THESIS WRITING SEMINAR
Part 3

Common mistakes, issues, problems…

1. NO ARGUMENT

1a **Banal Argument**

"As it emerges clearly, the prevalent topic is the discussion of protest events" (in a thesis about protests)

Of course, this is what the reader expected anyway.

Common mistakes, issues, problems…

1b Faking an Argument - MISLEADING THE READER!

Making the reader believe you have an argument when you actually don't have it.

Doing a lot (various methods, graphs, maps, pictures…) while not actually having an argument. Simulating a thesis, not showing substance.

NEVER mislead your reader!

NEVER promise more than you can deliver.

Common mistakes, issues, problems…

2. ARGUMENT TOO BROAD

"In this thesis I argue that context matters…"

This argument does not contribute anything, but it is very frequent.

Common mistakes, issues, problems...

3. STRAW MAN FALLACY (logical fallacy)

"In this thesis I argue that globalisation is not a stable, horizontal and unilinear process, but complex and multilinear."

But who ever said globalisation was stable and unilinear?

Common mistakes, issues, problems...

4. CIRCULAR REASONING – tautology (logical fallacy)

"only significant channels get a high visibility rate thus occupying a more significant position..."

Common mistakes, issues, problems...

5. APPEAL TO AUTHORITY

"As a critical social scientist, I claim that...", "As an expert, I argue that..."

NEVER refer to yourself as an expert in your text.
Let the reader judge your expertise.

Common mistakes, issues, problems…

6. STRONG WORDS

"It is absolutely true that", "This has an extremely powerful effect on",

NEVER try to strengthen your argument by strengthening your words!

The power of your argument is never in strong words, but in its content, logic, and empirical substantiation.

LET OUR WORDS BE MILD AND OUR ARGUMENTS CONVINCING.

Words like "extreme", "absolute", "total", "very"… should not appear in a thesis/academic writing.

Common mistakes, issues, problems…

7. SELF-PRAISE

"This thesis offers a full analysis", "I give a comprehensive account of…"
"my thesis provides an all-encompassing view…"

NEVER praise yourself in your work!

Let the reader praise you!

Common mistakes, issues, problems...

8. SELF-EFFACEMENT

"Obviously a mere analysis of words that I performed is very superficial..."

NEVER undermine yourself as an author!

If something is not useful or appropriate, do not mention it in your thesis.

Common mistakes, issues, problems…

9. PSYCHOLOGISING

"It may be unconscious…"

10. ESSENTIALISING

 "it may be in the people's soul", "it is deeply rooted in the national psyche…"

no no no ☺

Common mistakes, issues, problems...

10. PLEONASMS - redundancy in expression, unnecessary accumulation of words

"I was pleasantly happy to discover that..."

As you read your text, always ask yourself:

"is this word necessary?". If not, delete it.

Common mistakes, issues, problems…

11. COLLOQUIAL WRITING

"Last summer I read a very funny book about…"

"I was shocked when I discovered that…"

Academic writing can be personal, but should not be colloquial.

Common mistakes, issues, problems…

12. EMPHATIC/DRAMATIC WRITING

too formal, too "nerdy", too much jargon

"it is fundamental to understand and to explain that throughout history, monuments have always been used to shape historical narratives…"

Common mistakes, issues, problems…

13. STACCATO PARAGRAPHING

Underdeveloped, short and uneven paragraphs.

Abrupt transitions between paragraphs, no slur.

Disconnection, no flow.

Representativity matters. Mainstream representation can be highly beneficial for a minority, and the LGBT community is no exception. However, in the case of such a rich and diverse community, the type of representation on screen can also be detrimental.

In this essay, I will briefly explain how homonormativity can negatively impact the LGBT community through the lack of fair representation in Hollywood.

Homonormativity represents a certain type of the LGBT members, very likely white men for higher social classes. They do exist, and deserve to be represented but they are like the tip of an iceberg, the small visible part of a bigger, invisible community.

In the early years of LGBT movement, white men and women from higher social classes started the fight for better rights and recognition. Their positions in the society allowed them to voice their hunger for equality. They were the ones who could speak up, and carried their community. However, their will for assimilation left other LGBT members behind. (Gamson, 1995).

Homonormativity started organically, white gays and lesbians were the visible ones. They had positions in the society that allowed them to speak up and had the education to change the system. White gays and lesbians had the tools to make their movements go forward. They fought for better life and recognition as they wanted to be able to live "normal" lives (or simply "straight" lives), only with a partner of the same sex. Assimilation was their ultimate goal and after decades of fighting, they reached a good ersatz of it. (Duggan, 2002).

Common mistakes, issues, problems…

14. LITERATURE REVIEW TREATED AS A METHOD
X "My methods are: literature review, interviews…"

15. SOCIETY broadly understood
X "these attitudes are common in the society"

16. BULLET POINTS
In principle there should be no bullet points in a qualitative thesis.

17. A THESIS WITHOUT PAGE NUMBERS
GRRRRRRRRRRRRR

Common mistakes, issues, problems…

18. PRESTO THESIS – PRESTISSIMO THESIS
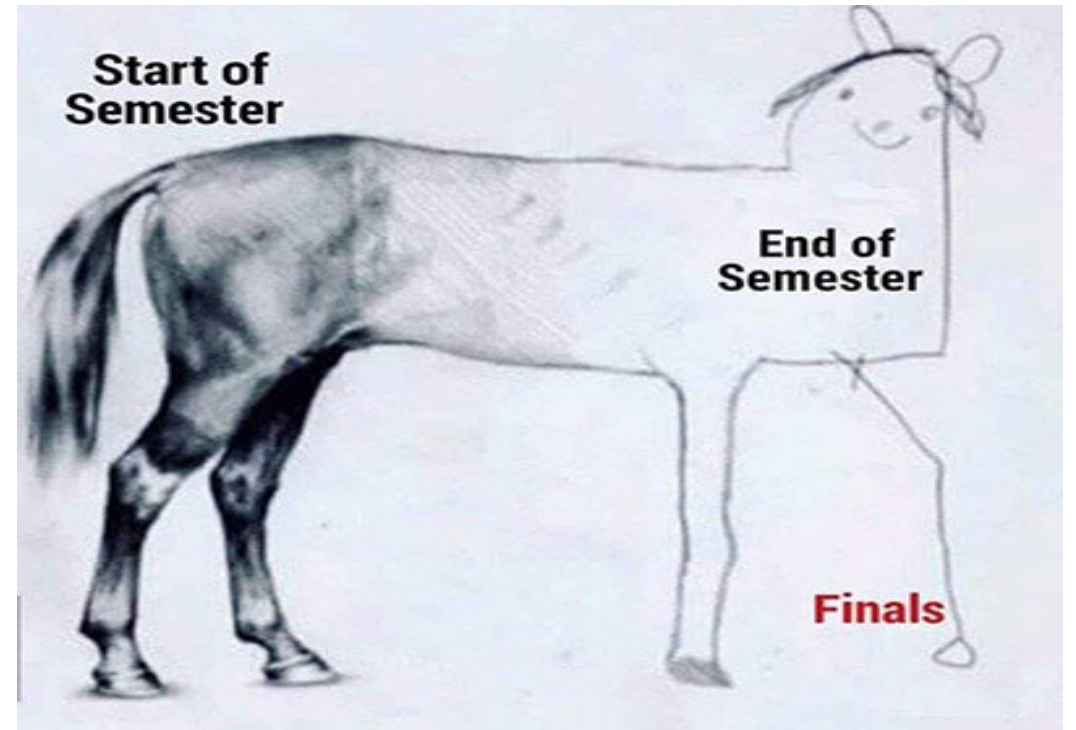(in contrast to an adagio thesis)

Thesis too hastily done.
No sense of coherence or stability.
No flow.
Thesis without a referencing style.

Not a chair to sit on.

Start of Semester

End of Semester

Finals

Common mistakes, issues, problems…

19. UNSTREAMLINED THESIS

Going in circles, constant repetitions…

Frustrating for the reader.

Common mistakes, issues, problems…

20. UNPROOFREAD THESIS

Grammar mistakes obstructing understanding and slowing the reader down.

Especially frequent are wrong collocations

(e.g. to participate IN something, not AT something).

Common mistakes, issues, problems... ITALIAN SPEAKERS

* "researches" – direct translation of the Italian "ricerche"

"These researches show that…"

But "research" is a singularia tantum in English.
Alternative: These studies show that…

* "paragraph" often wrongly used to mean a chapter section (part of a chapter with a subtitle)

"In the previous paragraph I argued…" probably meant: in the previous section

* "deep understanding", "deep analysis"…

NEVER call your understanding deep or your analysis deep

When one is writing in English, one is "translating" more than words.

Styles of playing/writing (moods a piece of music or text produce)
Good writing is…

- concise

- precise

- parsimonious

- laconic

- to the point

- in medias res

- elegant

- humble but decisive – *risoluto ma leggero e tranquillo*
- personal but formal, not colloquial – *grazioso*
- formal but not emphatic – *maestoso ma non troppo*
- strong but not dramatic – *energico ma non con fuoco*
- slow but not boring – *adagio ma non noioso* ☺

- *con brio*
- *con amore*

Good writing is hard, it takes time and practice.

The only rule is

take your time
and
read read read write write write delete delete revise write write delete rewrite read read read write write write read read write...

We use words to understand each other and even, sometimes, to find each other.

José Saramago

Thank you!

bojan.bilic@unibo.it