the wrong track altogether. We must not think of the things we could do with, but only of the things that we can’t do without.’

A character in Jerome K. Jerome’s Three Men in a Boat

The building blocks of a completed thesis are chapters. Yet if these blocks are to hold together they must themselves be effectively structured internally, so that they can bear a load rather than crumbling away under pressure. A first step then is to divide the chapter into parts. In addition, two elements of designing internal structure are commonly mishandled: devising headings and subheadings to highlight your organizing pattern; and writing the starts and ends of the chapter and its main sections. I discuss these three issues in turn.

Dividing a chapter into sections

The human mind is only capable of absorbing a few things at a time.

Stanislaw Lem

Nothing is particularly hard if you divide it into small parts.

Henry Ford
A chapter of 10,000 words is impossible for you to hold in your head as an author unless it can be split into shorter component parts linked by a common theme. It is similarly difficult for readers to follow your argument without the cues provided by ‘organizers’, especially the sections of the chapter and their associated armoury of headings, which should convey in condensed form a sense of the argument being made. Fixing the sections to be used in any one chapter is normally straightforward, since chapters are much shorter and simpler than whole theses. But the scheme which you adopt has to work not just for this chapter but across all your chapters in a recognizably similar way, unless readers are to start anew in understanding a new scheme of organizers with each fresh chapter.

Whenever you are chunking up text, it is a basic principle to try and make sure that the sections you create are similarly sized. Dividing the text as evenly as possible generates consistent and hence more accurate expectations amongst readers about how long each section will be. Just as thesis chapters should be around 10,000 words (plus or minus 2000 words), so the sections inside chapters should all be approximately the same length and have the same importance for your argument. How many sections you need depends on the precise length of your chapter, but a rough rule of thumb is that you will need a major heading to break up the text every 2000 to 2500 words, or every seven to eight pages of A4 paper typed double-spaced. Both you as the author and readers will be able to hold this much information in the forefront of their attention at any one time, but will quickly lose track if sections get larger. And with only four or at most five main headings to keep track of in each chapter readers should have a clear idea of its internal structure. If you have more than (say) seven sections then readers will definitely find it harder to keep track of how the whole chapter is structured. And main sections shorter than around 2000 words will often seem bitty or insubstantial.

So in a standard-length chapter of 10,000 words you need four main sections. The titles for these sections are called ‘first order’ headings, because they are the top organizers, the ones including most text within each chapter. You can show their importance to readers graphically in three ways: by numbering them (for instance, 3.1, 3.2, and so on); by using a large font
size and format that makes them stand out clearly from the sur-
rounding text; and by locating them prominently, for instance on an otherwise blank line of their own and centred on the page. For the smaller subsections inside each main part of the chapter you will also need a set of ‘second order’ headings. You can signal them as less important than first-order headings, but more important than ordinary text, by: using an intermediate-sized font; using a less prominent font format; locating them less conspicuously (for instance on an otherwise blank line, but placed at the left-hand margin); and by not numbering them. In some cases you may also need some ‘third order’ subhead-
ings, which are really only groupings of paragraphs. They are signalled by using a less prominent font and emphasis than the second-order headings; of course with no numbers; and located so that they are less conspicuous (for instance, at the left-hand margin, but with a main text paragraph starting adjacent to it on the same line). Overall, the size, emphasis and location of subheadings should be most prominent for first-order headings (which are the only numbered ones), less for second-order sub-
heads, and less again for third-order subheads (when they are present). Of course, all headings should be more noticeable than the ordinary text. In this way readers are given a clear visual signal of where each section stands in the overall argu-
ment structure of the chapter.

It is worth trying to avoid regularly using four orders of sub-
heading, which could be complex for readers to follow and hard for you to manage. It is also best to let the headings express the hierarchy of ideas, rather than to try frequently indenting text from the left-hand margin, as some organizer programs on word-processing packages will routinely do. Start each new para-
graph which comes immediately after a subheading at the left-
hand margin, and thereafter use a tab to make paragraph starts stand out. Short indented passages of text are used for lists of points, with bullets or dashes in front of them. They can also occasionally allow you to avoid introducing fourth-order sub-
headings, where it is convenient so to do. In this use, you can flexibly group together sets of paragraphs in an ad hoc way into indented passages, without burdening readers with any further elaboration of your subheadings system. (The only other reason for indenting passages of text should be for quotations longer
than 30 words. Run on smaller quotations in the text within single quotation marks, ‘like this’.

In addition to its component main sections each chapter will need a relatively brief, untitled section of lead-in text at the beginning, and a short section of lead-out text labelled ‘Conclusions’ at the end. Each of these smaller bits should be between 200 and around 1000 words only. Readers will universally expect that the text placed at the very beginning of each chapter is lead-in material, so you do not need to label it ‘Introduction’. (Using this redundant subheading can often be a quick way to make your overall scheme of headings and sections start to malfunction badly: see below.) However, your lead-out materials will always need a heading to mark them out, preferably at second-order level so that readers will not expect to find here a longer section than they will actually get. Thus in outline my recommended complete schema of sections for a chapter (let’s say Chapter 3) is:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Words</th>
<th>Subhead</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introductory text</td>
<td>200 to 1000</td>
<td>[no subhead]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 First main section</td>
<td>2000 to 2500</td>
<td>[first-order heading]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Second main section</td>
<td>2000 to 2500</td>
<td>[first-order heading]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 Third main section</td>
<td>2000 to 2500</td>
<td>[first-order heading]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 Fourth main section</td>
<td>2000 to 2500</td>
<td>[first-order heading]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>200 to 1000</td>
<td>[second-order subhead]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since this pattern looks very straightforward, it may seem surprising that authors ever have difficulties with partitioning chapters. But in fact three mistakes are commonplace: under-organizing chapters; overorganizing them; and organizing different chapters in different ways.
(i) The simplest way of disorganizing a chapter is to underorganize it, perhaps including headings but only fake ones that do no useful work. This effect comes about because authors often create sections which are much longer or shorter than others, and then they assign the same order of headings to these dissimilar pieces of text, thereby mis-signalling readers and creating inappropriate expectations. Using first-order headings for the lead-in and lead-out materials virtually guarantees this outcome. It is very common to find a chapter (let’s say, chapter 4) organized like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Length</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>300 words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>First main section</td>
<td>1500 words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>Second main section</td>
<td>12,000 words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>500 words</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Several things have gone wrong here. Titling the lead-in and lead-out materials as if they were main sections will generate expectations amongst readers that these are substantial bits of text when they are not. The middle two main sections are real ones, but they are completely unbalanced. Section 4.3 is eight times longer than section 4.2 (as well as being 40 times longer than section 4.1 and 24 times longer than section 4.4). So when readers encounter a first-order heading here they have no idea what to expect. It might be a section as short as 300 words or as long as 12,000 words. These headings will look well worked out on the thesis contents page, but in fact they do not effectively chunk up or organize the chapter at all. Virtually all the text (85 per cent) is actually in section 4.3, which at this length will be impossible for readers to follow or for the author to organize effectively.

(ii) It is also possible to overorganize a chapter by having too many levels of headings; making them too similar in their font size, appearance, and location; and then overnumbering them. For instance, if you split up a 10,000-word chapter into
12 sections, and have three or four second-order subheadings in each section, plus a scattering of third-order subheads as well, then readers will encounter 40 headings in total, effectively one every 250 words, or two per page. If the headings look alike (using similar fonts and occupying the same positions on the page) then confusion is guaranteed.

Text that has been overfragmented in this way often comes with a complicated numbering system that is supposed to provide guidance for readers. All modern word-processing packages have ‘outliner’ facilities which allow you to automatically create a numbered set of paragraphs in many different formats, often with varying levels of indentation as well. These features are mainly designed for use in short reports. The outlining facility can also be useful for making conventional notes when ploughing through a very hierarchic textbook or a similar source. After using this facility for these purposes in their earlier studies, quite a lot of doctoral students also adopt it for authoring large amounts of text. But applied over a very long text like a doctorate an outliner approach can often be counterproductive and seem like overkill.

In many technical or more mathematical disciplines the number sequence commonly adopted might look like this:

```
5.1 First-order heading
   5.1.1 Second-order heading
   5.1.2 Another second-order heading
      5.1.2.1 Third-order subheading
      5.1.2.2 Another third-order subheading
```

Alternatively in humanities subjects the same effect is often achieved by mixed-together different letter and number sequences such as this:

```
5.A First-order heading
   5.A.i Second-order heading
   5.A.ii Another second-order heading
      5.A.ii.a Third-order subheading
      5.A.ii.a Another third-order subheading
```
In both these examples the number sequence is overdone and looks ugly and hard to follow. Extending it to fourth-order subheadings includes five or more numbers (such as 5.1.2.1.3, which occurs in some cases): this step sends a very clear signal to readers that you care little or nothing about the accessibility of your text. Readers will find it difficult to tell whereabouts they are in such an overcomplex hierarchy of headings, especially where the headings at different levels look very similar (as in my examples above). Adopting such a schema cannot give cohesion to an argument that has become much too fragmented. Nor can it impart genuine order and hierarchy when an author has not clarified her ideas sufficiently to organize her text in a more considerate manner.

It may also be that authors who adopt complex numbering schemas are actively encouraged by the availability of this device to chop their argument up into ever smaller pieces. Typically they may overdevelop an ‘analytic’ argument so as to create a ‘fruit cocktail’ effect, discussed above (on p. 70). They place so much reliance upon the chaining of numbers or symbols at the start of each subsection that their basic intellectual approach alters. They start making too many distinctions, in a kind of ‘logic-chopping’ manner. For this reason my personal practice has always been to recommend people to number only the main sections of chapters (such as 3.1 or 3.2); and to avoid using headings with more numbers in them (like 3.1.2 or still worse 3.1.2.1). Using numbered headings only for chapter main sections but not for smaller subsections seems to work best for the vast majority of humanities and social sciences PhD theses.

Take a flexible approach to this rule of thumb, however. In the humanities especially, you may want to try and do without any numbered sections, if other professional writings in your discipline have a very literary or understated feel. Here you would rely only on the differing font sizes, emphasis and location of various orders of headings to give a clear sense of their hierarchy to readers. At the other end of the spectrum, if your discipline has a strong ‘technical writing’ style, as some areas of the social sciences do, you may wish to use numbered second-order headings, for subsections within the main chapter sections (that is, numbers like 3.2.2). But it is wise to hold the line here and not to introduce four- or five-number headings
(like 3.1.2.3 or 3.2.3.2.3) for smaller subsections, which will tend to encourage you to use overfragmented modes of exposition. It is also worth remembering that across most disciplines it will be much easier to get thesis material published as a journal paper (or even as a book), the less it seems like a report and the more accessible the text appears. Converting an overnumbered chapter into a paper is not a trivial task. If you have relied on the numbering scheme to give coherence, then you may have to redo all the links from one section to another, and much of the internal signposting in the chapter from scratch, if it is to work as a paper.

(iii) The final common problem with headings occurs when thesis authors do not use the same system of headings across all chapters, but employ different systems at various points. Most inconsistency problems occur because students write up their chapters one at a time, often beginning with a typical literature review which goes over length and becomes difficult to organize. As they write later chapters so they change their ideas about sections and headings, and start using different schemas, without going back to their earlier work and redoing the headings in the new format. Whatever scheme of headings you arrive at, it must be applied to give the same ‘look and feel’ throughout.

However, this requirement is quite consistent with the need for your scheme to be flexibly handled, in a way that responds to the nature of each different chapter and section, rather than being implemented in a mechanical or robotic-looking fashion. The system of headings stays the same throughout the main text, but some chapters may not need to use all the elements of the schema. For instance, you might use only first- and second-order headings in shorter chapters, with brief sections. But then you can introduce third-order headings in bigger chapters which have longer sections or which handle more complex material.

Just as a constantly updated rolling synopsis is a useful planning and revising tool, keeping you in touch with what the central argument of your research is really about, so it can be very helpful to maintain an ‘extended contents page’ showing the current sequence of materials in your thesis. This page may never be included in the final thesis, or used by anyone but
you. Instead its role is to help your planning and your orientation thinking by displaying a synoptic view of how your thesis is organized down to your lowest order of headings and sections. Some authors find it helpful for their extended contents page to include headings and subheads and any numbering used, in the same font and layout as they are shown in the chapters, which may spread the material out over several A4 sheets. Others like to use a more condensed format for the extended contents page, showing differences of emphasis, but in more compressed ways. By keeping the extended contents page on at most a couple of sheets of paper this approach may give an easier overview of the structure of your material.

Devising headings and subheadings

The best way to inform your reader is to tell them what they are likely to want to know – no more and no less.

Robert J. Sternberg

Good headings should accurately characterize your text. In a very few words they should give readers a helpful advance idea of what is to come in each section or subsection, and wherever possible what your substantive argument will be. Devising effective headings is a difficult art that needs sustained attention from authors. You can tell that the task is complex because in the business world there are highly paid professionals who do nothing else, people like advertising copywriters, newspaper or magazine sub-editors, and Web-site designers. Intellectuals tend to make fun of many of these groups and to see their outputs as non-serious. But the job they do is not as easy as it looks.

Consider the following problem. It is 1989 and the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia has renounced its previous ‘leading role in the organs of the state’, bringing to an end over 40 years of one-party rule and state socialism, and opening the way for democratization and a transition to a capitalist economy. You are working as a sub-editor for a right-wing British tabloid newspaper, the Sun, whose daily audience of 4.3 million
readers is mainly preoccupied with soap opera stars, footballers and the nude pin-up girls on page 3 of the paper. None the less, your editor has decided to lead on the historic Czechoslovakia story to please the right-wing proprietor. You are told to devise a front-page headline, to take up two-thirds of the page, but to use *no more than three words*, and four syllables (given *Sun* readers’ limited attention span and linguistic competences). How are you going to get the essence of the story across within these limitations? This is a genuine question, and I would encourage you to get pen and paper now and try to come up with your own answer. In the notes for this chapter I have printed the brilliant solution that the *Sun* actually went with.5

The paper’s achievement in this case was to give the essence of the whole story in its headline. Of course, tabloid newspapers have to try harder to grab readers’ attention than most writers of doctorates. As a thesis author you can allow somewhat more words and many more syllables into your headings than the *Sun*. But the basic goal, of putting the message in the shop window, is just as appropriate for doctoral work. Taking it to the limit here, one approach much used in fairly short business and government reports is to use narrative headings and subheadings, which give a mini-précis of what each section or subsection covers. This style has a lot to commend it. Yet it is rarely used in PhD dissertations, mainly because it could get very wearing if repeated over a long text. Headings and subheadings in doctorates, and in journals and books, are normally much shorter, ranging from one or two words at minimum up to seven or eight words at maximum. Headings for main sections only might be a bit longer if they have two parts separated by a colon. However, subheadings should always stay quite snappy (on one line, without parts). None of these limitations is inconsistent with trying to get as much of the text’s key message as possible into the heading or subheading.

There are four common general failings in how PhD and other academic authors title their chapters and sections:

(i) *Non-substantive headings* do little or nothing to cue readers about the line of argument you are making. People often choose headings which consist only of vacuous verbiage or are very formalistic. Some are process-orientated or refer only to the methodological operations you carried out, rather than to
your findings. Some are completely vague. Others tell readers a little about what topic is being covered, but give no clue about what the author wants to say about the topic, what position is being argued, or what the ‘bottom-line’ or conclusion of the argument may be. This problem is far and away the leading defect with headings in academic theses and publications, especially when authors are using an analytic pattern of explanation. Poor headings often feed into mismanaging readers’ expectations, because authors choose very grand or sweeping subheadings to caption small subsections, feeding a sense of disappointment amongst readers. To pick up cases in your own work, look through your extended contents page and test each of your headings for genuine content. Replace those which are formalistic or process-orientated with something more specific and substantive.

(ii) Interrogative headings consist solely of questions and end with a question-mark. Some very well-organized students quite late on in their studies have shown me PhD outlines which consist entirely of interrogative headings, sometimes as many as 15 per chapter, with an alleged ‘plan’ for the thesis as a whole defined by upwards of 150 questions. This approach often looks precise and informative at the planning stage, reflecting specialized knowledge on the author’s part. But interrogative questions create only an illusion of professional expertise, for one critical reason. Questions are not answers. It is always much easier to formulate a set of interesting questions about a subject than it is to produce well-evidenced, coherent and plausibly argued answers to them. Most expert readers will be thoroughly familiar already with the kinds of questions one can ask around your thesis topic. They are primarily reading your work to find out what substantive solutions you have come up with. And here a series of interrogative headings obscures things as effectively as vacuous headings, and can be every bit as formalistic. Again check your extended contents page and if you use interrogative headings (ending in ?), replace all of them with ‘answer’ headings that convey instead your substantive argument.

(iii) Inaccurate headings, which actively miscue readers about the content of their accompanying section, occur all the time. They represent a fundamental failure of the key authorial role, to effectively manage readers’ expectations. The heading
says that a chapter or section will do A, but instead it does something different, perhaps something close to the author's intentions like C or D, or perhaps something much further away like M or N. This problem can arise in many ways. Authors often set out to do something with a detailed plan, but their text actually turns out to have an inner direction of its own and they then have difficulty in recognizing the fact. Perhaps authors promise readers to evaluate a decision but in the end they do something more modest instead, such as describing the process of reaching that decision. Perhaps they hope initially to make some form of intellectual breakthrough and end up with something more mundane. Often an author's initial headings link so poorly or loosely to what has actually been accomplished in a piece of text that she cannot see that the section is being radically misdescribed, that readers will expect one thing from the heading and get something different from the section text itself.

Combating most of these common problems in finished pieces of work is partly bound up with how far you edit, revise and replan your text, a topic discussed in detail in Chapter 6. But in the planning stages (before you have written out your ideas), it is also important to make sure that your headings describing sections and chapters are as accurate as possible. Look at your extended contents page and check that the fit between headings and what you plan for each section is a close one. Headings should capture the flavour of your substantive argument, but without overselling or overclaiming. The headings and the planned text should be commensurately scaled, and the heading should create only expectations that your text is actually going to meet.

(iv) Repetitive headings occur when anxious PhD students keep incanting words from the title of their doctorate in their chapter titles and section headings. Again this is a quick way to confuse and miscue readers, because different headings may tend to blur into each other and chapters and sections will lose a distinctive feel or identity. It is particularly inadvisable to reuse theoretical or thematic concepts taken from your whole thesis title in many different chapter or section headings. You do not achieve linkage by saying mantra words over and over, but by forging a closely connected working argument, whose development can be schematically traced in your headings.
Other instances of repetition may not confuse readers, but instead just make your headings longer and more boring than they need to be. For example, suppose the thesis title makes clear that the author is focusing on Korean post-war musical culture. It would be completely otiose to have later chapter or section headings repeat that the country reference is Korea or that the general time period is post-war. Similarly if a thesis focuses on a particular author or body of work it is unnecessary to have the chapter headings repeat that. Instead they should move on, taking the thesis frame of reference as given and providing more details of what that particular chapter or section is about. It is straightforward to check your extended contents page and make sure that chapter and section headings effectively partner with the thesis title itself, without repeating it.

Repetitive or overly similar headings often arise in the first place because students submit chapters to their supervisors or review committees as separate bits of work on widely spaced occasions. Hence they subconsciously may try to cram more of the thesis self-description into the opening chapter title than is needed. To avoid this problem, get into the habit of always putting your current overall thesis title and the latest version of your short contents page as the frontispiece for each chapter you submit. Your supervisors, advisers or departmental assessors will also be grateful to be given a clear view of where your current piece of work fits within the thesis as a whole. PhD students often blithely assume that their supervisors have a godlike ability to automatically retain a clear view of their overall thesis architecture from previous discussions, normally several weeks earlier. In fact supervisors inherently focus on your thesis a lot less than you do. They have other projects of their own to keep in view, and other PhD students to supervise. So they can only give concentrated attention to your work whenever you submit new chapters. Supervisors often find it very difficult to separate out the layers of different past discussions or to follow all the twists and turns of your thesis planning ideas and changes. Hence they will always appreciate being discreetly reminded of your overall title and current chapter plan.
Handling starts and finishes

Creations realized at the price of a great deal of work must in spite of the truth appear easy and effortless… The great rule is to take much trouble to produce things that seem to have cost none.

*Micelangelo Buonarroti* 6

A central task for any author is to manage readers’ expectations. But authors are often not fully aware of the number of different ways in which they create expectations. Once you have produced a piece of text, and you are familiar with its every nuance and wrinkle, you may assume that readers will be equally detailed in their approach. It is all too easy to picture readers as scanning your text carefully in the exact sequence that you wrote it, judiciously assigning weight to this factor or that argument, and carefully creating a balanced picture of what is said. But ‘real life’ readers, those who are not the fictional products of our authorial imaginations, do not operate like that. Instead they treat the text harshly, garnering first impressions quickly from obvious signs and stigmata, and then often coding up what they later read in detail to fit in with that initial frame of reference.

Although readers are famously diverse in their reactions, it is not hard to explain how their first impressions are mostly sourced, or to identify which elements of the text are most productive of expectations. Headings, subheadings and the sectioning of the text are very important, as the two previous sections make clear. Well-organized authors also signal to readers what a chapter or a section will do. They make promises: ‘I will show that…’, ‘The analysis demonstrates that…’. These explicit hostages to fortune clearly need careful phrasing. But in addition you will often generate expectations more implicitly. Suppose you assign two-thirds of one chapter’s text to aspect P, a fifth to aspect Q, and an eighth to aspect R. Readers will inevitably conclude that in your view P is more important or more interesting than Q, which in turn is more important or interesting than R. And if your literature review waxes lyrical on the defects of previous work, then readers expect that your analysis will do better, will transcend these earlier limitations.
And if you wheel an elaborate theoretical apparatus onstage at great length, or delineate a typology, or introduce your own neologisms – then readers will expect that these elements will justify themselves, will do useful work or create new insights or predictions that could not have materialized without them. How your text uses terminology, the concepts and vocabulary it deploys, and the style cues that you signal as author – all these will be used by readers to try and classify you and your text, to understand where you are coming from, where your scholarly tribal affiliations really lie. If these cues do not fit with your self-classification in the professional scene, or what you later say and do, then readers will receive incompatible messages – and code them as confused authorial purposes. Diagrams, charts and tables are also key attention points. Along with headings these are the items that readers will most quickly identify on a first scan through a piece of text. And like headings these attention points should ideally be independently understandable, because readers will commonly try to make sense of what they say on a first scan, without ploughing into accompanying text in detail (see Chapter 7 below).

It is unrealistic for authors to respond to these points by deploring the laziness or the lack of application or disorderliness of readers, their inability to unwrap your text in the same sequence that you have written it. And it would be naïve to imagine that examiners, however conscientious, will behave in a radically different manner. None of us read academic work like a good novel, ploughing through in one straight line from A to Z. Educated, professional audiences do not suspend disbelief. From the word go, from the first encounter with your arguments, academic readers will get on with criticizing and categorizing your text, trying to place you as an author, trying to find short-cuts to unravel your intent, determined to economize on the time they spend grappling with your thought. And they are right to do so, for this is a rational approach to allocating scarce resources of time and attention.

The most crucial parts of a chapter for generating readers’ expectations, for setting up mental frameworks, for getting readers off on the right foot or the wrong foot, are the beginnings and ends of chapters and of sections. And, of course, these are also usually the most difficult passages to write. So here you can ease your difficulties a good deal by having a well-defined checklist or repertoire of things to include and strategies to try. I review: key
elements for setting out on a chapter; beginning and finishing a section; and concluding the chapter as a whole.

Starting a chapter

Writing down the first few pages of a chapter can take far more time than completing much longer sections of the main body of the text. Partly this is the normal intimidating effect of a blank page or a blank screen, a problem built into the writing process at all times (see Chapter 6). But the problem gains extra intensity here because all authors know implicitly that beginnings are important in conditioning how readers view their work, as well as influencing how their writing will progress and the detailed directions it will take once they are launched into text production. Getting a satisfactory start to a chapter will often be a two-stage process. At the very beginning you need to write quickly a ‘working’ start, just a piece of lead-in text that gets you going, that helps you start the writing out of your ideas for the chapter. Later, when you have all or much of the text in being, you will probably need to go back and carefully reshape your start to frame what you have actually done.

At either of these stages, however, you must always include four elements in the following sequence:

- a chapter title;
- some form of ‘high impact’ start element, designed to particularly engage readers’ attention;
- a piece of framing text which moves from the start element to some discursive comments on the chapter’s main substantive themes, leading up to;
- a set of signposts to readers about the sequence and topic focus of the chapter’s main sections (that is, those parts which have first-order headings).

Because of the special importance of starts in conditioning readers’ expectations and the author’s later progress, I analyse each of these requirements in detail.

A chapter title may seem obvious, but it is actually very common to find doctoral students submitting chapters to their supervisors without any title at all. This move makes it harder for supervisors to give useful feedback. It also means that the author has been writing the chapter all the way through without
a clear focusing element to keep her on track. Chapter titles need to be carefully chosen, but this is not a reason to postpone choosing one until the chapter is complete. Choose a working title from the very beginning, which you can then re-evaluate when you have finished. Chapter titles can be somewhat longer than the headings used for sections inside chapters – for instance, it is acceptable to have a two-part heading with a colon in the middle, as I do in some chapters of this book. Remember that chapter titles operate inside the overall thesis title, and so they should not repeat elements of it directly.

A high impact start serves to attract readers’ attention, to get them immediately engaged with the new chapter. It should set your new slab of text apart from what has gone before, and give it a distinctive ‘feel’ and character from the outset. In a ‘big book’ thesis it is very important that each chapter does a particular job which is clearly signalled to readers, and which is different from its neighbours. The chapters need to build up across the whole thesis in a cumulative way, adding new elements of the analysis. They must not seem to readers to repeat, or to go round in circles, or to wander without an obvious pattern across the possible landscape of your topic.

Start paragraphs must be conceived, written and normally rewritten with special care. The opening element (either a sentence, or a set of sentences, or a whole paragraph) should focus on some interesting general aspect or problem that the chapter particularly addresses. Later elements (again sentences or paragraphs) can come down to earth somewhat, feeding into the framing text (see below) which is specific in indicating what the chapter is about. However, the requirements to be interesting and to write with special care pull in different directions here. Most PhD students write their theses too defensively, and hence end up with safe but very low-impact starts. Three of the most popular false starts are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I</th>
<th>‘In the previous chapter, I argued that X and Y and Z. [Author may enlarge on this for several sentences, even a whole paragraph.] But there are also other issues of A or B which will be tackled here…’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>‘In this chapter, I will discuss [repeat the chapter title at more length], in particular the issues of A and B.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>‘The concept of A [a word mentioned in the chapter title] has been defined by Jones (1989) as “xxx” and by Smith (1998) as “yyy” …’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In all these cases the capital letters in italics such as A or X stand for specific concepts or arguments in the thesis. False start I is deeply problematic because it makes readers focus not on the new chapter, but on its predecessor. This mis-signalling is almost bound to make them feel that the current chapter only repeats or extends in some small way what has gone before, a very demotivating beginning indeed. In a new chapter, always begin afresh. Never, ever, begin a chapter by looking back, by trying to make retrospective linkages between chapters. These links must instead always be made prospectively, at the very end of the conclusions of the previous chapter (see below). False start II does not actively mis-signal what the new chapter is about. But by only elaborating and repeating the chapter title it will look boring and low energy for readers. If key chapter title words are incanted exactly, often many times in the first few sentences, this start will also seem badly written. False start III is again very low energy, ploughing off immediately into definitions, normally quite boring for professional readers who will have seen this concept many times before. By linking these definitions to other authors, of course, this start also makes your work look derivative and unoriginal from the outset.

The key ways of getting to a better and genuinely high impact start vary a lot, depending on your discipline and type of thesis. Three common choices are: including quotations; introducing a strong example or other striking piece of empirical information; and setting out a paradox or intellectual puzzle.

Strong, memorable quotations can often be helpful in getting you over the hurdle of beginning from a blank sheet. In Johanne Goethe’s words: ‘It is just when ideas are lacking that a phrase is most welcome’.  You can integrate the quote into the opening sentence of your chapter. Or a whole-sentence quote can be printed as an epigraph, as at the beginning of chapters and sections in this book. (An epigraph is like a motto or subtitle, placed immediately after the title and above the main text.) If the quote is in the first line or first sentence of your main text then you will have to immediately discuss the theme or issue it raises. But if the quote is an epigraph then it implicitly characterizes the whole chapter (or section) and does not have to be discussed straightaway.
Do not select boring, mundane or anodyne quotes as epigraphs or opening sentence material, especially from contemporary authors working in the same field as you. Useful starting quotes really need to be something like epigrams (witty or striking thoughts cogently expressed in a short space), or particularly thought-provoking or fundamental reflections for your themes (if you pick a longer quotation). A beginning quote from a contemporary professional author working in exactly your field can make your work look derivative. So try not to cite such people. Instead pick much more general quotes. Classical or canonical or long-dead authors in your field (who may safely be quoted without looking derivative) are a good option. Contemporary non-professional authors (novelists, playwrights, journalists) make a good impression, and in some disciplines other modern sources (magazines, newspapers, music CDs or TV programmes like The Simpsons) are also appropriate. You can also use contemporary professional authors working in radically different fields from your own but making a relevant point for your work. Looking for more general quotes can run the danger of your falling for clichés or very tired, familiar aphorisms (such as those found in most dictionaries of quotations). Reasonably well-read readers may well see such quotes as routine: they can be no help to you. General purpose sources (Shakespeare, the Bible, major philosophers and so on) are helpful only if the quotes you use are apt and unusual. If you think that quotations may work for you, keep a sharp eye out for interesting observations as you read (both in general literature and professional sources), and record any possibles in a PC file as soon you encounter them. That way you can pick and choose from a large selection, and are more likely to find one that is really effective and appropriate in a given context.

A striking example, incident, event, conjunction, narrative or other piece of empirical information can also be an effective start, crystallizing and perhaps dramatizing a theme which the chapter will explain or develop at length. By presenting the chapter focus in a very concrete way, or an element that leads into it, such a start can achieve an impact which a dry recital of theories or ideas cannot. For instance, Michel Foucault’s opening pages for his philosophical book Discipline and Punish starts with a detailed description of the gruesome logistics of a nineteenth-century
public execution. A similar effect can be created by using very key summary statistics or data as the ‘attractor’ element, especially where this information can be presented in a dramatic or novel way. The trick here is to handle a few key numbers in text (not in a table), concentrate on especially telling numbers, and lose all unnecessary detail in the data cited (see Chapter 7 for how to present numerical information in text). It helps if the point of the data is to show up a clear contrast or a not-widely-appreciated aspect of the chapter’s theme.

The final way of achieving a high impact start is to focus on a problem or paradox, a puzzle which has no obvious explanation, usually achieved by bringing proposition A and proposition B into a conjunction, and exposing a tension between them. An effective chapter start in this mould will operate like the overall thesis question (discussed in Chapter 1 above), only this time defining a core focus of the chapter. Later main sections of the chapter must then deliver an effective answer to the problem or a solution of the paradox.

Framing text comes after the high impact start, and domesticates it, making the links and the transition from the arresting start material to the more prosaic or mainstream themes of the chapter. The object of the framing text is to ‘warm up’ readers to the chapter topic, perhaps indicating previous schools of thought about it, or the interpretation offered by earlier studies. The framing text may also handle any ‘lead-in’ material which it is necessary for readers to encounter before the main sections start, although this should be kept to a minimum length. General framing text must amount to at least one substantial paragraph, but it should not extend beyond three or perhaps four pages. If you have very substantial amounts of lead-in stuff to get across (for example, a lengthy historical or geographical background for a case study) then make that into the first main section of the chapter. All your framing material should set up and show off the rationale for the main sections of the chapter. You should not dive off unannounced into substantive exposition. The framing text should lead up to the signposts which end the (untitled) introduction.

The signposts provide a minimal indication of the sequence of main sections to come in the chapter. When you drive down a highway, the signposts say ‘London’ or ‘New York’ to show
where you are going. But they do not provide any detailed pre-figuring of what you can find in these places. A signpost is not a guidebook. For the same reason, signposts in your text need to be kept fairly terse and under control. Readers must be given a very clear idea of how many sections there are in the chapter, and what sequence they come up in. You can include a phrase or two, perhaps a whole sentence, to very briefly characterize the subtopics considered in each section. But you must not blurt out what you will say in later sections or give a condensed summary of the chapter argument to come. If you do succumb to the temptation to write a mini-guidebook to future sections you will probably state your argument in too crude or vulgar a way now, and create an unwelcome sense of repetition for readers later on.

Signposts can be implemented in a more explicit or a more latent fashion. Explicit signposts should preferably use textual ways of conveying the sequence (‘First, I consider…’, ‘Second, I examine…’). It is best to avoid referring to the section numbers directly (‘Section 3.1 discusses…’) because this approach can make your signposting look too mechanical. It may then seem to readers as if you are just duplicating the headings themselves. More latent ways of signposting are briefer, simply signalling a sequence of subjects to come in the chapter, without linking them precisely to particular numbered sections.

Starting and finishing a section

The beginning of each of the main sections of the chapter also needs to be carefully written. Main sections generally should be numbered (2.1, 2.2, etc.) and have a short heading, probably around four to eight words. Section headings should be short and punchy. (The only exception concerns a ‘narrative subheading’ strategy where the headings are full-sentence descriptions that précis the section contents.) Do not use colons or partitions in subsection headings, which would make them too cumbersome. It is important not to repeat either the thesis title or the chapter title, both of which automatically frame what the section is about. Again, it is best to avoid interrogative headings. Instead try to get some of your storyline or substantive argument into each section heading.
Next you will need no more than one or two paragraphs of lead-in material. Ideally this should start in a somewhat higher impact way than normal text. Again a quotation can be used, or a very short empirical example or a smaller intellectual puzzle (one that will be wholly resolved within this section). But a section start must always be accomplished much more speedily and simply than that for a whole chapter. In longer or more complex sections you might need to end the lead-in paragraph with some low-key signposts setting out the rough sequence of topics that will be handled (within this section alone). Within-section signposts should always be briefer and less formal than those for the chapter as a whole. If they are not, there is a risk that readers may get confused, especially at the start of the chapter where they will encounter chapter signposts for the main sections at the end of the introduction, and then come across within-section signposts for the first section perhaps only one or two paragraphs later. It is important to ensure that readers do not run into different ‘first, second, third’ lists close to each other, which might be confusing.

Concluding a section is also difficult and worth doing carefully. You will need a last paragraph for each section that terminates it in a way that looks logical, well organized, and cumulative. It is best to avoid ‘telling them what you’ve told them’ in a mechanical fashion. Instead, the section wrap-up paragraph should let you step back a little bit and draw out a brief central message from the section as a whole. This could be an interim conclusion, or a summary of what the section has said but perhaps looked at from a different angle. It is important that the concluding paragraph for a section stick solely to what has been done in that section, and not discuss anything else. However, in the last sentence or so, the concluding paragraph can make forward linkages to the next section, so that it too can have a well-designed, higher impact kind of start.

**Finishing a chapter**

You should mark the end of the chapter by a Conclusions section which is at least two paragraphs long. It should have a heading displayed in a font which makes clear that it is not
a first-order section. The first paragraph (or part) of the Conclusions should gather up the key points previously pulled out in each of the final paragraphs for each section, and re-present them so as to draw together the end points of each section. It is worth writing the opening sentence of the Conclusions carefully, preferably in a general way which clearly breaks away from the ending of the last section and instead encourages readers to look back across the chapter as a whole and to assess what they have learnt.

The second paragraph (or second part) of the Conclusions should ‘open out’ to briefly consider one or two broader issues raised. It should always end by establishing a forward link of some kind to the next chapter. With a descriptive sequence of chapters the link will normally be easy to make – for instance, in a historical or narrative sequence, what happened next? And in a ‘guidebook’ pattern, what links A to B? Where the chapters discuss a sequence of analytic or argumentative topics the link across will usually take the form of pointing to some open issues raised by this chapter, one of which the next chapter will address. Sometimes there are more tricky transitions, when a series of connected chapters ends and you have to link forward to a new grouping of chapters. In these circumstances you may want to leave a couple of blank lines to indicate that the conclusions for this chapter alone have finished, and that some more general comments follow. Then write a separate paragraph or two just of linking text, drawing the connected chapters together and possibly referring back to your opening chapter plan and the sequence outlined there.

Conclusions

In the UK’s difficult and lengthy driving test there is a much-dreaded element called the ‘emergency stop’. At the beginning of the test your examiner tells you that at a certain random point she will tap on the dashboard of the car with her folder, as a signal that you must bring the car to a halt as quickly as you can, under control and safely. Then the test starts and you drive off, usually quite quickly forgetting about this whole idea under the stresses and strains of negotiating traffic. Later on, as
you are driving down some less populated section of road you suddenly notice your examiner apparently having a fit and lashing at the dashboard with her folder. As belated recognition dawns, you respond by bringing your car to a screeching stop amidst a copious cloud of burnt rubber from the tyres. For authors of doctoral theses (and indeed other professional works) it is a good idea to think of an analogous emergency stop test for your text.

Suppose that at some random, unannounced point I take the text away from someone who is reading your chapter. I ask her to explain (without looking at it again) whereabouts she is in the chapter, and what it is all about. If the text is adequately and appropriately organized then the reader should be able to respond:

The chapter is about the four themes W, X, Y and Z and it has three sections. The first was about W (specifically subtopics $w_1$, $w_2$ and $w_3$). When the text was taken away I was in the middle of the second section covering X, having already absorbed subtopics $x_1$ and $x_2$. I believe that three more subtopics $x_3$, $x_4$ and $x_5$ would be handled later on in that section. I have a clear but general idea of the topics yet to come in the bit of the chapter I haven’t yet read, namely that this third section will cover Y and Z together, and in a briefer way than the treatment of W and X.

If our mythical reader cannot respond as precisely as this, then the chapter is too weakly structured. The worst case result for an underorganized chapter would be if the reader responds to the emergency stop test by saying:

I have no real clue what the chapter as a whole is about, because the title is very vague or formalistic. From what the author says at the start perhaps the focus is on some X and W themes in some way? The chapter just started out on a magical mystery tour, and has so many [or so few] headings that I cannot really say how it is subdivided. I can only tell you roughly where I have been up to the point where the text was taken away. And I have little idea of what was to come in the rest of the section where I was
stopped, and no idea at all what remains to be discussed in later sections. Every other page I turn throws up a new element or a new direction in an unpredictable manner.

While it is important always to adequately organize your text, how you chunk up your chapters must also depend a great deal on the material that you are handling. The advice in this chapter should not be read as a series of remedies to be mechanically applied to produce chapters which are all the same. Although chapters should generally average 10,000 words in length, with main sections every 2500 words, that does not mean that every chapter should have the same four main sections as every other. It is important to adjust your structures sensitively to the material you are handling, rather than to produce robotic-looking work. An excessively mechanical application of these (or any other) rules could mean that you subdivide and signpost text more than you need to, producing fake sub-sectioning and a text that is very boring for readers to plough through.

So you need to be flexible, tuning and adjusting the principles set out here so as to accommodate different lengths of chapters and sections, and different kinds of material across them. Chapters smaller than 10,000 words may need only two or three sections, while longer ones might need perhaps five sections or at most six sections (but not more than this). Main sections in long chapters may need to be well organized in subsections that are explicitly signposted, producing perhaps twelve or more first- and second-order subheads in all.

The text box below shows a flexibly applied structure for a middle-sized chapter (let’s say, chapter 2), with each of the headings shown in its appropriate font, appearance and location. There are three main sections, plus a short (untitled) introduction and a brief conclusions bit. The box also notes where start and finish elements need to be more carefully written. In this plan section 2.1 has two subsections (each with second-order subheads), but section 2.3 is shorter and does not use any subsections. And although the larger piece of text in section 2.2 is subdivided, it is differently handled because of the nature of the material there, using three lighter-touch groupings of paragraphs denoted by only third-order subheads. Figure 4.1 on p. 102 shows
the same structural information as the text box below, but in a more diagrammatic form. It illustrates the general point that having a clearly recognizable and standard set of headings across the thesis as a whole is perfectly compatible with having chapter structures which flexibly adapt to the demands of organizing different kinds of text.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER 2: TITLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opening paragraphs – from 1 to 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2.1: SECTION HEADING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opening 1 or 2 paragraphs signpost subsections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subsection heading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opening paragraph, main body, closing paragraph</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2.2: SECTION HEADING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lead-in paragraphs signpost groupings of paragraphs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grouped paragraphs heading leads into text, with wrap paragraph at the end</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grouped paragraphs heading leads into text, with wrap paragraph at the end</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grouped paragraphs heading leads into text, with wrap paragraph at the end</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2.3: SECTION HEADING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opening paragraph, main body of text, closing paragraph</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONCLUSIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First paragraph (or part) summarizes across sections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closing paragraph (or part) points forward to the next chapter</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Implementing effective chapter structures is closely bound up with writing and producing text more generally. But to have a clear idea of what you are doing and some rules of thumb of the kind set out here is a great advantage when starting out on the writing process. It should generate more initial ideas for you to try out. In the next chapter I carry the discussion down to an even more detailed level of writing, looking at two issues which often prove troublesome for doctoral students – writing in a good style, and including simple and efficient scholarly references.

Figure 4.1  The tree structure of a chapter
Never ignore, never refuse to see, what may be thought against your thought.

Friedrich Nietzsche

For creative non-fiction the heart of the authoring process is a person sitting at a desk, surrounded by information, notes, scribbles and sources, or otherwise jammed with ideas, and struggling to organize their thoughts on a blank screen or sheet of paper. This particular image is so dominant in our thinking about authoring because it is so awe-full, so hard to manage your way through at the time, so difficult to capture what you were doing afterwards, and so psychologically stressful or unnerving to contemplate at almost any time. In another field, writing novels, its practitioners’ collective obsession with the angst of an author imagining something out of nothing has gone even further, as John Fowles noted ironically:

Serious modern fiction has only one subject, the difficulty of writing serious modern fiction…. The natural consequence of this is that writing about fiction has become a far more important matter than writing fiction itself. It’s one of the best ways you can tell a true novelist nowadays. He’s not going to waste his time over the messy garage-mechanic drudge of assembling stories and characters on paper … Yes, all right. Obviously he has at some point to write something, just to show how irrelevant and unnecessary the actual writing part of it is. But that’s all.
Of course, Fowles is pointing out that this degree of navel-gazing is deeply unhealthy, even disabling for his field. Thankfully, creative non-fiction is a more prosaic area than novel writing, an area where well-primed authors generally find it easier (more routine) to do writing. But most of us encounter some similar problems in handling the self-exposure involved in authoring, facing up to our own limited ideas and contribution, and coping with the inevitable separation between our planned piece of work and the one that actually materializes on screen or paper.

Three key strategies can help ease the myths and difficulties surrounding the writing process. One step is to rethink the writing process not as a single creative act but instead as a multi-stage process, where each stage is as important for your progress as any other. Authoring does not just involve producing a first draft. It is just as much about how you reflect on what you have done, try out the arguments on other people, replan your text in the light of comments, and implement revisions. Second, where a piece of writing is not working in its current form, it is useful to have in reserve a specific and reliable method for radically remodelling problematic text. A third strategy is to plan your writing sessions carefully and to review some detailed suggestions which may help you maintain progress and avoid running into potential road blocks.

Drafting, upgrading and going public

Everything is proceeding as I have foreseen.  
*The Emperor, in* The Return of the Jedi  

Writing up a chapter plan into the very first joined-up version of your text will produce literally dozens of changes in what you expected to do. All of them will be disappointing. What seemed feasible, concise, coherent or original on your plan will turn out weaker, lengthier, less accessible or more familiar in practice. Howard Becker notes that many PhD students adhere to the illusion that there is some ‘one best way’ of authoring any given piece, sitting out there in a landscape of potentialities, just waiting to be discovered. The writer’s task then is to hunt high and low for this optimal path. Taking this view, you
may easily get the feeling part-way through writing that you have been thoroughly mistaken about where this best way lies, and now have lost track of it entirely. Countering these setback feelings entails taking a longer view of, first, the whole set of stages involved in developing a professional text; and second, the process of exposing it to consideration and debate by others.

**Stages in the writing process**

Don’t get it right, get it written.  
*James Thurber*  

Outlines can help, but not if you begin with them. If you begin, instead, by writing down everything, by spewing out your ideas as fast as you can type, you will discover … the fragments you have to work with.  
*Howard Becker*

The major myth of the authoring process is the critical character of breaking fresh ground, filling a blank screen or a blank page *de novo*. An essential antidote is to recognize that this is only a first stage in authoring, and not necessarily the key one for the development of your argument. Authoring is a multi-stage process and, as the quote from James Thurber above makes clear, there are divergent rationales to go with these different stages. 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. As your text grows you will also necessarily lose some control over it. By the time a chapter is 30 or 40 pages long you cannot possibly hold its entire argument in your head at one time. Nor can you even fully understand what you have written or why the argument turned out as it did. Rebuilding this mastery is a key element in the second stage of the writing process, where you can follow through a logic of organizing text in a coherent fashion. Building an extended text will necessarily change your thinking. It will make clear aspects of your own views that you could not have
known in advance, and allow you to weigh, test and sift the varying levels of commitment you have to different propositions. Someone quoted the maxim, ‘Never begin a sentence until you know how to end it’ to the novelist E. M. Forster. He replied: ‘How can I know what I think till I see what I say?’

A second essential philosophical change of view with this approach is to recognize that there is no ‘one best way’ of saying something. There is no Platonic perfect form sitting out there waiting to be searchlit by a peculiarly perceptive advance plan, or, once identified, capable of being written up intact by a more self-consistent or more talented author. Instead all that you can say is constructed, created, not found or discovered ready-made. Difficulties arise because very often we confront authoring dilemmas, choice points in the creative process where two or more options lead further on but you can only maximize one of your valued goals or purposes at the expense of another. There may be no ‘right’ choice in such dilemma situations. There often is no common currency in which to measure the different kinds of costs attaching to each of the options leading forward. So you can only make conditional choices to follow one route rather than another and to see what happens. But later on it will be helpful to recall those prior decision points in re-evaluating what you have done. Perhaps an alternative choice might be better after all.

Going from a poor version of your ideas to a radically improved and viable text takes time, distance, alternative perspectives and a concerted effort at remodelling. Writing is an act of commitment. So no one can constructively renounce text that they have just produced – that is, see what is wrong with it or what might be changed to remedy defects. With a newborn text you can only renew and reiterate your commitment (perhaps tinkering around with perfectionist embellishments) or reject it non-constructively (‘It’s all rubbish – I’m wasting my time!’). You need at least some days to pass, other things and other thoughts to intervene, and other people to read what you have written in order to begin to see things differently. And when you start to revise and replan it can be helpful to have built that stage into your thinking and your timetable in advance, and to have some appropriate expectations about it.
You will almost always need to carry out five operations on any piece of text: print, edit, revise, upgrade and remodel:

- **Print** your material to achieve a shift of perspective from writing on your PC. If you only edit text on-screen your changes will be too confined to small corrections and changes at a verbal level. Working on paper will help you see how more thorough-going alterations are feasible, such as moving large chunks of text around over several pages.

- **Edit** means a word-level edit of your raw text to remove mis-spellings, grammar mistakes, tiresome repetitions of the same word or phrase, and other infelicities. Do not leave your text untouched with these problems still around. So long as they remain uncorrected, their presence will tend to obscure other defects from you. Getting to a clean text lets you see beyond the clutter, to any deeper intellectual problems.

- **Revise** covers a paragraph-level reconsideration of how one idea chains to the next. It focuses on improving things by small-scale switches around in the order of sentences or paragraph chunks. It can also cover more substantive changes, especially in the beginnings and ends of paragraphs (remembering the Topic, Body, Wrap sequence).

- **Upgrade** involves going back from your piece of text to your original materials and considering whether you can strengthen the arguments in any way. Can you cite more scholarly support for points you have made? Or bring in additional empirical evidence? Or reanalyse your data to knock out possible competing interpretations? Can you extend your key arguments, or develop them in a more formal or systematic way? You need to be clear when your approach needs more sustenance and underpinning. But avoid slipping into ‘thesis paranoia’ by overarguing or overciting on non-controversial points.

- **Remodel** refers to a much more radical restructuring of a chapter or article, which usually requires a very specific method, described in the next subsection. Text that is already in a satisfactory condition may not need full-scale remodelling. But you will normally have to make radical changes in at least one or two chapters out of eight, unless you are a very disciplined and consistent writer.
Producing a piece of text finished in ‘first draft’ form involves both your private efforts to generate raw text and improve on it, and seeking outside commentary and advice. The overall process can be pictured as having four phases, moving from most personal and private to most public. Going public with your commitment, a text that crystallizes your thought and for the moment fixes it in one configuration, is a particularly sensitive stage that needs to be handled carefully.

In Phase 1 you write out a semblance of the argument to an approximate length of the chapter you are embarked on. This stage produces raw text, words on screen or handwriting on a page, arguments played out or attempted, facts marshalled, connections made, positions expounded – but maybe not yet in any satisfactory joined-up form.

In Phase 2 you stockpile and reassess your text for a while, looking for ways to upgrade it and tighten it up. After leaving a short gap (because some time and distance are needed here), you can review what you have, looking for omissions or inconsistencies, trying to trace the development of the argument and to see places where moving things around can improve things. During this shape-up stage it can also be useful to show bits of text to friendly readers, that is people close to you, such as fellow PhD students, friends, relatives, significant others or lovers. Even people without a background in your topic can be helpful foils, sympathetic readers who can look at your text dispassionately and tell you how accessible or well written it seems. A trusted, intelligent but inexpert listener can also help you test your key arguments by letting you say them aloud and more accessibly. If you are very lucky and get on really well with one or more of your supervisors, perhaps you may get them involved in this shaping-up stage. Phase 2 may involve you in making multiple small revisions as you go along. But it normally ends with you making a first systematic run through of your work, inserting additional materials, tying down loose referencing, moving and reknitting text in an improved pattern, and consolidating lots of small upgrade changes into a revised form.

In Phase 3 you begin to go public with your text, accumulate comments, and incorporate them in a more fundamental revision or remodelling. In professional contexts you can only
go forward a certain distance on your own, after which you need to get some radically different views of what you are saying in order to make progress. Your supervisors or advisers are the first port of call. One of their primary roles is to look at and comment on your formal written text. You need to make sure that they give you effective feedback on your work. Normally advisers are reassured and even grateful when they get chapters to look at. It is not easy for them to operate solely at an oral level in someone else's research topic. They need your help in the form of a regular sequence of chapters in order to offer useful advice and commentary. But supervisors are also very variable in what they say, for various reasons. Some are famously diffident or difficult people, like the Oxford philosopher whose three-word written comment on a student's painfully produced 12,000-word chapter was: 'I suppose so'. Different supervisors also follow different strategies. Some will comment in vigorous detail on early drafts, where others deliberately stand back for fear of being too critical of your nascent ideas. Some very well organized supervisors put their effort in very early on in your text production process, demanding that you get a near-perfect chapter draft to stockpile before you can move on to another chapter. In this perspective, once you have reached the right 'doctoral' level in one chapter, it will become easier for you to deliver subsequent chapters to the same standard. Other advisers (like me) feel that it is only important for you to get a broadly acceptable chapter draft before moving on, lest you drag out early writing with perfectionist anxieties and erode your later research and authoring time. In this perspective, going from a first full draft of the thesis to a final version of the text will normally produce so many changes that overwriting early chapters, before the neighbouring chapters are written, will too frequently be wasted or redundant effort. The detailed stylistic and argumentative choices you make in your first two years' work are likely to be extensively overturned by more mature insights and by the alterations inherent in crafting the thesis into an integrated whole.

Beginning to go public should take other forms than just showing material to your supervisor, however. Presenting a chapter in a 'friendly' public forum such as a departmental graduate seminar can be very helpful, even if the audience does
not include many people who know a great deal about your topic. The point of these exercises is for you to think through how your text can be presented and explained to people knowledgeable in your discipline but not in your specific topic. The changes that you make in order to mount an effective presentation and the comments that you get back can often be very helpful foretastes of how people in your discipline generally will view your work. Some PhD students resent being asked by their departments to do regular presentations once or twice a year to such groups, feeling that so inexpert an audience has little to say to them about their own specialist research. But at the end of the PhD other ‘generalist’ audiences in your discipline will make crucial decisions about your future as an academic, such as deciding whether or not to appoint you to a university job or to allocate you a post-doctoral grant. It is far better to have to appreciate early on how the profession as a whole may see your work – so that you can make adjustments in the orientation or presentation of your text in time to improve these later perceptions.

Talking is a basic human art. By it each communicates to others what he [or she] knows and, at the same time, provokes the contradictions which direct his attention to what he has overlooked.

*Bernard Lonergan* 8

Conference makes a ready man [or woman].

*Francis Bacon* 9

After your supervisors or advisers have commented on your draft, and perhaps you have also accumulated some ‘outside’ commentary, then you should quickly make any changes that seem necessary, while these criticisms and reactions are still fresh in your mind. This second round of revisions is the final element in producing a settled first draft of the chapter. Your first draft will normally be a long way from your original raw text. It is a version of the chapter that you can safely bank, leaving it as it is, not to be reassessed until you have written a complete draft of the whole thesis and are moving to a final
version of the entire text (see Chapter 8). It is important for your later morale that before you ‘bank’ the chapter you make some effective modifications to meet suggestions or comments from your advisers and criticisms in seminars.

This does not mean scrapping and starting again. Nor does it mean throwing up your hands and filing your existing version of the chapter with a lot of disabling commentaries attached, your own and other people’s. Instead keep faith with your chapter, and with the work that it embodies, but try to find a way of adjusting what you say and how you say it that meets or skates around the points made against your argument. It may not be a good idea to painstakingly try to remodel the chapter into a completely different form now, because later changes when you move from first draft to a final text could supersede any major restructuring which you do now. But when you ‘bank’ your chapter in first draft and move on to the next, it is important that it is in a reasonable working format, one that counters criticisms and incorporates important suggestions. In that way you will think of the banked chapter as viable, up to date, genuinely a first draft – rather than seeing it as imperfect, conditional or in need of a major overhaul before reaching proper first-draft status.

Phase 4 of developing text is a desirable but more optional one, of going public in wider professional settings by giving seminars at other universities and papers at conferences. Do not attempt this stage until your chapter or paper is well worked-up, so that you are reasonably confident about taking outside criticism of your ideas. If you meet this test then presenting to an outside seminar at another university can be a very useful first step. Alternatively there may be small-scale specialist group meetings which occur regularly within academic professional associations. These occasions can offer more focused criticisms and evaluations from people working in exactly your field. Any outside audience (especially at conferences) will tend to be more heterogeneous, less committed to the theoretical ideas or methods of research that hold sway in your home department or university. They will be franker about possible problems and more radical in challenging your ideas with alternative approaches. Going beyond this level involves presenting a paper to a larger professional conference, at national level.
Later on in your doctorate, when you have a developed version of a chapter in a tightly written and short conference paper format, then you may also find it valuable to apply for international conferences. As you go up this ladder of increasing scale the potential audience for your paper widens. But the time you get to present it falls, from 30 to 40 minutes in a university seminar, to maybe only 15 or 20 minutes at large conferences.

Remodelling text

One changes one’s ideas the way an animal sheds its coat, in patches: it’s never a wholesale change from one day to the next.

_Umberto Eco_ 10

All of the advice above assumes that your text already works tolerably well, sufficient for you to be able to absorb comments and to upgrade it incrementally. But sometimes, perhaps rather frequently in the early stages of developing your thesis or with more argumentative or theoretical chapters, you may find that the overall feel of a chapter is not right. Here more fundamental changes may be needed. Text remodelling is a particularly powerful technique for this kind of situation. It is psychologically difficult to use, because none of us likes to admit to ourselves that some writing we have produced really does not work. The idea of starting over can seem very threatening and non-constructive if you have no clear alternative idea of how to proceed.

Remodelling is designed to cope with the fact that at the normal full-chapter length of 30 to 40 pages any piece of text becomes very difficult for us to hold in our heads as a whole. We tend to cope by selectively forgetting parts of the text as we move through it. Authors use many different linking words, phrases and sentences to convince readers that one paragraph leads on seamlessly to the next. These devices can all effectively disguise the structure of a chapter from the author as well. Even if you have gone over a finished chapter several times making incremental changes and revisions, the chances are still very high that you will not fundamentally understand what you have done.
Three steps provide the foundations for remodelling:

– Write out the chapter heading in full, and then all the subheadings in full as they come up, in the same font as used in the chapter. It is best to do remodelling with pen and paper, and not on a PC. (There are a couple of specialist PC packages which might assist authors doing extensive remodelling, especially people whose research already uses a lot of interviews or case study materials.\textsuperscript{11})

– For each paragraph in the chapter, write a one-line summary of what it says. Try to express the argumentative core of what the paragraph says. Be cold-bloodedly realistic, or perhaps downright cynical or sceptical. For instance if a paragraph only says a bit more on a point already made, express that judgement in your summary line. It is very important not to let these summaries lengthen out beyond a single line.

– Number all the paragraph summaries in sequence from the beginning to the end of the chapter.

You should now have a drastically summarized version of what your chapter says, one that records all the key points being made within one or two pages. This view should be much more accessible and comprehensible than your previous impression of the chapter.

With the couple of pages showing this chapter skeleton on the desk in front of you, begin a series of basic checks:

\begin{itemize}
  \item Is the chapter structure simple (good) or complex (bad)?
  \item Is the argument pattern clear and logical (good) or unclear (bad)?
  \item Do the current sections and subsections divide up the chapter text evenly (good) or unevenly (bad)? Even division shows up because each section or subsection has much the same number of component paragraphs as the others at the same level.
  \item Does the chapter’s argument have a developmental or cumulative feel about it (good) or does it by contrast seem recursive and repetitive (bad)? You need to follow a ‘say it once, say it right’ philosophy, gathering together closely related points which can be handled at one place in a full-force way, not dissipated across different bits of the text.
\end{itemize}
Does the chapter use an analytic or argumentative mode of exposition (generally better in terms of organizing and personalizing your argument) or does it rely on a descriptive approach (generally worse for organizing and personalizing your argument).

These checks will only take you five minutes to do for a normal chapter, but the answers you get may sometimes surprise you. You may find that what you have written is a considerable distance away from what you planned to do in advance, but also from what you thought you were doing in producing the raw text and making any edits since. Sometimes the text may seem to have a life or tendencies of its own, and this can be an important datum for you to consider. If you find a mismatch between the initial chapter plan and its implementation, do not immediately conclude that your text must be flogged back into line with the master plan. If in the end this is how you wrote it, that may be because this is how that text had to be written by you. And if your initial structure was different, perhaps it is that which should be changed? Sometimes your sectioning, headings, subheadings, signposts and promises reflect your original plan while the body of the text you have written in fact does something different. Bringing the two back into sync by dropping an unrealistic plan can sometimes sort out problems very straightforwardly.

Books do not always obey the author’s orders and this book… quickly became obstreperous.
Claire Tomalin 12

A show has a mind of its own, and it’s wrong to push it in a direction it doesn’t want to go.
Neil Simon 13

The next stage of remodelling can be as psychologically uncomfortable as realistically summarizing each paragraph. If the text does not read well, you must try to generate one alternative schema for the chapter, a new structure that differs substantially from the existing one. On a new sheet of paper, set out some alternative section and subsection headings for the chapter, spacing them out evenly from top to bottom of the new sheet.
The idea here is to surface a different way of organizing things, a different sequence of ideas. Once you have specified the section heads and subheadings you can then indicate the kind of body-text to go inside each section by simply inserting paragraph numbers from your existing text-skeleton onto the new plan, in the rough order needed – which may be very different from their current sequence.

To really assess this alternative schema you now have to flesh it out a bit, which means moving back from pen and paper to working on your PC. Save your existing text twice as different files, once under its customary name and again under a new name (perhaps adding ‘revised’ or ‘Rv’ to the front of the old name). Now at the top of the revised file insert the new section headings and subheadings you have created. Then cut and paste your numbered paragraphs from one location and sequence to the alternative one. This stage of the operation is called ‘chop and stick’, because you are only cutting out paragraphs and putting them back together in a different sequence. You are not yet rewriting the beginnings or ends of paragraphs to make them fit together, merely regrouping them. The next stage is to print out the reconfigured file with a couple of blank lines at each point where the new sequence differs. Then read through the text in the new sequence, marking it up as you go along. Think about how you could rebuild the whole chain of links in the new sequence, from one paragraph to another, and from one subsection to another. Pencil in ideas for doing this on your print-out.

Next comes a key evaluation decision. Which works best – the new sequence (roughly hewn though it still is) or the old one? The point of looking at a whole alternative approach is to compare like with like. Left to ourselves most of us are quite conservative and risk averse. Faced with a choice between some finished-looking text and a still unspecified alternative version, we will tend to cling tenaciously to what we have. But sketch in a new structure, and show yourself how the text would look if quickly remodelled, and you may be able to overcome this inertial attachment. With a rough-hewn alternative physically in front of you, you have a chance to make a much better informed decision. In my experience, people who have got this far with text remodelling techniques almost always proceed
with the reshaped version – even when they previously felt dis-satisfied with their text but pessimistic about finding any better way of organizing it.

From here on you need do only a limited amount of work to finish off the remodelled version of the text. The principal task is to refocus the beginnings and ends of sections and subsections, the signposts and promises made to readers. You will also have to remake some linkage points between paragraphs at all the points where the sequence has changed under the new structure. But you should have a clear plan of what to do by now, and almost all of the text used in the new version is already written. With these elements on the desk in front of you, producing a fully polished and connected new text should be much easier than it was to generate the original version.

There are then only a few remaining checks that you need to make on the remodelled chapter:

- Look at each subheading in turn and ask: is it the right level of heading, and in the right place? How many paragraphs follow each subheading (easily checked from your new plan)? Your subheadings should neither be too spaced out, nor come too frequently. It is especially important to avoid having two headings next to each other, with no intervening text. (Also look out for cases where there is only a single lower-order subheading inside a section: creating subsections is redundant unless there are at least two of them.) Do the subheads divide the text evenly so far as possible? Are the subheadings effective and informative? Do the headings give readers good clues about what the storyline or the ‘bottom line’ is in each? It can be very useful to crosscheck the subheadings with your one-line paragraph summaries for that subsection and see how far they match up.
- Check each of the linkages between paragraphs in the new plan. Is there a good reason why this paragraph follows that? Does the first and last sentence of each new paragraph signpost the contents well, and make good verbal links from one paragraph to the next?
- Practice the ‘emergency stop’ test on the new text. Suppose that I suddenly clap my hand over the bottom of the page
at a randomly chosen point in the chapter and ask readers to explain what the structure of the argument is and how far they have come in it. Will they be able to give a reasonably easy and assured answer? If the answer is no, strengthen the signposting in the text, review the headings and subheadings again, and try to tighten up the structure and make it as simple and straightforward for readers to access as possible.

Organizing the writing process

Biting my truant pen, beating myself for spite, ‘Fool,’ said my Muse to me, ‘look in thy heart, and write.’
Sir Philip Sidney 14

I write when I’m inspired, and I see to it that I’m inspired at nine o’clock every morning.
Peter de Vries 15

Your experience of the writing process can become unnecessarily off-putting if you do not approach it in the right way. Writing is difficult to do, and most of us tend to put off doing hard things for as long as possible. I often think of multiple tasks that I must complete before I can even try to bang out words on screen or put pen to paper. Perhaps I start what was meant to be a writing session but then find some displacement activity, like following up scholarly references, or doing a word-level edit of last week’s writing, which allows me to wriggle away from starting new writing. After a few less productive sessions like this, I can end up writing hard against a deadline – which is far more stressful than starting in good time and trying to consistently rack up some words. Repeat this experience a dozen times and it can quickly become habit-forming. Nothing useful gets written except when a deadline really looms. So the new writing process becomes inextricably associated in your mind with high-pressure working. In turn this link reinforces the tendency to postpone getting started on it, like putting off going to the dentist. There is no magic cure for these common problems.
But it can be helpful to review some fairly commonsense issues around the writing process, and to do what you can to make creating new text easier and more straightforward for you.

A first step worth thinking through is how you programme your writing slots.\textsuperscript{16} Nothing is more demoralizing than to plan on doing a certain amount of writing in a given week or month, only to find that the time has elapsed and you have made too little progress on your planned levels. Start by being realistic about all the competing demands you face, from family, friends and social life, from employment or other means of paying your way, travel time, teaching, studying courses, lectures and seminars, and so on. You need to take out appropriate amounts of time from any given week and be realistic about what is left. When estimating how much you can write in a session, build in some slack time also for editing and catch-up activities. Sometimes in doing these sums it will become clear that you just need to prioritize your writing more, to set aside much longer or more frequent periods for it than you have been doing.

The time slots you earmark also have to be useful ones. A writing session cannot normally be squeezed into small bits of time, a half-hour here and there, a short train journey, or a small interval between coursework sessions. These lesser chunks of time can be used very productively for other things related to writing, like jotting down ideas, reviewing previous jottings, or word-editing raw text. But writing raw text from scratch, or substantially remodelling stuff you already have, generally both require a substantial commitment of time, perhaps around three or four hours minimum for most people. This has got to be completely free time – not eroded by phone interruptions, not a time when you do e-mailing or surf the Web, and most especially not a time when family members or friends will interpose quite different demands on your concentration.

You need a half-hour space at the start of each writing session in order to get warmed up on pre-writing activities, reviewing your notes and organizing ideas for the piece from your last writing session. You may need to build up your confidence, morale and sense of clear direction in order to reach the point of committing words to screen or paper. It can help to type notes and organizing ideas into the document you are working
on below the existing joined-up text, in the rough sequence you want the unwritten sections to follow. Then as you write up new bits of joined-up text, you can delete the appropriate notes or organizing ideas, so as to give you a sense of progress and to keep focused on what is yet to be completed.

You also need around half an hour at the end of today’s writing to leave off in a proper fashion. It is important to finish in a controlled and chosen way, rather than just depleting your stock of ideas, evidence and argument to nothing and going away hoping that ‘something will turn up’ in time for your next session. Try to finish a writing session by gathering together all the materials you may need for the next day’s piece of writing, like quotations, references, data or other attention points, bits of argumentation or especially juicy or telling phrases that have occurred to you. Type sufficient notes into your PC file or a possible skeleton of the next passage of text to get you quickly restarted again whenever your next session is scheduled. Some people find it helpful to print out and pin up these elements on a big noticeboard next to their writing desk, where they can be seen as a whole, and also physically moved around and reorganized if need be. The longer the gaps between writing sessions the more care you will need to take over this prefiguring exercise. It is also very helpful to sustain your sense of making progress by printing today’s new pages and putting them in a file or pinning them on the noticeboard for editing outside the writing session itself, in some smaller or less useful slice of time.

For the main body of each writing session you need enough time (perhaps two or three hours) to rack up several hundred words at least, such that you will see a distinct accretion of new text by the end of the session. Once you get stuck in to writing it is a good idea to keep plugging away at it for as long as possible, resisting the seductive idea of having a break and a cup of coffee, because you will only need to warm up all over again. But it is not a good idea to make writing sessions too long, because as with all other kinds of work there will be diminishing returns to effort after a while. You need to check how good your endurance is, and also what times of day or night are most productive for you. Keeping a log may help you to find this out more clearly.

However long your writing sessions are, it is critically important to remember to energetically flex your arms and hands
regularly when typing (at least every 15 minutes). Repetitive strain injury (RSI) is now something of an occupational disease for PhD students and academics. In very serious cases its onset can create a high level of disability, making it impossible for you to touch a keyboard, to write with a pen, to drive a car, or even to turn a key in a lock. In acute cases RSI can mean months without being able to do academic work at all. And once significant RSI symptoms have appeared they never completely go away. It is therefore incredibly foolish for any would-be academic or researcher to run risks like typing for hours on end uninterruptedly, especially when working close to fixed deadlines. As well as flexing regularly, you can also help ward off RSI by always using an ‘ergonomic’ keyboard plugged into your computer. This step should be mandatory if you are using a notebook or portable PC, all of which have very cramped keyboards which are particularly prone to triggering RSI symptoms. More generally, make sure that you get up and walk around every half hour of your writing session, perhaps doing a few stretches. Again, using a noticeboard to organize elements for your text, or using an impromptu standing-up desk (like the top of a four-drawer filing cabinet) to do drafting, may help keep you more mobile.

My foot is a writer too.

Friedrich Nietzsche

How many writing sessions do you need to accomplish the physical task of banging out 80,000 words in a coherent whole? Different perspectives suggest very diverse answers. An encouraging way of looking at things sees a thesis as ‘a mountain with steps’, capable of being surmounted a bit at a time. Zerubavel points out that if you can write even 500 words in each writing session, you will need only 160 sessions to complete 80,000 words. Even if every word has to be redrafted twice from scratch, you will still only require 320 sessions. Seen in this salami-slicing light the wonder is that it commonly takes three or four years of full-time work to find the space for these few hundred necessary writing sessions, when there are 200 working days per year. If you can manage 1000 words per day, which is perfectly feasible for all but the most painstaking or complex
bits of text, then writing the whole thesis twice over should only take 160 days. And at 2000 words a day the time involved shrinks to just 80 days.

But look at how much time you have in a day and the perspective is not so benign. Allow 7.5 hours for sleep every night, the current average for people in the USA, about an hour short of what is medically best for us. That leaves a total of 1440 waking minutes per day, according to James Gleick.\(^\text{19}\) Say we take as a rule of thumb the idea that even the simplest of daily tasks takes somewhat under five minutes (having a shower, brushing your teeth, making a cup of coffee). Then in a normal day we can each of us only do 300 things, across every life activity we have. In a four-hour writing session you can do maybe 50 things – like switching on your PC and waiting for it to lumber into life, checking a reference, writing a couple of sentences, editing a paragraph, making a note or two (that is 10 per cent of your time gone already). Yet it is by combining a myriad such protean activities that an integrated professional text has to be constructed.

How much you manage to do in any writing session will be shaped by many different influences. The traditional mind/body way of looking at scholarly pursuits pictures a struggle between your intellectual push to complete authoring tasks and the physical artificiality of spending long hours in front of a PC or sitting writing at a desk (see the quote from Aquinas below). There is something in this perspective, since writing on your own is normally a more sedentary activity than (say) working in an office, especially if family distractions pen you up in your study in order to get any writing done at all. You can counteract these tendencies, however, by ensuring that even on heavy writing days you insert time outside your writing sessions for walks, fresh air, getting out and about, going to the gym or the swimming pool, or whatever works best in helping you focus. It is important to remember that authoring is not a leisure activity, but work. You need to be fit and well to do authoring properly, just as much as for more physically demanding jobs.

The soul has an urge to know, and the body an inclination to shirk the effort involved.

*St Thomas Aquinas* \(^\text{20}\)
The whole calamity of man comes from one single thing, that he [or she] cannot keep quiet in a room.

*Blaise Pascal* 21

Our thinking subject is not corporeal.

*Immanuel Kant* 22

The mind/body way of picturing difficulties in writing is far too crude, though. Normally problems in concentrating and focusing, getting up steam and then keeping going, are the results not of physical resistances to being chained to the keyboard or the desk but of mental cross-pressures. Your progress will depend most upon your intellectual morale (itself closely reflecting how the work is going) and the level to which other worries and business impede upon you. These are the influences which tend to generate displacement behaviour instead of writing (such as overperfecting earlier bits of text, refiling your notes and papers, or breaking off for a cup of coffee and some light-relief daytime TV). Making an effort to persist with writing for your full session length is usually a worthwhile response to such pressures. Taking some small steps can also strengthen your morale by giving you more perceptible indicators of progress and better incentives to continue. For instance, find the starting number of words in your chapter (using the ‘Tools/Word Count’ buttons in Word or the ‘document information’ button in Wordperfect), and then type it into the beginning or end of your document file. Then update the word count at the end of each session, and perhaps keep a record of the words racked up. Comparing these figures with your target level also guards against overwriting, otherwise an important source of potential extra delay for hard-working people.

Keeping up your intellectual morale can be very difficult while working up a chapter on your own. Planning the structure of a new piece of text tends to be an optimistic stage, because you are still shielded from difficulties of implementation. But writing up raw text for the first time tends to be inherently dispiriting, especially if you subscribe to the ‘writing equals one-off creation’ myth and hence do not take account of the multi-stage nature of the authoring process. In looking at
last session’s raw text try to bear in mind the extent to which you will normally be able to edit, revise, upgrade and remodel your work. You can always make big changes by taking out infelicities, adding in strengthening evidence, developing and extending arguments, formalizing or systematizing frameworks for analysis, uncovering new relationships in your data, boosting scholarly referencing, and so on.

Work makes the companion.

Johanne Wolfgang von Goethe

In order that people may be happy in their work, these three things are needed:

they must be fit for it;
they must not do too much of it; and
they must have a sense of success in it
– not a doubtful sense, such as needs some testimony of others for its confirmation, but a sure sense, or rather knowledge, that so much work has been done well, and fruitfully done, whatever the world may say or think about it.

W. H. Auden

As you are writing up new text you are likely to be strongly influenced, consciously or subconsciously, by ideas about how your readership or audience might respond to what you are saying. Normally these are constructive influences, for instance, if you think seriously about how to represent ideas to readers, or use the ‘need to know’ criterion to set an appropriate level of detail for your argument. Anticipating how professional readers will interpret your text is also a vital element in composing raw prose and then editing it into a more acceptable form. But it is also possible for this thinking ahead to become overdone and disabling, creating a ‘writer’s block’ syndrome where authors are so constrained by their readership’s anticipated reactions that they have difficulty getting any text up on screen at all, or showing what text they have got to other people. The good news is that this problem is strongly linked to previous success or anxiety about your reputation. So perhaps it more commonly afflicts established authors in middle age trying to repeat earlier successes than it does young people just starting out.
But the off-putting and obsessional character of the doctorate in general, especially when a ‘big book’ thesis is involved, probably more than makes up for this age-protection effect.

Trouble has no necessary connection with discouragement – discouragement has a germ of its own, as different from trouble as arthritis is from a stiff joint.

_F. Scott Fitzgerald_ 25

Some people misinterpret what writer’s block is. They assume you can’t think of a single thing. Not true. You can think of hundreds of things. You just don’t like any of them.

_Neil Simon_ 26

Part of the positive help that comes from exposing your text to a fairly wide range of commentators, from family or partners to supervisors, fellow students and wider seminar audiences, is that it can help counteract the development of disabling private standards of criticism. Going out into the professional world at conferences is also generally encouraging for PhD students, since it tends to show you that standards there cover quite a broad range. Doctoral researchers normally cannot match the sweep of large-scale confirmatory research projects or the thematic ambition of major authors. But in terms of doing well-based and consistently-pursued research many PhD students can match or outclass most academics doing conference papers. The important thing is to have a realistic image of your likely professional audience, one that encourages you to ‘see what may be thought against your thought’ in Nietzsche’s terms (from the epigraph to this chapter) without paralysing you from composing, developing and upgrading your text.

**Conclusions**

To learn from experience is to make backward and forward connections between what we do to things and what we enjoy or suffer from things in
consequence. Under such conditions, doing becomes a trying, an experiment with the world to find out what it is like; the undergoing becomes instructions – discovery of the connections of things.

*John Dewey*  

At whatever level you choose to look, producing effective text is a very iterative experience. Once you formulate an overall architecture for the thesis, it is important to keep it updated as your planned research activities work out in practice. At the micro-level you need to consider alternative ways of structuring or sequencing materials, comparing your status quo arrangement with a viable and well-specified alternative. At the detailed sentence level, you need space and distance in order to be able to spot what can be improved in your writing. Running through all these aspects is the common thread of considering how your text will be read. How will it be deconstructed? What intended or inadvertent messages will you communicate? In its current form does this sentence/this paragraph/this chapter positively build the thesis? It can help your confidence to keep in mind that producing an integrated professional text is a multi-stage process, and that a lot will change as you progress raw text towards an effective finished form. And remember too that completing the thesis as a whole is a further key stage for making improvements in your final text, a phase which I discuss in detail in Chapter 8. Before then, however, I focus in the next chapter on some important non-text elements of many theses – charts, tables and diagrams.