

A black and white line drawing of a graduation cap (mortarboard). The top surface of the cap is filled with numerous small, hand-drawn icons representing various fields of study and general education. These icons include: a lightbulb, a leaf, a book with horizontal lines, a flower, a pencil, an apple, a globe, a calculator, a clock, a pencil sharpener, a magnifying glass, a book with the letter 'A' on it, a triangle ruler, a globe with latitude/longitude lines, a musical note, a brain, a beaker, a lightbulb with a number '4' inside, a number '5', a number '6', a number '7', a number '8', a number '9', a number '10', a number '11', a number '12', a number '13', a number '14', a number '15', a number '16', a number '17', a number '18', a number '19', a number '20', a number '21', a number '22', a number '23', a number '24', a number '25', a number '26', a number '27', a number '28', a number '29', a number '30', a number '31', a number '32', a number '33', a number '34', a number '35', a number '36', a number '37', a number '38', a number '39', a number '40', a number '41', a number '42', a number '43', a number '44', a number '45', a number '46', a number '47', a number '48', a number '49', a number '50', a number '51', a number '52', a number '53', a number '54', a number '55', a number '56', a number '57', a number '58', a number '59', a number '60', a number '61', a number '62', a number '63', a number '64', a number '65', a number '66', a number '67', a number '68', a number '69', a number '70', a number '71', a number '72', a number '73', a number '74', a number '75', a number '76', a number '77', a number '78', a number '79', a number '80', a number '81', a number '82', a number '83', a number '84', a number '85', a number '86', a number '87', a number '88', a number '89', a number '90', a number '91', a number '92', a number '93', a number '94', a number '95', a number '96', a number '97', a number '98', a number '99', a number '100'. The cap has a tassel hanging from the right side.

A close-up photograph of a hand in a white dress shirt cuff, holding a small black graduation cap (mortarboard) between the thumb and index finger. The background is a plain, light gray.

**FINISHING YOUR PhD
FULLY, ON-TIME
WITHOUT OVERWHELM**

BY ARJENNE LOUTER

Is your thesis keeping you up at night?

Have you ever wondered if there were a proven strategy you could use to make *sure* you finish your thesis successfully and on time so that you can take that next step in your career and move on with life?

The PhD journey can be an enjoyable, fulfilling time in your life if, that is, you know how to navigate it without ending up burned out and overwhelmed.

The statistics don't lie: recent research from the VSNU shows that in the Netherlands only 11% of the PhD students finish their thesis within the required 4 years. That number increases after 5 years to 45%, but after 7 years or more still only 70% of the PhD students have finished their thesis. The numbers are very similar in other countries. These statistics show that the journey of getting your PhD can be highly challenging. But it doesn't have to be that way!



This book is meant to support you in finishing your thesis successfully and on time, whilst working less, and to make sure you actually enjoy and keep enjoying the PhD journey you are on!

I'm Arjenne Louter and I wrote this book because I'm tired of seeing smart, bright, and talented PhD students get overwhelmed, frustrated, struggle or fall ill because of all the requirements they need to meet. Writing articles, doing experiments, gathering data, having meetings with your supervisor, being ready for conferences, it all needs to happen. There are a lot of things to consider, and often you may not be sure if you are on the right track and still on schedule with your PhD.

Maybe you have put forth a lot of effort, and your supervisor simply says that you did it wrong and need to do it very different. Or perhaps you start to doubt whether you are in the right place and begin to suffer the imposter syndrome. What about the equipment that doesn't work, if you are a stem PhD student? Or the fact that it is often not possible to speak your mind?



There are so many things that need to be done during your research, and you will find conflicting advice on all of it! A lot of PhD students become insecure. When all of these factors start piling up, it's easy to start feeling defeated and to question if you are ever going to succeed in finishing your thesis.

Don't give up. I'm going to tell you exactly what you can do to stay confident and on track.

I have been teaching academic skills for 30 years now, and the last 15 years have been dedicated to supporting PhD students to finish their thesis and actually enjoy what they are doing. Because of the expertise I have from my background as a teacher in academic skills at a lot of different (applied) universities, a mediator specialized in work related conflicts, a trainer, a coach working with artistic applications, a researcher in academic skills, and an entrepreneur, a Qigong practitioner, I know what it takes to finish your PhD on time, and I also know that there is a vital piece missing in the support system.

I have guided thousands of PhD students and because of that, I know what it takes to become a successful academic.

There is a clear pattern in the obstacles that you are most likely to meet as a PhD student. Being an 'outsider' has made it possible for me to have a different perspective and gain an understanding of what is actually needed to conquer those obstacles and move forward easily. I have been able to come up with the ingredients that will really help you to finish your thesis successfully and on time.

What are those ingredients? Well, of course I can't cover all of them here, but I want to give you an important notion. You need to focus more on the *process*. By focussing on the process instead of the content of your PhD you will see that a lot of things will change. Even if your content is brilliant, if the process is not working, you won't finish. You need to follow a plan that keeps you on course.



Almost all supervision is aimed at the content, the subject of the research, but HOW to make that research happen is not so clear. In this book I give you 3 vital action steps to help you finish your thesis successfully and on time whilst working less and enjoying every step of your PhD journey!

The 3 Thesis Success Ingredients

1 - Make a Plan

Imagine going on a sailing trip, heading off from the shore of France to the ocean and hoping you'll miraculously reach the United States of America even though you do not have a map to chart your course.

You wouldn't dare to go on a sailing trip like that, but most people embark on their PhD journey without a plan. It's equally dangerous as the sailing trip I just mentioned. The chances of you reaching your destination without sinking, taking a detour, getting lost in a storm or getting stuck on a sand bank are much greater if you are not prepared.

Make a plan!

A lot of PhD students think it is not possible to create a plan, but actually it is. How to do it?

There are a lot of things you already know that need to happen; milestones like:

- Writing proposal
- Go/no-go decision
- Writing articles, papers, chapters
- Visiting symposia, congresses
- Concept thesis

Secrets to THESIS SUCCESS

- Sending script to reading committee
- Preparing your defence

Find out what you already know about your project.

Then think about the kind of activities that are involved in the different parts, like:

- Reading
- Case study or experiment
- Pilot study
- Writing and improving article or paper
- Courses
- Appointments with supervisors
- Vacation



Then you start the actual planning. The important bit is to use countdown planning, so to start with the end in mind:

- Plan all your milestones and activities backwards and find out when you need to stop with a certain activity to make sure the next activity can begin. For instance, at a certain point you need to stop reading to start writing, or you need to stop collecting data to start applying it.
- Plan periods of data collecting and writing.
- Plan courses and conferences.
- Plan holidays.
- Discuss with supervisor.
- Print out your plan and hang it up.
- Measure your progress after a few months to make certain that you are still on schedule and if not, adjust accordingly.

If you plan like this, you can be sure that you have a clear direction and a solid basis from which you can take decisions.

2 - Beat Procrastination

Procrastination is a bitch, and beating it can be difficult. Having a clear plan keeps you focused on your step-by-step directives. Not knowing exactly what to do is one of the biggest causes of procrastination.



There is a lot to say about procrastination, but this is one of the golden tips:

- Identify the most important thing you have to do today.
- Decide to do just the first little part of it — just the first minute, or even 30 seconds of it.
- Clear away distractions. Turn everything off. Close all programs. Sit there, and focus on getting started. Not doing the whole task, just *starting*.

Secrets to THESIS SUCCESS

- Pay attention to your mind as it starts to have urges to switch to another task. You will have urges to check email or Facebook or your favourite website. You will want to play a game or make a call or do another task. Notice these urges. But don't move.
- Urges build up in intensity, then pass, like a wave. Let each one pass. Notice also your mind trying to justify not doing the task. Let these self-rationalizing thoughts pass.
- Now just take one small action to get started. As tiny a step as possible. Get started, and the rest will flow.

Think how much more you would accomplish if you stay on task! That is time you could actually use for fun stuff and some time off.

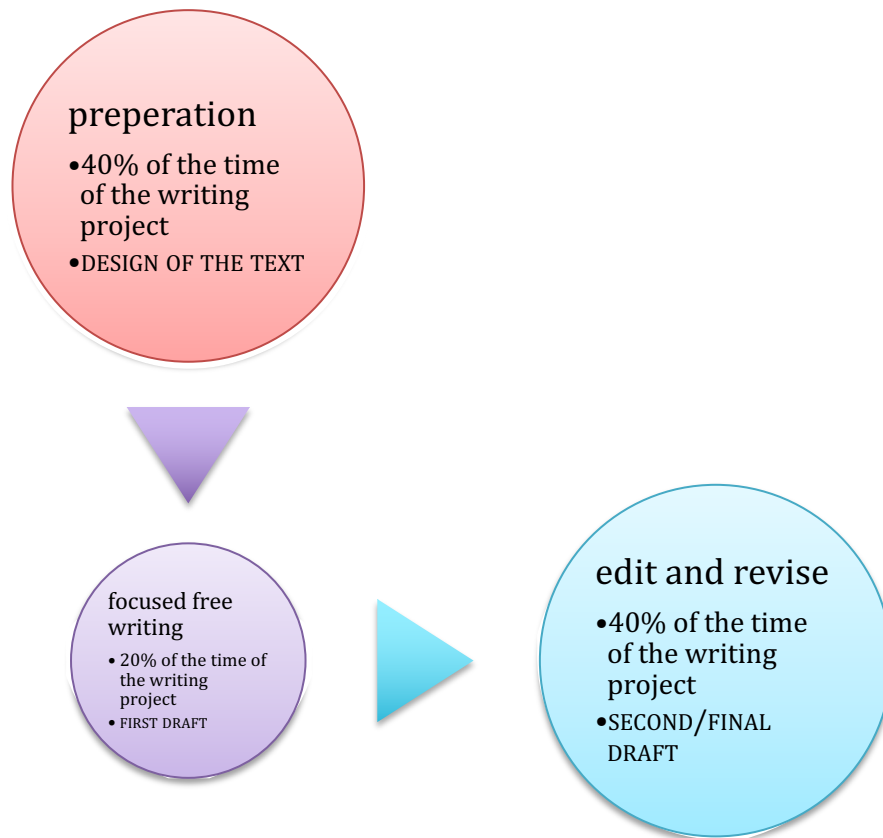
3 - Write like a pro

Writing skills are maybe the most important tool you need to master during your PhD. In writing, a lot of different things are involved: you have to know your audience, get your story clear, master grammar, spelling, argumentation, using your literature, being convincing, having a clear structure, referencing in the right way, and so on, and so on.

The biggest mistake PhD students make is that they try to work with all these different writing aspects at the same time. It is a bit like trying to juggle with 36 balls in one go. And even for very skilled jugglers, that is a bit too much.



So what do the professional writers do? They divide the writing process into different stages and focus only on the stage that they are in. There are three stages:



So when preparing, they don't revise, when revising, they don't change the whole design.

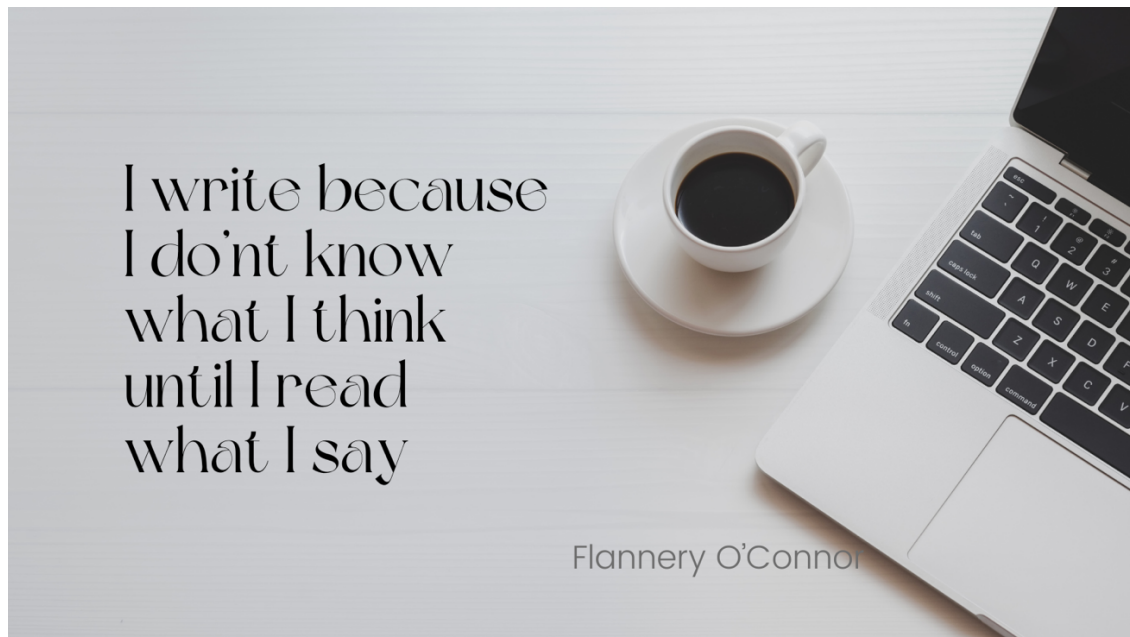
Another very important tool good writers use is called *free writing*. What is free writing? The technique is simple. You take a timer, set it for a maximum of 15 minutes, and you just start to write. By hand. You basically don't stop writing until your timer goes off. If you don't know what to write, just write 'I don't know what

to write'. If you think it is stupid, just write 'it is stupid'. It doesn't matter, just keep on writing.

By doing that, you will find out that all the 'stuff' that is in your head gets out, and it becomes clear what is working and what is not. Because of the free writing you find out what you actually think, and that makes the whole writing process a whole lot easier. Free writing is typically a tool for the first writing phase: the preparation.

What you probably recognize is that before you start to write, you think you have everything clear, because it is clear in your mind. When you actually start to write, however, it turns out to be less clear than you thought it was. Free writing is the best tool to gain clarity and to see where the gaps are.

A famous writer – Flannery O'Connor – wrote it down very nicely.



And a last piece of advice for the perfectionists amongst us:

The worksheet is titled "First Draft" in a large, bold font. To the right of the title is a field labeled "Name:" followed by a dotted line. Below the title, it says "Draw, write and edit your prompt." There is a large rectangular box for drawing or writing. Inside this box, the text "First drafts don't have to be perfect. They just have to be written." is written in a dotted font. Below the box are several horizontal lines for additional writing.

If you have a first draft, then you have something to work with and something to discuss with your supervisor. Without it, it is much more difficult to move on and take the next step.

By now, I hope you're feeling excited about focussing on the process of your PhD and making sure you finish it successfully and on time, with ease. I hope you can truly feel that there is another way to go about this journey without feeling overwhelmed or stressed. Your journey can be very enjoyable!

Do you want to be part of the 11% of PhD students who finish their thesis successfully and on time? Do you want to be more productive, more efficient and effective in the way you work? Would you like to increase your confidence, have less stress?

If you answered yes, follow the three steps outlined in this book. Then, I encourage you to take it one step further. I would like to offer you a [free catalyst session](#). In that session we will craft a tailor-made plan to make sure you meet your goals.



I have limited spaces available for free sessions so be sure to grab yours right away!

During this session I will help you break through confusion and procrastination, and map out your best plan for Thesis success!

About Arjenne



I work with PhD students who want to become more efficient and effective, who want to have less stress and want to make sure they finish their thesis successfully and on time with ease. I support you to make sure you enjoy your PhD journey.

What makes me unique is that I have a lot of inside information, but I am an objective outsider. My background as a teacher, trainer and researcher in academic skills, as a coach, as mediator, qigong practitioner and entrepreneur provides me with a unique mixture of skills which I can use to

give you just the input YOU need. There are many different ways to go about your PhD, and you need to find the way for you that helps you to have a smooth journey. [Click here for your catalyst session](#) for a tailor-made plan. No charge! Because I salute you for embarking on the PhD journey, I know it is not always easy.

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