

Forms of Writing

Artistic doctorates have pioneered new ways of writing, of subjective first-person voices, auto-ethnographic voices, narrative voices. I think there are still hidden hierarchies in terms of modes of writing. New ways of writing still struggle with more traditional forms of academic writing. (Helen Phelan, Artistic Research Doctorate Examination, Visioning the Future Seminar, 2020)

As a research process that often develops through sensorial means and embodied practices – sound, visual, experiential, haptic – Artistic Research has a different kind of relationship with writing than more conventional research processes. Whilst in scientific fields *writing* and *writing up* take place as means of analysing, making sense, and communicating phenomena which can be easily expressed in words, in Artistic Research, we sometimes write about processes and events which have very deep experiential knowledges associated. This raises the challenge of finding the vocabulary and the tools to express an experiential process in words.

I think the writing helps me to delve into the practice. If I was just practicing getting ready for performance but didn't do the theoretical side, there are things I would not discover. (...) there is a lot of things about my practice that are very much to do with the body and movement, those things, embodiment and all of that stuff. It's really hard to put that into words sometimes. (...) You can have a feeling and it can be really important but how do you describe that in actual words? Or like events to do with sounds. If you're developing a sound and you want to talk about a sound, how do you describe that sound or that piece of music. How do you actually put that into words? (PhD student, 2020)

The counterpoint between creative making processes and critical writing can sometimes feel jarring. With the support of your supervisory team, you can find writerly strategies that can both acknowledge this difference and also resist it in playful and critical / theoretical ways. Writing is helpful in diving deep into the practice, in unpacking its layers, and in reflecting and articulating its value. The process of writing enables you to articulate the knowledge emerging in your

research: to explore the limits of what words allow you to do brings criticality into the work (de Assis, 2020). In the following video excerpt, Paulo de Assis speaks about how we need to go as far as possible in language to express an argument:

[Paulo de Assis, reflections on words and writing](#)

Writing is a form of dialogue with the practice to bring forth your original contribution to the field. It can be *about* the practice, *describe* the practice, *unpack* emerging issues in the practice, *relate* the practice to other practitioners, theorists, philosophers... it can be writing *with* the practice, *through* the practice, *next to* and/or *in parallel with* the practice, and in any possible articulation. Writing can *be* the practice too, and alternative writing styles can be appropriate for your research project. As there are many directions open in the research, what you write *about* can be a challenge: will you examine the failures and articulate your learnings? How much space will you devote to describe the processes, examine the findings, explain your methods, locate your work in the field? What is the appropriate balance between philosophical and/or theoretical sources and contemporary/historical artistic contextual practices? The answers to these questions depend on the specificities of your project. As you write it will become clearer what you need to focus on.

Annette Arlander speaks about the role of writing and how it relates to the practice (2020):

[Annette Arlander, reflections on the role of writing](#)

Finding your writing voice is also challenging. Writing in Artistic Research often involves the use of different registers to talk about practice and the research:

I also get very excited about potential within writing practice. And the potential fluidity there – how you find a voice that can have many layers to it and registers integrated into that. For me, as an academic, when I started out as a dancer... I felt very intimidated by those structures that I was encountering – that I had to sound a particular way to be able to write about anything in that field. And then over time I've gained more confidence in different kinds of voices within my writing. It's like I'm returning to more of a creative process (...). When I'm working with people coming into that I hope that I make that more accessible (...) so they can find their voice within that space. (staff member, 2020)

Your writing evolves as you edit the text and refine your thinking. Similarly to the artistic process, where you constantly edit and refine your work, a large part of written materials will not make it to your final submission. In editing and revising you are making room for new ideas and highlighting the most relevant ones, as well as making new connections.

Artistic doctorates have a rich potential to explore distinct kinds of writing, of articulation between knowing and doing, of thinking and making, and of creation and analysis. Allow your own process to expand the realms of where your research might take you, both in writing and creative practice, taking you towards unknown territories.

Proposals for Action: Expanding your Writing

These two strategies can be helpful to support your writing. For more strategies and exercises, consult the resources below.

- **Record Yourself Speaking**

Write yourself a question, a prompt, or a set of questions that you are facing at the moment. Using a camera or a sound recorder, press play, ask the question/prompt out loud, and begin responding freely. If you stop, try to grasp the train of thought you were in, and continue a bit longer to let the ideas emerge and associations to happen.

I had a few questions, interview questions. I just turned on the camera and tried to answer them. You have to talk. Sometimes with writing on paper it can be too slow for your thought process. If you're talking to a camera you can talk much faster sometimes than you can write. You don't have to edit what you're saying. That was something I tried a while ago and it helped get some ideas flowing. (PhD student, 2020)

- **Thinking Walk**

Research shows that walking helps you think creatively about problems, and that creativity is boosted while walking and after (Oppezzo and Schwartz, 2014). If you are stuck, stop staring at the screen and go for a walk. Write down the issue you are thinking about in your notebook, grab a pen and go. Think about the matter you are struggling with while you walk. Talk to

yourself about it. Record yourself even as you walk. If an idea emerges, take notes before resuming your walk.

Resources on Writing

The following generic resources contain helpful writing strategies and prompts which you can use to get writing going:

Murray, R. (2017) *How to write a thesis*. 4th ed., London: Open University Press, McGraw-Hill Education.

Murray, R. (2013) *Writing for academic journals*. 3rd ed., Maidenhead, Berkshire: Open University Press.

Dunleavy, P. (2003) *Authoring a PhD: how to plan, draft, write and finish a doctoral thesis or dissertation*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Phillips, E., and Derek S. P. (2008) *How to Get a PhD: a Handbook for Students and Their Supervisors*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.