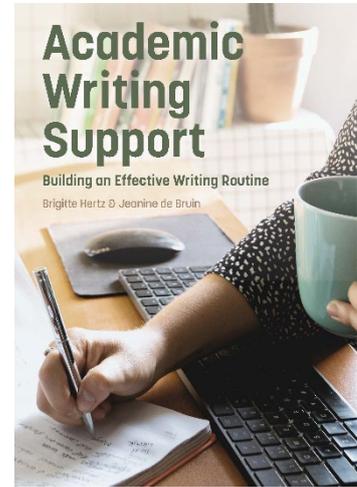


Academic Writing Support for PhDs

Little experience in academic writing

It is often insufficiently clear to PhD students what is expected of them when they need to start writing their first paper, even though they might have written a good master thesis. As a supervisor you attach great value to PhD students' own initiative and want to give them as much space as possible. At the start of their process, they need more guidance though. This discrepancy might only become apparent after a long and frustrating process for both parties. According to the Hersey-Blanchard model of Situational Leadership, it is important to provide instruction when PhD students have little experience and knowledge and, moreover, they do not know where to start.

PhD students generally also have little self-confidence when they write a scientific paper for the first time. This is also because writing is a complex task. A clear step-by-step instruction helps them overcome the first bumps and ensures that they (dare to) make a start. This way, they gradually develop more self-confidence, and you can loosen the reins a bit more.



Give clear instructions to help them get started. Use pages 90 - 95.

Procrastination in the beginning

Lots of academic researchers find it hard to focus on the work that is important but not urgent like writing; they postpone it. The reasons for this vary for each person, but we see some common denominators.

- Not knowing where to start
- Planning fallacy
- Insecurity

To tackle your PhD student's procrastination you first need to find the reason behind it. So ask them: Why do you procrastinate? What is bothering you? What do find difficult? Try to delve deeper than the obvious 'I have been busy with.....organising/teaching/data collection.'

Use pages 48 and 49.

Procrastination later in the process

A good example here might be procrastinating the dissertation's discussion or the introduction. In this case your PhD student is an experienced writer, but maybe it's the novelty of the specific part of the book. Anyhow, you will have to try to find out the reasons why, even though the PhD student herself might not know this.

A practical solution like brainstorming or the WIAMI technique might also be helpful.

Use pages 32 - 36.

Stress and insecurity

Sometimes precisely good performing PhD students seem to get blocked in the writing process. They might suffer from imposter phenomenon. They fear they didn't deserve their position, are not good writers and soon will be found out.

It may help them to realise that absolutely everyone, maybe including you, occasionally encounters those paralysing thoughts when writing. Scientific work is characterised by having to deal with failures.

Make sure that in your research group you not only share successes, but also failures. Tell them about your own.

Use pages 72 - 75.