

Writing A Dissertation / Thesis

Importance

The dissertation is the culmination of the Ph.D. student's research training and the student's entry into a research or academic career. It is done under the supervision of faculty, but it is to be substantially the student's independent, original work, properly citing ideas or quotes from other sources. It is to be a study of publishable quality. Like all published studies, it can answer only certain questions, but it also demonstrates the student's scholarship, research acumen, and writing ability, all of which are predictive of subsequent research competence.

How it works

The student must develop a formal dissertation proposal. The student should first discuss the research problem for the dissertation with the committee chairperson and the committee members. The student should confer with the committee as to how to proceed with the proposal.

Dissertation proposals should contain at least three major sections. These are:

Statement of the Problem

The first section of the proposal should provide the introduction to the problem to be addressed by the dissertation research. The problem statement should cite relevant literature as necessary to support the existence of the problem plus pertinent background information. At the conclusion of the problem statement, the reader should have a clear understanding of the problem to be addressed by the dissertation.

Review of the Literature

This section should *critically review* the literature relevant to the dissertation problem. The extent of the review is in part determined by the committee, but all relevant research directly bearing on the dissertation problem should be included. Every effort should be made to include the most recent relevant literature. Historic literature should be included to the extent that it is directly relevant.

At the conclusion of the literature review, there should be a statement to the effect: "The problem addressed by the proposed research is..." This statement should be followed by either the specific research hypotheses *or* by the research questions. Hypotheses in null form are not appropriate.

Method

While all aspects of the proposal are important, the method section is critical since it presents the details of the research process. While the exact content of this section will vary as a function of the nature of the particular research, generally the method section should include the following topics:

1. Subjects or participants (numbers, characteristics, population sample, selection criteria, etc.)
2. Measures (detailed descriptions; if tests, are to be employed include indices of reliability and validity).
3. Treatments (if independent variable(s) is/are manipulated)
4. Procedures (give sufficient detail for an independent researcher to replicate the

- study).
5. Analyses (describe the proposed analytic process whether graphical, statistical, or other).

In general, the student should assume that the readers of the proposal are knowledgeable psychologists, but ones who may not be experts in the particular area addressed by the proposal.

It is desirable for the student to have run pilot studies as part of the proposal. The purpose of the pilot work should be to familiarize the student with the subject characteristics and the methods and to demonstrate the feasibility of the procedures. It is not uncommon for proposals to be modified after running pilot studies.

Proposals must be written in APA style in accordance with the current *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (i.e., double-spaced draft format except for references).

Writing it all up

The student must adhere to the following guidelines in preparing the completed dissertation. It must be written in the style specified by the American Psychological Association and this document. For the most part, the guidelines in this document have been adapted from the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. It is the student's responsibility to see that the dissertation is in the proper format. Looking at previous dissertations usually will be helpful, but the final authority is the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*.

The student should read the section in the *Publication Manual* on dissertations (current edition). Note that most of the *Publication Manual* guidelines are for submitting a manuscript to an editor, whereas the dissertation is a final publication, like a book. Drafts to the chair and the committee should be double-spaced and need not follow all of the guidelines below; however, the final copy distributed to the committee and the approved version to be bound must adhere to all of these guidelines. The guidelines in this document supersede those of the *Publication Manual* on a number of points, consistent with the dissertation's being a final publication.

The dissertation should consist of the sections listed below. Variations from the above five chapters are permissible but should be cleared in advance with the student's committee.

Sections of the Dissertation

- Title Page
- Approval Page
- Acknowledgments
- Table of Contents
- List of tables
- List of figures
- Abstract
- Chapter I: Statement of the Problem
- Chapter II: Review of the Literature
- Chapter III: Method

- Chapter IV: Results
- Chapter V: Discussion
- References
- Appendices

Dissertation Defense

It is advisable that the student maintain frequent contact with the committee chairperson and with the committee members throughout the dissertation process in order to obtain ongoing feedback regarding the research. With the consent of the chairperson, the final defense may be scheduled. All defenses must proceed according to the same guidelines as listed for the proposal defense with the following substitutions:

1. If the committee accepts both the dissertation and the student's defense of it, each member will sign the dissertation approval sheet. The sheet should be dated the day of the defense. The approval sheet should be held by the chairperson of the dissertation committee until all revisions, if any, are completed. At that time, the chair should date and sign the final approval section of the approval sheet. This will constitute the official date of completion of the dissertation.
2. When the Chairperson of the dissertation committee is satisfied that all revisions (if any) have been made and that the dissertation is ready for binding, he/she will submit a research completion form with an attached abstract to the Academic Affairs office.

Closer look at Bibliographies

What is a bibliography?

A bibliography is an alphabetical list of all materials consulted in the preparation of the student's assignment.

What is an annotated bibliography?

An annotated bibliography is an alphabetical list of books or articles for which one has added explanatory or critical notes. The annotation is usually written in a paragraph, about 150 words, in which one briefly describes the book or article cited, then add an evaluation and a critical comment of one's own. An annotated bibliography differs from an abstract, which is simply a summary of a piece of writing of about 150-250 words without critical evaluation.

Why must a bibliography be created?

1. To acknowledge and give credit to sources of words, ideas, diagrams, illustrations, quotations borrowed, or any materials summarized or paraphrased.
2. To show that one is respectfully borrowing other people's ideas, not stealing them, i.e. to prove there is no plagiarizing.
3. To offer additional information to readers who may wish to further pursue the researcher's topic.
4. To give readers an opportunity to check out one's sources for accuracy. An honest bibliography inspires reader confidence in one's writing.

Examples

1. *Standard Format for a Book*

Author. Title: Subtitle. City or Town: Publisher, Year of Publication.

If a book has no author or editor stated, begin with the title. If the city or town is not commonly known, add the abbreviation for the State or Province.

If you are citing two or more books by the same author or editor, list the name of the author or editor in the first entry only, and use three hyphens to indicate that the following entry or entries have the same name. Do not use the three hyphens if a book is by two or more authors or is edited by two or more individuals.

Example:

Business: The Ultimate Resource. Cambridge, MA: Perseus, 2002.

King, Stephen. Black House. New York: Random, 2001.

---. Dreamcatcher. New York: Scribner, 2001.

---. From a Buick 8: A Novel. New York: Simon, 2002.

Osen, Diane, ed. The Book That Changed My Life: Interviews with National

Book Award Winners and Finalists. New York: Modern, 2002.

2. *Standard Format for a Magazine, Periodical, Journal, or Newspaper Article*

Author. "Title: Subtitle of Article." Title of Magazine, Journal, or

Newspaper Day, Month, Year of Publication: Page Number(s).

Example:

Hewitt, Ben. "Quick Fixes for Everyday Disasters." Popular Mechanics Nov. 2004: 83-88.

Nordland, Rod, Sami Yousafzai, and Babak Dehghanpisheh. "How Al Qaeda Slipped

Away." Newsweek 19 Aug. 2002: 34-41.

Suhr, Jim. "Death Penalty for Juveniles Is Considered: High Court to Hear Missouri Case."

Buffalo News 10 Oct. 2004: A12.

Library Definitions

Abstract

A summary of the contents of a periodical article or book.

Bibliography

A list of citations of works an author refers to in a text (e.g., journal article or book) or a list of citations to works on a particular subject. Subject bibliographies can often be found in the Reference Room.

Call Number

A unique combination of letters and numbers assigned to most library materials to provide an orderly arrangement and means of finding material. Some call number

systems like the Library of Congress Classification, which Maag Library uses in most cases, are based on subject content and group similar subjects together.

Index

A collection of citations of articles that have appeared in magazines, journals, and newspapers. May be found in print, CD-ROM, or online versions.

Journal

A scholarly publication containing information written by experts on current research in a given field.

Keyword Search

A broad natural language search strategy which allows patrons to locate citations to individual records containing a word or combination of words in designated fields from an online catalog or database. A keyword search retrieves the greatest number of records, some of which may be irrelevant.

Magazine

A periodical published primarily for a general audience. It usually does not contain scholarly articles.

Periodical

A publication with a unique title that is issued at an established interval (weekly, monthly, quarterly). Examples include journals and magazines.

Reference

Area where patrons can get help not only using the library but also locating library materials. Dictionaries, encyclopedias, atlases and directories as well as CD-ROM databases are available.

Research Databases

Online indexes and abstracts as well as informational databases available through OhioLINK. ERIC, Medline, and Contemporary Authors are some examples.

Reserve

Materials (books, journal articles, and sample tests) which faculty make available for a particular course.

Subject Heading

A list of standard search terms assigned to an item to identify its primary content. Using the correct subject heading is an important part of an effective search.

Subject Search

A controlled search which gathers records with a specific subject heading. This search strategy typically results in a high number of relevant records.