

## Writing Tips for Success

These Writing Tips come from Richard Swartz, who holds a Ph.D. in Statistics from Rice University. Dr. Swartz is now doing statistical analysis for M.D. Anderson Hospital in Houston. He does a lot of writing, including protocols and papers.

- 1) Whenever possible for proof reading, put the document down for at least a day. Whenever I do this I still see the paper differently than if I proof read after working on it. If you can't put it down for a day, then at least take a couple of hours break from working before going back to it. Also proof read at least once when you are fresh. Proof reading can be as challenging as proving a math theorem (especially in the early stages of the draft) so I try to give it the same courtesy.
- 2) I find that consciously looking for topic sentences and keeping topic sentences in mind, both for the paper and for the individual paragraphs helps me keep my document focused at the document level and the paragraph level. Keeping the document topic in mind with every paragraph helps the transitions and enables me to more succinctly make the point of the overall document. Looking for topic sentences in the paragraphs helps me not only keep the paragraphs tight on their point, but also makes it easier to identify paragraphs that should be split or combined. Also it helps me identify concepts I need to think more about – if I don't have a strong topic sentence or tight paragraph, it usually indicates an unrefined concept.

I will at least keep this in mind during the whole writing process. I usually give it less focus when I am drafting the document for the first time, because sometimes I need to just get the ideas on paper. Then I give it more focus once I have my ideas written into a draft to help refine my arguments. It's a simple point, but I have found it most helpful.
- 3) Whenever possible get someone else to read it, especially if you are “stuck.” Fresh eyes mean fresh opinions and insight. No matter how well written I think the paper is, someone always finds something I missed.
- 4) Co-writing sessions are very helpful. (This may not be applicable or possible to do when writing a thesis, but it's definitely helpful in writing a paper.) After creating a completed draft, if I can sit with one other person to work on the “sticky” parts – the ones that are the most difficult to word – I find it very helpful and informative. I learn something about writing every time I do it. Also, the person I'm working with has a different understanding of the topic and I'll usually gain a different perspective on the topic as well. Furthermore it is usually faster than giving the paper to someone for comments, then deciphering their comments and incorporating them into the paper.