

D.Min. Dissertation Guide

Question #1: *What am I puzzled about?*

1. Autobiographical Introduction (1-3 pages)

Answer this:

- Something happened one day, and from then on I was a carrier of a passionate puzzle or critical question.
- What challenge do you face in ministry repeatedly, one that blocks ministry in significant and detrimental ways? This is something you've really wanted to get to the bottom of for a while; you're also willing to invest 2-3 years of methodical inquiry to resolve.

2. Statement of the Problem (1 paragraph)

Answer this:

- What circumstance carries an urgent defect or un-seized opportunity?
- This could be an isolated issue, but most likely is a chronic challenge that keeps the church from being who it needs to be and doing what it needs to do.

3. Research Questions (1-3 pages)

Answer This:

- What are 3-4 components of the puzzle, elements that if you had the answers, your puzzle would be solved?
- Finish the sentences: "If we just understood why..." "If we just knew how to..." "What kind of redemptive word/presence/action could the church bring to...?"

4. Rationale for the Project (2 pages)

Answer This:

- What are 3-5 reasons that someone must attend to this matter? Begin each of the 3-5 paragraphs with, "The first reason this study matters is...; The second reason this study matters is...," etc.
- You are addressing the big "WHY?" question for your project. Why does someone need to study this?

5. Definition of Key Terms (2-3 pages)

Answer This:

- What are the key technical terms that need explanation to an uninitiated audience, especially those derived from the technical literature? List them.
- Decode the buzzwords in your area of interest for someone who doesn't know anything about the subject.

6. Delimitations (1-2 pages)

Answer This:

- What exclusionary or inclusionary decisions did you make to define the boundaries of this study? List. Examples: sample size, geographic location, the variables studied, theoretical perspectives, the generalizability, etc.
- What and who did you include in your research (Examples: your church; your denomination in a particular geographical, cultural setting; women in several neighboring churches, etc.)? What did you leave out (other churches like yours, total church membership because you are only focusing on your lay or volunteer leaders, urban and rural areas since your church is set in the suburbs, etc.)?

7. Review of Relevant Literature (4-10 pages)

Answer This:

- What are the key features and priorities in conversation when others who are similarly puzzled by the same problem discuss this matter in the technical literature? List normative literature (technical and non-technical), with an eye to cluster the works by theme (as opposed to alphabetically).
- Who are the most notable people speaking into the issue you have chosen to explore? Hint: check the bibliographies of the primary books and articles you have right now. What writers show up again and again in the literature?

8. Analytic Framework (Data Analysis Plan, 2-5 pages)

Answer This:

- How do existing theories or your own theories explain the nature of the problem/solution or opportunity/intervention? Are there natural breakdowns in these? Draw graphically.
- As you look at the initial research in the area you are investigating, what issues, angles, or questions are not being addressed or at least not addressed well? What's missing in what you're reading that you know or need to know?

9. Data Collection Method (3-5 pages)

Answer This:

- What did you decide to include/exclude to define the boundaries of your study? (See Data Collection Plan)
- What approach makes the most sense to gather data for this project? Will people fill out surveys; will you conduct interviews with individuals and/or small groups? Do the participants (people involved) need to respond to some kind of a research tool before and after an experience you create?

10. Research Report Outline (1 page)

Answer This:

- What is your outline for the written project?
- How do you think your project will flow from beginning to end?

11. Schedule of Work (1 page)

Answer This:

- What is your timeline for strategy implementation for this project? Can you reflect on a “dissertation matrix?” See Example.
- Work backward, perhaps, from when you will present your project to your cohort at Asbury Theological Seminary. How much time do you think you’ll need for each component of your research/intervention? Remember, if you’re working with people, things always take longer than you initially project ☺

12. References Cited (1-5 pages)

Answer This:

- What resources have been used in the project?
- Who can you talk to or read that can point you in the right direction of the best, most foundational, recent, and reliable resources in your area of interest?

13. Preliminary Interview/Observation Questions (1-3 pages)

Answer This:

- What questions/evidence will let the sample/respondents answer your research questions?
- Think about the people participating in your study/project. What do you need to know from them to discern whether or not they are experiencing what you hoped or are learning what you intended?

NOTE: 15-40 pages, more likely 15 pages *before* your first residency, expanding to 40 pages *after* you return home.