How to organize text chaos

SchreibCenter at the Language Resource Center

To organize a large amount of text, you can use a few question-driven steps and keywords. In doing so, you will streamline your material to relate it to your research question. The resulting text will be well organized and have what is called the "roter Faden" in German ('red thread').

This technique is useful for writers who do not like following outlines but rather create text structure by writing: When they have written a large amount of text, they can organize it with this technique.

The Steps (repeat for each chapter):

1. **Chapter sections with keywords**

What keyword best summarizes each paragraph? Write down keywords next to the paragraphs and go from chapter to chapter. If a paragraph requires multiple keywords, consider breaking it up.

2. **Arrange sections according to keywords**

Which paragraphs belong together according to the keywords you wrote down? You can highlight them in different colors and then change their order.

3. **Meaning of the chapter**

How does the chapter help answer the research question? What statements need further discussion or explanation? Write your answers in bullet points.

4. **From answers to and content categories**

What does the chapter need to contain to meet the requirements you noted down in step 3? Make bullet points and create content categories from them.

5. **Checking requirements and keywords**

Answer this question for each paragraph: Can you match the content categories from step 4 with the keywords from step 1? If so, the paragraph adds value to your text. If some keywords do not match the requirements, you may want to move them to another chapter or delete them.

6. **Checking the overall text structure**

When each paragraph has the appropriate content categories, check the overall text structure.

Based on: Grieshammer, Ella; Liebetanz, Franziska; Peters, Nora & Zegenhagen, Jana (2012): Zukunftsmodell Schreibberatung. Eine Anleitung zur Begleitung von Schreibenden im Studium. Baltmannsweiler: Schneider Verlag. pp. 204f.