Dissertation Writing Hints:

1. Be organized
   a. Outline paper before writing
   b. Most papers have a common structure
      i. Abstract: Very important. Be concise. No abbreviations or notation. Include the motivation and punchline. Typically, 100-150 words.
      ii. Intro: Outline the question. Explain why we care, and what is new in the paper. Give a slightly longer summary than the abstract of what is done in the paper, and emphasize the major findings.
      iii. Lit review (may be incorporated in intro if short)
      iv. Theoretical model: Be only as complicated as necessary. Understand ramifications of assumptions. If the main innovation of the paper is empirical, a theory is only necessary if it adds something not already understood in the literature.
      v. Empirical model: Be clear. Understand where identification comes from. Consider all relevant specification tests. Acknowledge potential deficiencies, circumstances under which estimates are biased or inconsistent.
      vi. Data: Explain the sample selection criteria, and detail the variables used. If the application builds on an existing literature, be sure to note any differences between the sample selection criteria and those used in existing papers.
      vii. Results: Be sure to spend enough time discussing the actual results. This is, after all, why the paper is (supposedly) written.
      viii. Conclusion: Emphasize importance of new findings, as well as shortcomings of the current paper. Discuss potential future work still to be done. End on a positive note.
   c. Put discussions in relevant sections
      i. Avoid discussing the same point in multiple locations
      ii. Discuss data in data section
      iii. Discuss results in results section; most econometric issues belong in the empirical model section

2. Be considerate to your readers
   a. Invest the time to proofread the paper many times; if you are unwilling to go through your paper carefully, why should others invest their time?
   b. Spell check, grammar check, typesetting stuff, etc.
   c. Define notation, abbreviations, etc.
   d. Avoid redundant notation, excessive notation, awkward notation, etc.
   e. Avoid overly critical remarks about other papers; other authors are not idiots, and may be your referees
   f. Tables should be easy to read, and self-explained (need to refer back to the text should be kept to a minimum); include notes under the tables to explain things; avoid using abbreviations for variable names unless necessary
   g. References should be double-checked; be sure they are accurate and all are included in the bibliography

3. Be professional (this is not a term paper)
   a. Avoid unsubstantiated claims
   b. Avoid sweeping or grand statements
   c. Avoid generalizations
   d. Be upfront; don’t hide assumptions/restrictions hoping they will be overlooked, and justify their use
   e. Give credit where credit is due; cite others’ ideas (in parentheses, not footnotes)
   f. In general, any statement in a paper should fit one of the following categories: (i) factual (agreeable to virtually any reader), or (ii) debateable (but then references should be given to support the statement, or it should be supported by the work done in the paper itself, or it should be written in the appropriate language… “If one believes X, then Y”)

4. What to include?
   a. Dissertation chapters can/should be longer than papers submitted for publication
   b. Chapters may include greater detail on:
      i. Lit review
ii. Data construction
iii. Empirical methodology
c. Papers to be submitted:
   i. Include brief lit review; perhaps greater detail on papers most closely related, relegating other info to a footnote
   ii. Include only most relevant info regarding data sample, data construction
   iii. Do not spend too much space regurgitating econometric methods published elsewhere, unless it is a relatively obscure method