

Writing a PhD Thesis: Practice and Pain

What has Michelangelo got to do with science?

Presentation for the oikos PhD summer academy
at the University of St. Gallen, August 5-9, 2002

Agenda

- I. Michelangelo and the Creation of the giant "David"
- II. Writing as the Final Phase (an End-of-Pipe Approach)
- III. Writing as a Continuous Process (an Integrated Approach)
- IV. The Art of Writing
- V. Questions & Discussion

I. Michelangelo and the Creation of ..

Michelangelo and his life as sculpture, painter and architect

- 1475 born in Florence/Italy
- 1488-1492 education in the art of sculpture and painting
- 1496-1501 in Rome, marble sculpture in Peter's cathedral
- 1501-1505 back in Florence, work on the giant "David"
- 1505-1516 Rome
- 1516-1534 Florence
- 1535-1541 Rome, working on the "fresco" of the "Last Judgement" in the Sistine Chapel
- 1547-1564 architect/master-builder of Peter's cathedral
- 1564 death in Rome

I. Michelangelo and the Creation of ..

Michelangelo and some of his works



I. Michelangelo and the Creation of ..

Michelangelo and the creation of the giant “David”

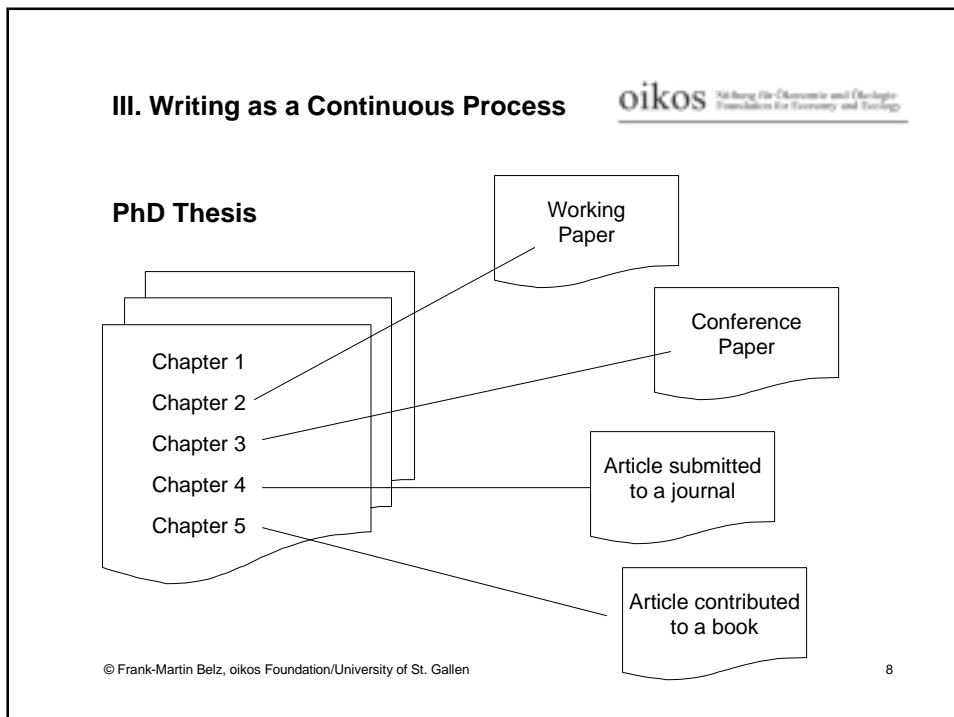
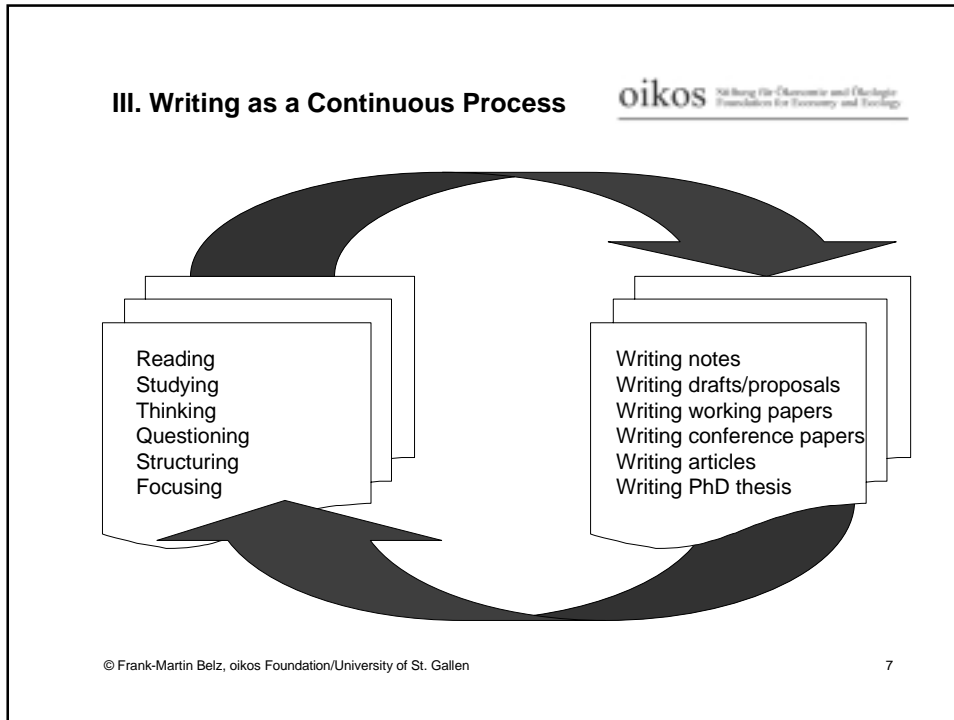
- Readings of “David & Goliath” in the bible
- Study of previous sculptures/works on “David & Goliath” by other artists
- A lot of questions and reflections
- Drawings
- Several clay figures
- Small marble sculpture (5 feet)
- Work on the final marble sculpture (17 feet)

II. Writing as the Final Phase

The Life Cycle of the PhD Thesis: Some major steps

1. Selection of general area for research
 2. Selection of several topics for evaluation
 3. Dissertation proposal
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4. Detailed chapter outlines
 5. Literature search completed
 6. Research completed
 7. Text of dissertation completed

Source: David, G.E. (1972): A Systematic Approach for Managing Doctoral Thesis, Working Paper 72-38, European Institute for Advanced Studies in Management INSEAD, Fontbleau 1972



III. Writing as a Continuous Process

Two Phases:

First phase: readings, drawings, clay figures (2-4 years)

Second phase: work on the final marble sculpture (6-12 months)

III. Writing as a Continuous Process

Change from the First Phase to the Second One: Some Personal Experiences

- A good feeling ("the time has come")
- External pressures/deadlines
- Bringing my filing system in order
(forms of filing systems: physical and electronic
criteria for filing systems: chapters and key words)
- A mid-and-short-term time table with milestones
(months, weeks, days and hours)
- disciplined, balanced life-style, daily routines

IV. The Art of Writing

Some preconditions and pieces of advice:

- Right setting (table, chair, light, office/home etc.)
- Touch type
- Getting started: Overcoming writing barriers
("the fear of the author of a blank piece of paper")
 - o find out the right time for yourself during the day
 - o see writing as a process of "continuous improvement"
 - o put things in perspective
- Style: short, simple and stimulating
- Form: consistent and clear
- Presentation: no need for a PhD thesis to be a masterpiece of desk-top publishing

V. Questions & Discussion

On the one hand writing a PhD thesis is tough work!
It is a highly unstructured project, which has to be managed properly. It is very challenging intellectually.

On the other hand writing is a privilege and a pleasure!
It is very satisfying and rewarding.

Thanks for your attention!

Good luck for your work!

