

Being the test subject's laptop can be both cumbersome and exciting. Cumbersome, because one finds little rest, even at night. He would seize me whenever he has an inspiring thought (or what he believes to be one) and work on his paper, no matter what the hour may be. A while ago he even took me to the loo to work on his thesis all night, in near-complete darkness. However, I should not be complaining, as this is the only type of erratic and unpredictable behaviour he displays. As a matter of fact, he is a fairly structured and orderly person, in particular when writing is concerned. A long phase of planning and structuring precedes each project, when he drafts up a question and a preliminary structure and, once this has been settled, he proceeds to finding literature that may prove helpful in whatever endeavour might be his current occupation. He would then evaluate the literature, i.e. read it, underline important passages and insert them verbatim into the document he has started for that specific purpose. At the very beginning of each project, the paper looks like a gross and blatant case of plagiarism, with dozens of direct quotes composing each chapter. However, he is just accumulating facts, figures, evidence and arguments to further his cause or rather develop his own line of argument. After a while, when he believes he is done with his research and evaluation of literature, he reworks the passages to string together a coherent text that follows a logical structure and results in comprehensible conclusions, at least ideally. That is the exciting part, when masses of information - seemingly unrelated information - are reshaped and begin to present a certain picture, like one would expect from a puzzle of some sort. Alas, sometimes things go awry, and he will have to find further evidence or he realises that in some way or other he lacks an argument or a suitable transition to proceed with the chapter he is working on; but usually, it is little trouble to overcome these minor setbacks and finish what he has started. Even a paper that has been thoroughly structured and planned may bring up unexpected twists and developments that have to be tackled; but at this stage, finishing the paper is painting by numbers to him. It has all been set, the aim is clear, and so is the structure, which leaves only the blanks to be filled in. It sounds trivial, it may even sound ridiculously easy, but a whole lot of effort and time go into the preparations before this stage can be reached in the first place; but he believes, and experience has proven him right, that any other approach to papers is doomed to fail. At least any approach that dismisses a clear question and structure as superfluous or that relies on the notion that the paper will find its own structure sooner or later. In the end, however, excitement makes room for routine; it is his job, after all.