Thesis Writing Workshop

1. Approach to writing relatively short documents such as thesis proposals:
   a. Make an outline (as shown above). In each category, list the items that will be included.
   b. Complete first draft of all figures.
   c. Rough draft. Do not worry about grammar, flow, etc. Just get all of your ideas down on paper (in computer). Do not worry about organization either. This is really a brainstorm of what should be included. Some can do this in the outline stage. If you have difficulty beginning with the introduction, start with something more straightforward, like the methods.
   d. Rewrite. This time, worry about BOTH form and content. Streamline the document so that one idea flows to the next. Spell and grammar check.
   e. Rewrite again, after the document has aged for a few days/weeks, depending on your schedule. Finalize figures.
   f. Get critiques
   g. Evaluate criticisms and rewrite accordingly
   h. Let rest and rewrite again, putting on final touches. Make sure the details, such as matching figure numbers in the document and on the figures, have been carefully reviewed.

2. Approach to writing your thesis
   a. Prepare figures and preliminary figure captions.
   b. Prepare all tables with ALL data. Do table captions if they are necessary.
   c. Make an outline. In each category, list the items that will be included, using figures and tables as the guide to what needs to be discussed in the paper. (CHECK with your ADVISOR)
   d. Begin writing. Do this in small blocks. Try to write some everyday, but do not plan on writing for 8 hours/day. CHECK SCIENTIFIC ACCURACY AT ALL POINTS.
   e. When you get exhausted, do other tasks like working on references, etc.
   f. Once a major section is done, go back and rewrite it. This will help smooth the text. DO NOT become too fanatical about the flow, etc. Even if you have all of the data, as you progress, some of your ideas will change.
   g. Once major sections have been revised, print out hard copy. You may or may not find this helps you.
   h. REPEAT until the document is completely written.
   i. When you have a complete draft, so a top to bottom overhaul. At this point, recheck you numbers, models, uncertainties, etc. You may need to reorganize. For every section and sentence, ask your self what you think the audience must know. Eliminate anything else form the draft.
   j. Print out a hard copy and reread and edit.
   k. Make corrections and then print out again, checking for consistency with figures, table, etc.
   l. Give rough draft to student colleagues (maybe) and advisor. You may want to give it to your advisor in parts. (depends on how your advisor wants to do it. ASK!!)
m. As you advisor goes over it, let it rest. Do something else, like read other journal articles.

n. Revise according to the comments you receive.

o. SPELL and GRAMMAR check many times.

3. Other recommendations
   a. See #15, page 34 of Irvine and Rumble. This is absolutely true. Even if the reviewer’s interpretation is wrong (that is, they misunderstood what you are saying), you should revise HOW you are saying it. If you get 3 reviews, and 1 reviewer does not understand, then ~33% of your audience will have the same reaction.
   b. For long documents, it is commonly very difficult to begin with the abstract and introduction. Often, the easiest place to start is with the methods section.
   c. If possible, write the methods sections as you go. Then, the thesis writing will not be so daunting.
   d. Expect the writing process to take 2-3x longer than you plan.
   e. Expect 2-3 iterations of revisions, and more if you plan to submit to a journal.
   f. Anticipate that you will change your perspective on your data/interpretations AS YOU WRITE. Often, the first time everything is put together is when you write. This means you will catch inconsistencies, etc. This is often why the writing process takes so long!
   g. READ MANY, MANY journal articles. Flag the ones that you think are particularly well written so you can mimic some of its good qualities.
   h. As you revise, think of ways that you can simplify your writing. One measure of a person’s writing is certainly his/her vocabulary and the ability to construct complex sentences, but clarity and ease of reading are also important.
   i. KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE. You should write differently for 145 students than you would for a journal audience.