Think Write

Empowering researchers

My Thesis in 10 Steps

Scoping and strategy that helps you submit on time

ThinkWrite™ workshops

The ThinkWrite suite of workshops enables participants to communicate with greater clarity, gain confidence and make good use of time.

Clarity

A key theme in the workshops is the need to be sure about what it is that you are trying to convey. The underlying issue is 'what's your message?'. Communication fails when the message is unclear.

Confidence

To communicate well you need to know who you are (student, colleague, supervisor etc) and whom you are addressing (editor, peer, examiner). Both of these components will vary from task to task. Each time you engage in an act of communication it is important to decide on the identity and role of the players involved. Once you can do this you will feel much more confident about the task.

Good use of time

Each ThinkWrite workshop outlines a process that breaks different types of communication into multiple, carefully defined steps. This will allow you to make effective use of limited time, so you can not only deliver, but deliver to a set of deadlines.

About ThinkWrite

ThinkWrite was established by Pete Moore PhD. The workshops draw from his experience in academic writing, book authorship, science journalism, academic PR and public speaking, as well as his occasional work with radio and TV.

Since 2010, ThinkWrite has broadened its expertise by the arrival of various team members and Associate Trainers. Together the team brings direct experience of working in key UK universities in the Sciences, Social Sciences and Arts and Humanities.

We gain new contacts mainly from recommendations and word of mouth referrals and since 2010 we have worked in seven countries in northern Europe and Scandinavia, meeting over 2000 participants a year.

Why am I here?

1. When did you start your research project? ....

2. List the problems that you face when writing your thesis that you would like to start to tackle today.

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3. What do you want to have achieved by the end of today? Be as specific as possible.

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Planning and Writing Your Thesis

Session 1

Session 2

LUNCH

Session 3

Session 4

What is it all about?

Why write a thesis?   Who reads them?

What does a thesis contain?   How long is a thesis?

What are the marks of success?   How much is a thesis worth?

A thesis is…	
Novel	Communication
Structure	
You	Them

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Examine potential examiners

Potential examiner	Academic discipline	Key expertise	Pet hates	Recent publications

Note deadlines in your diary

You need to take control. So:

- When does your maximum period allowed expire?
- Are there any term dates for submission?
- How much notice do you need to give before you can submit?
- What paperwork needs to be included with the submission?
- When does your money run out?
- When does your visa expire?

- Remember: deadlines have three elements Day / Month / Year

Deadline Item	Comment	Date	Completed

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Note general requirements

A thesis needs to demonstrate:

	Have already	Need to get
that it is genuinely the work of the candidate		
Capacity to pursue original research		
Three years worth of achievement		
Candidates own account of his/her investigations		
A distinct contribution to the subject, e.g. new knowledge, connecting previously unconnected facts, new theory, revision of views…		
The exercise of critical judgement—on own work and on other's published work		
That it is an integrated whole		
A critical assessment of literature		
Satisfactory literary presentation and structure		
That it contains an element that could be published in a journal		
An ability to design and implement independent research		

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Reality check

	A possible example			
Word count	85,000			
	Summary			
	Introduction			
	Literature review			
	Methods			
	Results 1			
	Results 2			
	Results 3			
	Discussion			

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Now think about yours

- What is the most likely chapter structure for your thesis?
- Which parts of the task are already completed?

Completed				
Needed				
Content				
Introduction				

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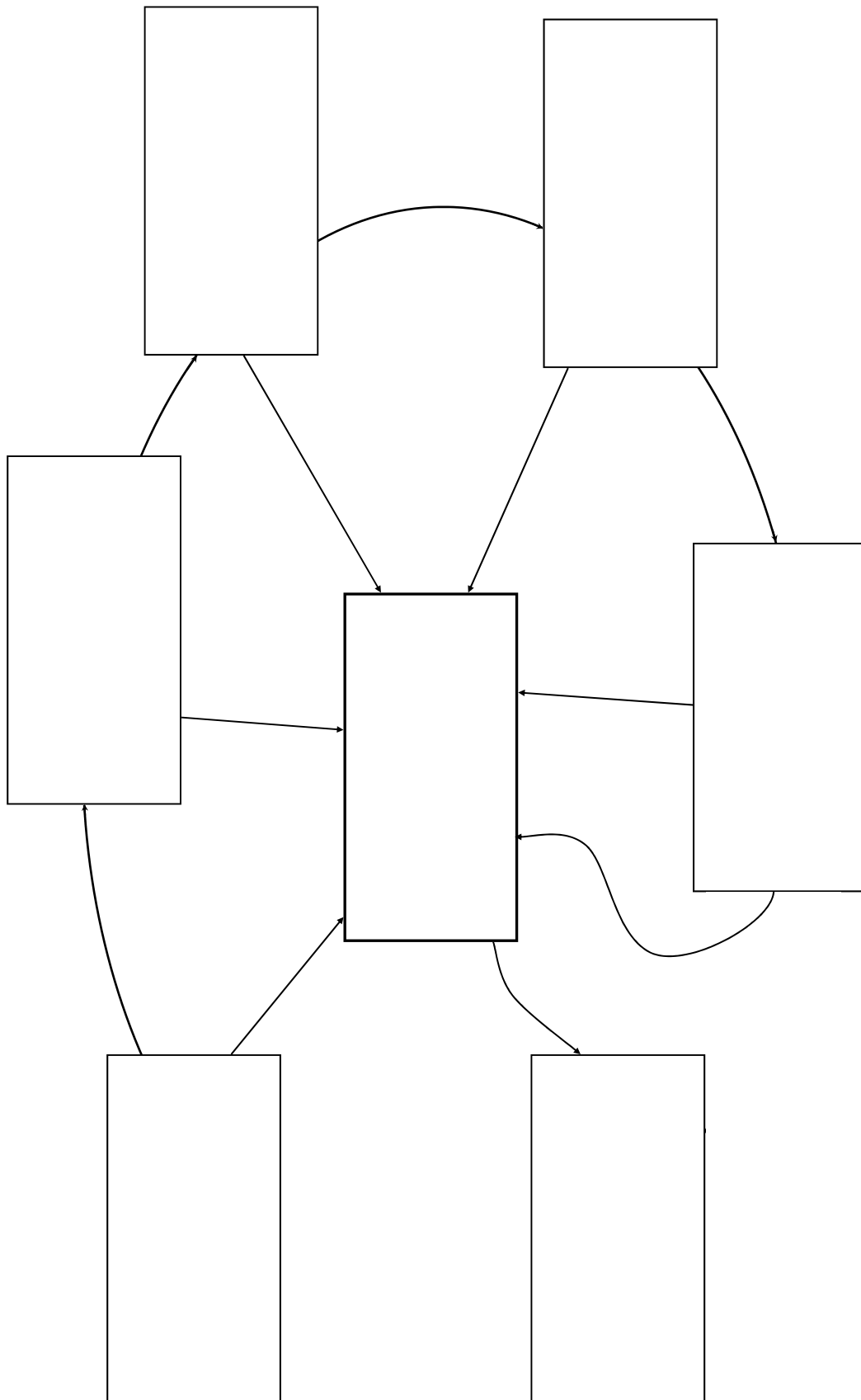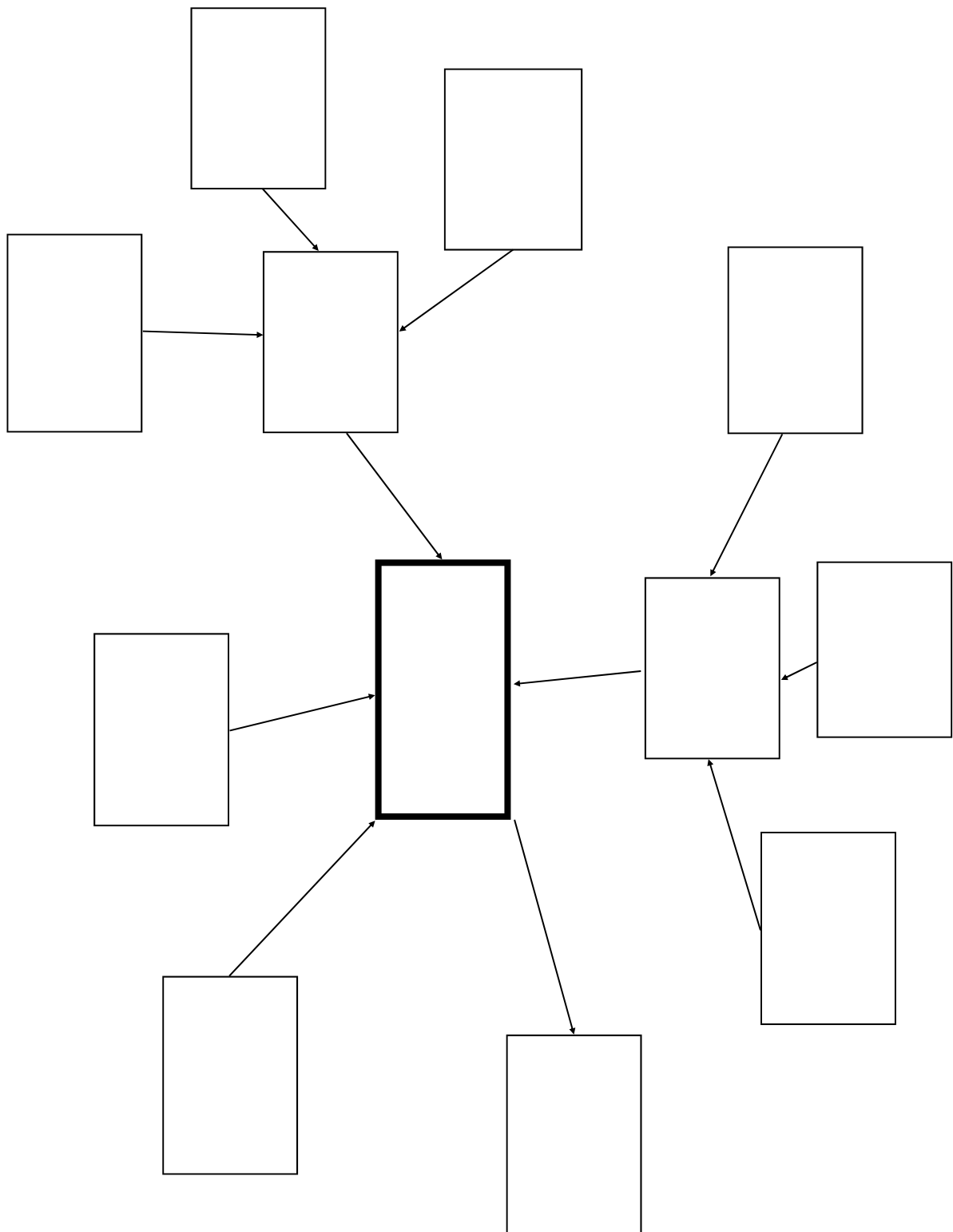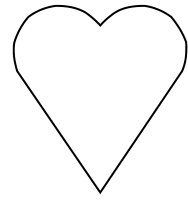
What do you want to say?

Find your message

Before you start writing, sort out a strong key message. Having this written down will help you collect your thoughts, and select the appropriate data/evidence. It's best if you can sum up this key message in a single short sentence.

    Three guidelines:

        1) 12-16 words

        2) 1 verb (claim)

        3) not a question

It is not the title

Note that titles seldom have verbs. They define areas, but seldom make claims. A message is different—it makes a claim.

The first message

In reality you will probably know a message for one or more of the chapters long before you know the core message. Use the Chapter-level step tree to help gather these thoughts together.

Additional ideas

Within a thesis there will be many supporting arguments that need highlighting. You will need to define each as a new 'message'. Make sure they add together to give your key message. In addition, you will need to create a message for each section or chapter. Again, the sum total of these should be your key message.

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Step 6. CATALOGUE potential chapter content

	Headings	Sub-headings	Paragraphs	References	
Chapter 1					

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Step 6. CATALOGUE potential chapter content

Graphs	Tables	Images		

Start with the word count

It is very distressing to have to throw good words away; so limit the extent to which you over-write. Try to work out how many words you are allowed and what this means for your thesis before starting.

	Example	My thesis
Word limit	80,000	
10% safety margin	8,000	
Words needed	72,000	
Number of Chapters	7	
Average number of words per chapter	10,000	
Average number of words per paragraph	120	
Average number of paragraphs per chapter	80	
Sub-headings	20	
Main headings	5	

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Step 7. ADD STORY to individual chapters

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Main Heading	Sub heading	Paragraph content	External examiner's interests, concerns key words, etc
C#.1	C#.1.1	Key words, concepts	
	C#.1.2	References, short notes	

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Time to write

Good project management lets you sleep well.

- Don't leave it all to the end
- Create a timeline
- Split large tasks into daily manageable pieces

Word count	70,000 words
Paragraph count (eg. science = ca. 100)	700 paragraphs
5 paragraph blocks	140 blocks
5 blocks a week	28 weeks

References read and catalogued

Date

Think Write
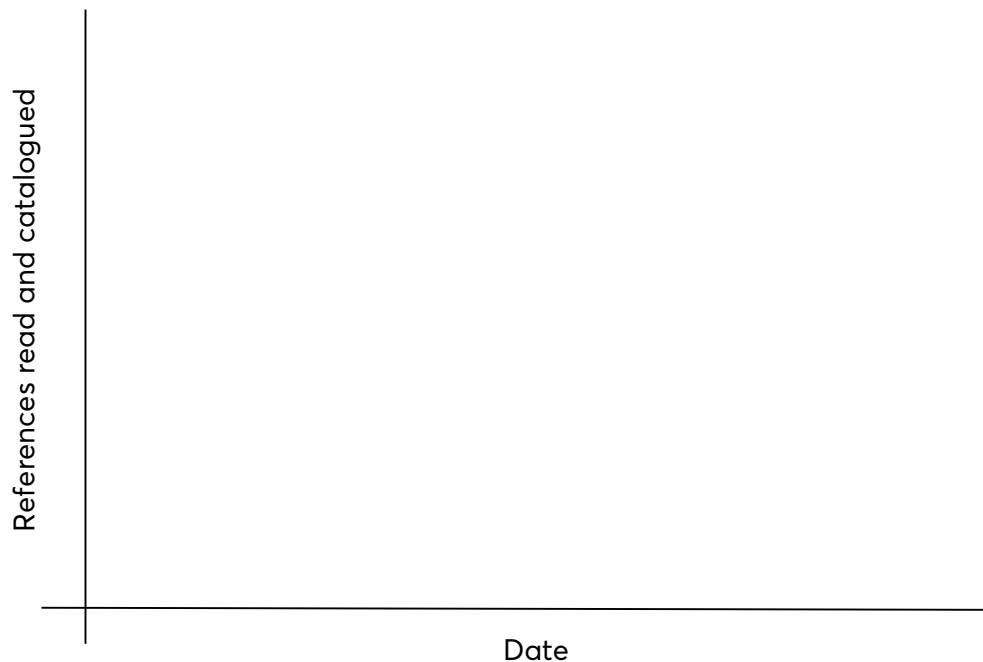
Gantt Charts

	Chapter No	Week 34	Week 35	Week 36	Week 37	Week 38	Week 39	Week 40	Week 41	Week 42
1st draft	↑									
2nd draft		↑								
Copy edit			↑							
colleague			↑							
Supervisor				↑						
3rd draft					↑					
Supervisor					↑					
4th draft						↑				
Copy edit							↑			
Finalise							↑			
1st draft				↑						
2nd draft					↑					
Copy edit						↑				

	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb
Year 1						
Year 2						
Year 3						
Year 4						

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	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug

Signpost sentences
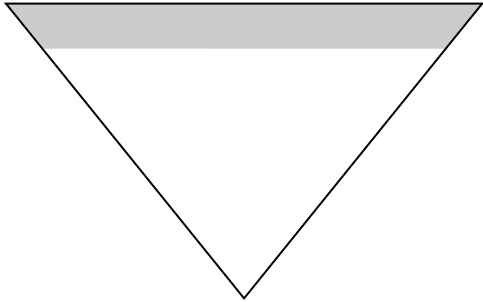
Think of the first sentence as a signpost for the paragraph. This sort of shape is:

- Assertive
- Loud
- Confident

Alternatively you can work towards the signpost building your argument as you go. This approach is more:

- Reflective
- Calm
- Respectful
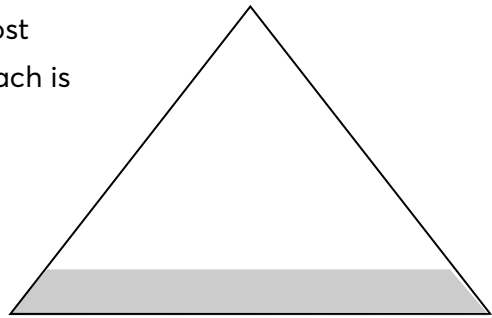
How about:

1) starting with a signpost that shows were we are going
2) developing the argument required to reach that destination
3) stating the destination

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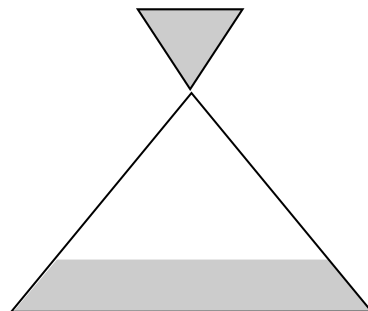
Readability scores

Fog, Gunning, Flesch and Kincaid

Numerous academics = numerous methods. Readability scores are no more than guides, but they can be useful indicators. They can also give you useful ammunition (I mean data) if you need to argue the case for using simpler language.

https://readability-score.com/

KISS—Keep It Simple, Stupid

Would you die for it?

First impressions count and the stakes are high. Make it obvious that you really cared. Also try not to give the impression that you think this is just a draft, and you plan to create the real version after the *viva*!

Nice Paper

Don't use standard 65-70g economy photocopier paper. Do splash out on high grade 80-85g paper that is often sold as 'colour' paper. ie. white paper for printing in colour.
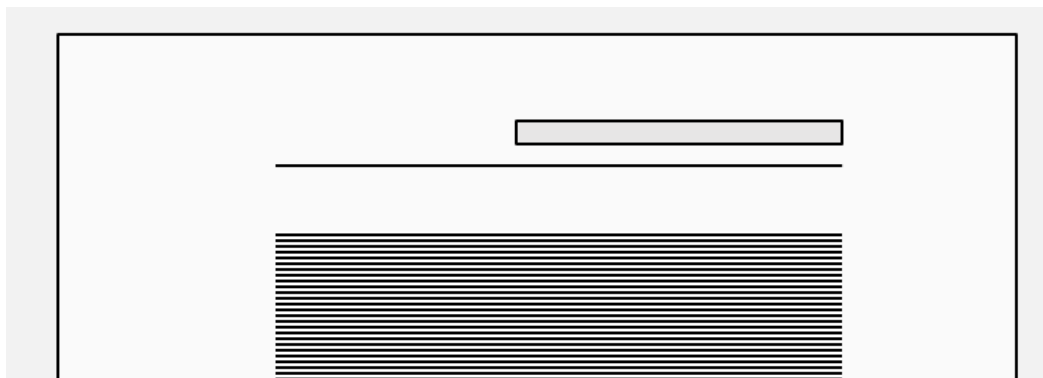
Required Margins

Make sure you stick to the rules—the space gives examiners room to scribble.

Page Number

Universities often ask for the page number to be in the centre of the page at the bottom. It is simple to do and easy to read.

Running Header

Help the readers know where they are on a page-by-page basis.

Fonts

Pick one font, and stick with it. Does your University have a preferred font?

Don't just share.

Inspire...

**For more information or
to book a workshop
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