

Writing during your PhD: Theory and practice

Course requirements: For the theoretical part, the content is adapted to students enrolled in a PhD programme looking for tips and tricks to make writing easier. For the practical part (retreat), the only requirement is to have something to write – a CSI report, a PhD chapter, a project proposal, an article, etc.

Duration: One day of theoretical training on-campus in Grenoble, followed by a two-and-a-half-day “writing retreat” off-site to put the theory into practice.

Skills addressed during the workshop

Communication approaches in the context of writing the comité de suivi individual (CSI) report. Identification of the scientific niche, setting the context, effective writing styles. More extensive work on a pre-writing summary to clearly identify the themes to be addressed.

Objectives

Any scientific writing is primarily an exercise in communication – with peers or examiners. ***During the theoretical training***, after an introduction to communication in general, by deconstruction we will identify the different sections to be included in “typical” documents, starting with a research article. We will then look at how this common structure can help to draft this type of text, while also giving the underlying message a greater impact.

Through practical exercises, we will deal with a demanding writing exercise – in terms of style and length – by producing a pre-writing summary to encapsulate the final document. From this exercise, we will draw parallels to help with writing longer texts through the placement of information at strategic points.

The aim of this day is to “demystify” writing by starting from the point of view of the reader, and establishing a framework for the final document.

During the writing retreat, the theory will be put into practice. The aim of these two and a half days is to come together with others sharing the same objective: to produce a written text. By making writing a group activity, concentration and perseverance are improved, and it becomes possible to fully focus on the task. The writing/break periods are structured to further help eliminate mental load.

At the start of each period of writing, participants set themselves precise objectives. These objectives are reviewed at the end of the period in order to adapt the objective for the following period. The objectives are not shared or judged, they serve solely to get a better idea of what it is possible to do in the given time.

Audience

Any PhD student who needs to write. The examples used will voluntarily be selected from a range of fields. By avoiding overly close focus on the details of a specific field, these articles will help us to identify common, or even universal, points of effective scientific writing.

Programme

- an introduction to audience-focused communication
- inverted learning: working on a collection of scientific or non-scientific documents to identify the structure/genre
- identification of the niche for students' own work
- drafting of a pre-writing summary to frame the outline of the full document to be written
- suggestions of ways to make writing more fluid with a greater impact (phrase length, placing information within the sentence, passive/active voice, placing citations)
- examples of how to present results
- links between figures and text

Active student participation will be strongly encouraged during the theoretical training, in particular students will be asked to write a summary of their own work, which will then be analysed during pair-work.

The time between the theoretical training and its implementation allows students to appropriate the information and prepare for the task of writing during the retreat. Preparatory exercises, in the form of "free" (personal) writing will be proposed.

About the trainers

Aleksandra Bogdanovic-Guillon created her own Scientific communication agency in 2009

Engaged in a career in scientific communication since 2003, Aleksandra Bogdanovic-Guillon started out in science (PhD in Molecular and Cellular Biology, obtained at UJF – now UGA). She is therefore familiar with the world of research, and in particular the challenges faced by PhD students in relation to communication. She specialises in scientific communication, assisting academic partners and start-ups with their communication strategy and content-creation, in writing, graphical, digital and other formats. She also provides training on communication.

Maighread Gallagher-Gambarelli runs a scientific editing and translation business.

Maighread Gallagher-Gambarelli is a native English speaker with a PhD in biology. Since 2009, through her company Translate Write Science, she provides language services to the broad scientific community. In particular, she edits and/or translates scientific articles, technical manuals, contributes to the development of websites, and organises training for academic and private institutions.

Aleksandra Bogdanovic-Guillon and Maighread Gallagher-Gambarelli will provide the theoretical training together; Maighread Gallagher-Gambarelli will facilitate the writing retreat.