

# GUIDELINES FOR FORMAT AND CONTENT OF THE DISSERTATION

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

#### *Background*

This section should be approximately 2-5 pages of background narrative, citing literature as appropriate and needed. You have two purposes in this section: (a) grab your readers' attention and (b) enlighten your readers about the thrust of the study and its importance.

#### *Conceptual Underpinnings for the Study*

Reread your Chapter 2 to see if you can determine a theoretical or "quasi-theoretical" base for the study. The conceptual framework is the theoretical base from which your topic has evolved. It includes the basic, historical, theoretical nature, and background of your topic. This information is the material that undergirds, and provides basic support from which your topic emerges. Essentially you are trying to present a rational/theoretical/research-based model for (a) the key variables you are interested in investigating and (b) any believed interrelationships between the dependent, or criterion, variable and the independent variables. This section will typically be 2-4 pages. Literature citations are essential. Theorists and researchers who are famous in the field of the topic will probably be referenced in this section.

#### *Statement of the Problem*

Approximately 1-3 pages in which you give a clearly and concisely detailed explanation of just phrases like: "While evidence of this relationship have been established in the private schools of New Hampshire, no such relationship has been investigated within the public schools of Missouri." "Yet, the results of prior studies have been mixed and contradictory, as evidenced by research by Smith (1990) and Allison (1992)." "Still not enough is known about the impact of 'X' on 'Y' when 'Z' is taken into account for students of this age."

#### *Purpose of the Study*

There should be one or two paragraphs to introduce the research questions and hypotheses.

*Research Questions*

List them as 1. . . . 2. . . . 3. . . . . . . . n.

*Hypotheses*

List them as 1. . . . 2. . . . . 3. . . . . . . . n.

*Limitations, Assumptions, and Design Controls*

Having this section clarifies some points for your readers, setting the assumptions upon which the research is pursued, listing some limitations, and indicating clearly how some potential problems will be controlled (thereby increasing your readers’ confidence in you as a researcher and in your study).

Limitations are the limitations for which you, the researcher, have no control over. These might include resources for your topic which are limiting you from doing more extensive study, or in the case of active research, subjects who fail to complete the appropriate test items, or lack of whatever which might cause you to eliminate that person from your study. This section may not be applicable to your treatment of the topic. Seek advice.

Assumptions are those things that, relative to your study, you are “taking for granted.” You may find it easier to write this section later as you develop your methodology in Chapter 3.

*Definition of Key Terms*

An introductory sentence should be used to transition to the definition of key terms. The terms in this section should be terms directly related to your research that will be used by you throughout the research. It is up to you, the researcher, to define each term as you want the reader to know that term. In every case possible, cite a source for you definition. It is all right to have some definitions without citations when you are listing a “commonly understood” term or you have no source. (The following are examples for formatting purposes).

*Achievement.* (The definition should be written as 1 or more complete sentences and not underlined) \_\_\_\_\_ (Thompson, 1998).

*Attendance.* \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ (Smith & Jones, 1997).

### *Summary*

Present a 1-3 paragraph summary of key points included in Chapter 1. Then present a one-paragraph description of how the remainder of the study is organized (that is, Chapters 2 through 5 and any appendices you now know will be included; for the dissertation proposal this paragraph should only refer to chapters 2 and 3).

#### Note:

- The length of Chapter 1 varies from proposal to proposal, but most range from 15-25 pp.
- Also note in the formatting that the narrative is double-spaced except between each chapter section. **Triple** spacing is used between the close of a chapter section and the beginning of the next section.
- The levels of headings used are: 5, 2, 3, and 4. See p. 91 of the APA style manual.
- Long quotations are single spaced. (See Guidelines from University of Missouri.)

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

#### *Introduction*

Write a brief introduction of 2-3 paragraphs to refresh your reader's memory about the problem and purpose of the study you presented in Chapter 1. Also, tell your reader about the form this chapter will take in terms of purpose, scope, and sequence/organization. The introduction of this chapter should include the titles of the main headings you have in this chapter. Remember that in this chapter you are reporting on what other researchers, experts, theorists, etc. have already said about the subject. Therefore, for the most part, the verbs in this chapter are past tense. It is a skill on the part of graduate students to report on the literature in such a way that the student also compares, contrasts, and in so doing analyzes what is found in the literature.

#### *Effective Schools Research*

Your literature review should be organized around a format that clearly covers (a) the research related to the criterion/dependent variable of your study and any subcomponents, (b) the research related to the independent variables of the study, (c) to issues of measurement, and (d) to alternative points of view. Always double space between the title of a section and the beginning of the narrative for that section. Always **triple** space between the close of a chapter section and the beginning of the next section. All narrative should be double spaced, except in cases of any "block indented direct quotation" material.

Quotations of four lines or longer should be single-spaced with the left and right margins indented five spaces on each side. This is according to guidelines from the University of Missouri and different from the APA style manual.

*National Studies (Level 3 heading)*

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*Missouri Studies*

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*Correlates of Effective Schools*

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*Schools and Their Communities.* (Level 4 heading)

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*Teachers and Administrators.*

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*Staff Development*

Whenever a new chapter section is begun, there should be an introductory paragraph(s) before subsections are developed.

*Teacher and Administrator Preparation Programs*

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*Pre-service Education.* Whenever a level 3 or level 4 heading is included within a chapter section, there should be the need for at least two parts of the chapter section with this level of heading.

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*In-service Education.* -----

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### *Summary*

This chapter should have a summary that ties together the main headings of the chapter. Also, be sure to preview for the reader what is coming in Chapters 3, 4, and 5 of the dissertation. For the dissertation proposal, this paragraph will only address chapter 3.

#### Note:

- The APA Publication Manual is the guideline for the format of your paper. Also, the University of Missouri *Guidelines for Preparing Theses and Dissertations* should be thoroughly read as there are several requirements in format that vary from the APA Manual and take precedence.
- Consistency is the law. Decide how to do something and do that the same way throughout the paper. This is particularly true of chapter headings and subheadings.
- Except in rare cases, use last names only for persons noted or references in the study and do not use position or academic titles.
- In most cases, paraphrase what you want to share for your reader from what you have found in the literature. Overuse of “directly quoted” material is to be avoided.
- How long should chapter 2 be? Rarely is a review of literature under 25 pages considered adequate in a dissertation. There are 4 criteria in determining the adequacy of the review of literature: (1) complete enough to inform and enlighten the reader, (2) clear in every regard, (3) correct in style and accuracy, and (4) concise as possible while meeting the complete criterion.
- Remember: A considerable portion of what you find in you literature search can and will be important parts of Chapter 1, “Background of the Study,” and Chapter 3, “Research Design and Methodology.” In fact, some literature may be used in all chapters, except Chapter 4, “Results of Data Analysis.” Much research reported in Chapter 2 should be referenced again in Chapter 5 as comparisons are made between your research results and those of others.

[Note: Be sure to review successfully completed dissertations for examples to guide the organization and writing of Chapter 3.]

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

#### *Introduction*

Approximately 2 – 3 pages to introduce the reader to this chapter and to refresh the reader’s memory about (a) the problem being investigated, (b) the research questions posed to guide the researcher in fulfilling the purposes of the study, (c) the hypotheses to be tested.

#### *Problem and Purposes Overview*

Keep this brief, concise, to the point: probably only 2 paragraphs.

#### *Research Questions*

After an introductory sentence, simply restate the research questions from Chapter 1.

#### *Research Hypotheses*

After an introductory sentence, simply state the research hypotheses from Chapter 1.

#### *Population and Sample*

Length of this section will vary from dissertation to dissertation. The researcher is obligated to define precisely the population represented by this research project. Also, the method for selection of a representative sample from the population must be specified, along with the exact number of subjects to be included in the sample. The sample unit needs to be specified (e.g., school district, school building, student, teacher, or principal as the “unit of analysis”) as well as the sampling method (e.g., random, proportional random, total population as sample, time, series). [Check a statistical analysis text for a table to determine the required sample size for statistical analysis depending upon population size.]

#### *Data Collection and Instrumentation*

Length of this section will vary greatly from dissertation to dissertation. The researcher is obligated to describe precisely and expansively the data collection methodology (e.g., mail survey, personal or telephone interviews, participant observations, accessing existing data bases).

Include a separate section for each instrument adopted or developed for data collection, whether that might be published instruments, researcher-developed instruments, interview schedules, or test results (like the MAP). Be sure to include information for each instrument on (a) form of the instrument, with sample items and scaling/scoring information, (b) assurances, or at least estimates, or the validity and reliability of the instrument, and (c) reference to an appendix in which the reader will find the complete instrument and all correspondence and directions which will be sent to the respondent subjects in the sample. A considerable number of literature citations will probably appear for each instrument. Three examples of headings for instruments follow:

*Work Values Inventory (MVI)*

*Minnesota Job Satisfaction questionnaire (MSQ)*

*Missouri Mastery and Achievement Tests (MMAT)*

#### *Data Analysis*

Specify the statistical analyses that will be used to answer the research questions and/or test the research hypotheses. Cite literature sources for your discussion of the statistical techniques. Convince your statistician to assist in statistical methods, depending on the types of variables being investigated, specifics of the sample of the study (groups), research design, etc.]

#### *Summary*

In one or two paragraphs, summarize the information presented under Population and Sample, Data Collection, and Data Analysis.

CHAPTER 4  
ANALYSIS OF DATA

*Introduction*

Write 2 to 3 paragraphs that present an overview of how the chapter is organized to present the data analysis. You should begin with a brief review of the purpose of the study and the problem to be addressed. If a survey instrument was utilized and/or developed for the study, provide a brief description of the contents of the instrument.

*Organization of Data Analysis*

Use 2 or 3 paragraphs to provide an overview of how the data will be presented. What is covered here is highly dependent upon the design of the study. If a survey instrument was part of the research that contained demographic data used to determine independent variables and this is to be presented first, this should be mentioned. The way in which the research questions and hypotheses will be presented should be reviewed. If there is a difference in the presentation of data for different research questions and hypotheses, provide a brief statement of the different treatment. For example, some research questions may have only descriptive data. Additional research questions may each have one or more hypotheses with accompanying data analysis and findings from each hypotheses.

**Review other successfully completed dissertations for examples to guide the organization and writing of Chapter 4.**

(Should you have demographic data to present start with a section subtitled as –

*Presentation of Descriptive Characteristics of Respondents*

This should be introduced followed by a discussion of the demographic data in narrative and in tables.

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*Research Questions and Associated Hypotheses*

Use an introductory sentence to introduce the questions and hypotheses.

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*Analysis of Data*

Use an introductory sentence then present each research question.

Research Question 1—To what degree . . . . . ?

This should be followed by a discussion of the type of statistical analysis that was utilized followed by the related hypotheses if there is a related hypothesis. You may not have a related hypothesis for a research question or you may have one or more. Therefore the analysis of data varies greatly depending upon the research questions, hypothesis, and design.

Hypothesis I— There is no significant relationship . . . . .

Following the statement of the hypothesis, a discussion should be given which reviews the resulting data from the statistical analysis. This should be presented in a narrative and appropriate tabular form. A concluding statement should indicate the rejection or retention of the hypothesis.

Hypothesis II – There is . . . . .

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Research Question 2 – Is there . . . . . ?

Hypothesis III – There is . . . . .

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### Summary

A summary paragraph should present a brief review of the chapter. A sentence should also introduce the final chapter.

- Remember this chapter is a presentation of the data. No conclusions or implications should appear in this chapter.

## CHAPTER 5

### FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

#### *Introduction*

This introductory paragraph should review the five sections that will be in the chapter.

#### *Summary of the Study*

This section should give an overview of the entire study. It should begin with a review of the problem and the type of information collected. The research questions should also be restated.

A brief statement or several sentences regarding the contents of the review of literature should be included. If the review of literature was the basis for the development of a survey instrument this should be mentioned.

The population from which the sample was drawn should be described. If there is a response rate from a survey this should be stated.

#### *Findings*

A review of all of the findings from the statistical analysis of data should be presented. This should occur in the same sequence as they were presented in Chapter 4. They should be presented factually and in an organized narrative.

#### *Conclusions*

Conclusions should be based on the research questions in Chapter 1. They should be presented in the same order as the research questions. This last chapter of the research paper should bring the research full circle.

Be very clear about stating conclusions and the discussion of the conclusions. This chapter is anything and everything that the researcher wants to say about the research that has been conducted. It is the chance to tell the reader what the research thinks about the research. Therefore, be sure to use references in this chapter to support what is being said!

Feel free to disagree with what was found in the literature, just be sure to explain what is being thought. As the researcher, you may draw upon life experiences to support your thoughts, views, and ideas. Tie everything together. Analyze, synthesize, and evaluate what was found in the research with what you think.

### *Implications*

Implications are practical suggestions for addressing the issues that have been raised in the research. These should be suggestions of what should be done. Be sure to add, following what should be done, how it can be done. This is important! It is easy to make suggestions as to what should be done regarding an issue; it is another thing to suggest how it can be done. There may not be more than two or three implications for practice. The quantity is not as important as the quality of thought behind the suggestions.

### *Future Research*

In the review of literature and in the research that was studied, several “holes” were probably were questionable. Give some thought as to what further could be studied in the area of research conducted. When stating what should be studied, also indicate why this is important. Provide a rationale for why the additional research should be done.

### *Summary*

This summary should be 2 to 3 pages in length. It should begin with a brief statement of the purpose, followed by an overview of the findings, and conclusions.

Credit needs to be given to Dr. Margaret Theobald for the narrative in the information presented for Chapter 5 – Conclusion, Implications, and Future Research. This was modified from a booklet she authored, *Writing for Methods of Research*, Southeast Missouri State University, 1991.

