

Individual supervision – case #1: ‘I have been writing for two years’

One poignant case of individual supervision was a student we could call Jim. He wrote a mail to AWC and asked for an individual supervision session. He was going to write a paper of about 20 pages. Before the session he sent five pages that were rather difficult to read and understand. It was quite a complex text that seemed to have no beginning and no ending.

First supervision session: First of all I asked Jim to explain what his project was all about. He explained slowly and carefully what his research question was, and which hypotheses his paper would build on. It was actually rather easy to understand what Jim wanted to do, and he had studied hard to get his theoretical basis right. During his speech, Jim told me that he had tried to write this paper for three years, and that he had written about 60 pages. He also told me that he had had three academic supervisors. His last supervisor had advised him ‘to step back and have a second look at his paper’. Jim wasn’t sure what the supervisor had meant, and he said that he had a deep feeling of anxiety when he sat down to read or write in relation to his paper.

I introduced Jim to two sheets of paper:

- a) “From topic to research question”, a paper with the four boxes: 1) observation, 2) type of problem, 3) larger or general academic issue and 4) research question.
- b) “The pentagon – five key constituents of research papers”, a model consisting of the five boxes: 1) research question, 2) purpose, 3) data, 4) theories, concepts and methods and 5) course of action



Homework: 1) I suggested to Jim that he should speak about his paper and tape what he had said. During his talk he should use sheet a) as support. Subsequently he should write the introduction to his paper exactly as he had talked about it. 2) As we looked at the pentagon, we talked about the 60 pages that Jim had already written, and placed the different parts in the five boxes of the pentagon.

Second supervision session: Jim had sent me the introductory chapter of his paper, and I was happy to see that it was logical, coherent and well written. He was optimistic and was going to see his academic supervisor the following day.

From my view point as a writing consultant, it seemed as if it for Jim was mainly a matter of knowing how to sort and structure his material by taking the rather well-established format of an academic research paper as a starting point.



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