



## How I Write by Réal

### Structure Around Bullets

I recently read an article how "bullet-ization" of information is killing critical thought. I could not disagree more. I think all arguments start as bullets. Maybe bullets are sometimes shorter than a sentence, but I like that they are a quick way to get your ideas down on paper. For example, say I was writing an essay on which animals make the best pets. My thesis for this essay would be, "In this paper I will argue that dogs make the best pets." After I find my thesis I start to jot down my ideas. I may not even have done the research but I put whatever ideas come into my head down on paper. These ideas are usually just bullets:

- dogs are loyal
- dogs are easy to train
- and so on

In my mind, my essay is starting to take shape. I use these bullets to structure my essay. These bullets will eventually become paragraphs, but the bulleting helps me organize my ideas.

### Digital

I resisted technology for ages. Then one day I got a cell phone and that was the beginning of the end. I started to do everything digitally. I made phone calls, played games, wrote my essays, read books, and did research digitally. I still love a good board game, but going digital significantly reduced the time it took me to write my essays and it is getting easier all the time. For example, this past weekend I was working on my dissertation and I had my computer open to split screen mode while doing some research. While I was reading the journal, my second screen is open to my note document. When I find something I like, I can quickly copy and paste into my notes. Of course I make note of the page for future reference. Essentially I am making a digital annotated bibliography. Technology has made it so much easier to construct my essays and keep track of my citations. Before this system, I would constantly lose track of my points and have to redo the research.

I have also really learned to love e-books the past few years. You can carry thousands of books on a Kindle or Kobo. The Kindle makes it really easy to take notes in a book and access those notes for incorporation into your essay just like my annotated method above.

## KISS

As a homeschooled student, my mother was my teacher. Since I am a wee bit strong willed, or so I have been told, I was in constant conflict with my mother. I hated English. So you can imagine that we had some fun times in English class. One day we were working on an essay we made a breakthrough. She didn't like what I had written, saying it was confusing. She told me to "keep it simple, stupid. K.I.S.S." My writing was overly complex. From that point on when we would revise my essays, she would stop and ask at each sentence what do you mean? Often what I had written was complex and didn't really say what I wanted to say. I realize that if I did keep it simple, my writing became clearer and easier to read.

K.I.S.S. is vital to academic writing. Even if you are writing about complex ideas, you must find a way to explain them clearly and concisely, with as much precision and simplicity as possible. Your arguments need to flow from sentence to sentence and paragraph to paragraph. I think there is the perception out there that academic writing has to be complex. I disagree. The best articles that I read are straightforward. Good writing must be simple and intriguing. I am still asking myself the same question that my mother posed to me so many years ago, what do I want to say?

## Schedule

I am stealing something Natalya said in a session: "Two hours or two pages a day." It is the perfect way I would describe my philosophy. Working at the writing centre has helped me put terms to my own writing practice. To me "two hours or two pages" represents a commitment to scheduling. I have learned to schedule my days hour by hour. I do not get stressed or worried if I am not writing 8 hours a day. I don't think that is possible, but I do make the time to write. Actually I think this philosophy can apply to more than writing. If you want to get better at guitar or sports or anything "two hours or two pages a day" applies.

## Rest

You probably think I am a very structural and rigid person. I stressed the importance of bullets, efficiency, and rigorous scheduling. I am not that kind of person. I do like to have fun. I think having fun is very important to maintaining positive mental health. Positive mental health is critical as you progress further into your academic career. I find I have become more productive when I do make time for rest. In sports, you cannot keep training. Overtraining leads to injury. I think the same thing applies to writing. Overwriting leads to bad writing. So treat yourself to a coffee on me.