

Doctoral Seminar
Various Stages of Developing a Dissertation – A Few Guidelines

1. DISSERTATION CONCEPT PAPER

The concept paper is written for brainstorming purposes (approx. 2 pages) and it is likely that you will make substantial changes after presenting it in class. It's fine to present 2-3 different concept papers; it will help you to find an appropriate focus. Make sure though that your advisor is interested and supportive of that focus.

Use bullet points to structure your concept paper:

- Problem statement/research question (2-3 lines)
 - Background information (5-7 lines) includes relevance and purpose of your research
 - Interpretive framework (will eventually be your literature review): list a few scholars/studies that have inspired you or informed your research focus (1/2 page)
 - Research design: methods, sampling, data collection instruments (1/2 page)
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2. DISSERTATION PROPOSAL

The proposal consists of the following sections:

- 1- Problem Statement (1-2 pages)
Consists of research question: 2-3 lines and explanation of research question

- 2- Background (10-15 pages)
Includes background information on the situation/country/phenomenon that you are examining; includes information on relevance of the research question and purpose of your research (to which field/aspect of current debates in educational research does it concretely contribute to?)

- 3- Literature Review (20-30 pages)
Here you identify literature that is relevant to your research topic and you will build on this literature, for example, answer the following guiding questions:
how will your research be different/similar to research conducted by others; what are the strengths/weaknesses/biases of existing research; what is new about your research?. In this section, you need to prioritize. Identify the literature that is core to your dissertation (for your “theoretical/conceptual model/argument”) and only mention briefly others that have also worked in your field. Sometimes it helps to make sub-sections (by topic) in the literature review section.
- 4- Research Design (12-15 pages)
Provide information (and explain why you have chosen) your research setting, sample, instruments, methods(label the methods; use, for example, Creswell; Miles & Huberman; Denzin, and others to identify the methods that you will be using), data collection methods, data analysis methods.
- 5- Limitations of Study (3-4 pages)
List all the limitations of your study with regard to time constraints, your role as researcher, access to data; also include time-line for the various stages of your dissertation.
- 6- Tentative Chapter Outline of the Dissertation (2-3 pages)
Provide a detailed, tentative chapter outline for your dissertation reflecting the following general structure. A dissertation consists of five sections:
 - Introduction
 - Literature Review
 - Research Design and Methods
 - Findings
 - Conclusions and Agenda for Future Research

Your proposal is basically an abbreviated version of chapters 1, 2, 3 of your dissertation.

3. DISSERTATION DOCUMENT

As mentioned before, a dissertation document consists of five sections:

- Introduction
- Literature Review
- Research Design and Methods
- Findings
- Conclusions and Agenda for Future Research

Please make sure all these sections are included even if you choose to specify the titles for each section to suit the topic of your dissertation. It is in fact encouraged that you specify the titles for the sections “literature review” and “findings.” Some dissertation choose to have several chapters for the “findings” section (2-4 chapters emphasizing the major findings of the dissertation research). I recommend that you review a couple of dissertations (available on-line).

A dissertation should not be longer than 250 pages and not shorter than 150 pages. Your dissertation needs to be substantiated with references to existing literature and to data. It needs to be a novel contribution to your particular research field, which you identified in your background and literature review sections.

Keep in mind that your dissertation is your first and *not* your last piece of academic writing: it does not need to be comprehensive, but rather needs to be specific, original and well substantiated. Don’t try to change the world with a dissertation (no recommendations please).

Advisement:

Please keep the academic calendar in mind: There is no advisement over the summer break or the winter break.

Hearings and Defenses: Proposal hearings and dissertation defenses should be scheduled between September and March. A proposal hearing consists of two professors (advisor and second reader) and a dissertation defense of 4 professors (ED.D.) or 5 professors (Ph.D.). For the Ph.D. defenses, you need to have members of GSAS on your committee and you also need to schedule an Advanced Seminar as soon as you completed all but the last chapter of your Ph.D. dissertation document. The Advanced Seminar is a 1-2 hour meeting with your advisor, second reader, and a third committee member. In general, professors tend to be supportive of doctoral students who are scheduled for a dissertation hearing or defense. As an unspoken rule, other professors trust the advisor that the doctoral student is deemed “ready” for a hearing or a defense.