



# HOW TO FINISH AND DEFEND YOUR DISSERTATION

STRATEGIES TO COMPLETE  
THE PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE DOCTORATE

**CYNTHIA GRANT** and **DANIEL R. TOMAL**

“Grant and Tomal provide a cogent approach to navigating the dissertation trail from start to finish. They demystify the process and provide expert advice and specific examples. This book is a must have for every candidate during their dissertation seminar courses.”

Christopher H. Tienken, EdD  
Editor, AASA Journal of Scholarship & Practice  
Editor, Kappa Delta Pi Record  
Assistant Professor, Education Leadership, Management, and Policy  
Seton Hall University, NJ

“An informed, lucidly written, practical guide that demystifies the dissertation process. Highly recommended!”

Constantine Sedikides, PhD  
Director, Center for Research on Self and Identity  
University of Southampton, England

“This book is a goldmine of information and I wish it had been available when I engaged in my own marathon. It is easy to read and engage with and the suggestions are spot on. After teaching for multiple doctoral programs, I can assure that the information here will be relevant to all those in university programs. Buy this book and save money on fewer semesters!”

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Dean of Student Services and Counseling  
International Horizons College  
Dubai, United Arab Emirates

“*How to Finish and Defend Your Dissertation* is a well-organized, comprehensive, and thoughtful guide to completing an otherwise daunting task. It provides doctoral candidates with the requisite tools for moving through the dissertation process and completing the defense. I highly recommend it!”

Julian Thompson, MA, PhD Candidate  
School of Social Service Administration,  
University of Chicago, IL

“Doctoral cohorts, having completed their coursework, should discuss *How to Finish and Defend Your Dissertation*, providing an excellent overview of the dissertation process, with the end in mind.”

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Professor of Educational Administration, California State University-Bakersfield; Association of California School Administrator “Outstanding Professor of the Year;” National Council of Professors of Educational Administration “Living Legend.”

“The authors present sound advice on the independent and self-directed nature for completing a dissertation with suggestions on how to cross the finish line of the dissertation. Some of the practical suggestions include following the advice of the dissertation chair, networking with others completing a dissertation, and preparing the defense so the candidate has confidence. This book is a must read for all doctoral candidates running the marathon to completion of a dissertation.”

Dr. Pauline M. Sampson

Doctoral Faculty and Dissertation Chair,  
Stephen F. Austin State University, TX

“An all inclusive, straightforward guide for ‘making it happen’ from start to finish. I especially like the embodiment of emotions, relationship management and presentation skills. Superb!”

Gary L. Wolford, PhD

Bridge Avenue Partners, LLC  
Chicago, IL

“I highly recommend this book to any doctoral candidate who wishes to better understand the complexities of preparing the dissertation. The text provides logical and appropriate guidance for the doctoral student preparing for the dissertation writing, defense, and publication.”

Dr. Frank D. Adams

Graduate Professor  
Wayne State College, NE

“We know that understanding how we are to do and what we need to do are important factors in accomplishing our goals. Drs. Grant and Tomal immerse the reader in a wealth of examples, case studies and strategies—all of which provide the reader clear guidance concerning what to expect and how to solidly survive the complexities of writing and defending a dissertation. This book is a must read for doctoral students in all professional fields!”

Sharon D. Kruse, PhD  
Professor and Chair  
Educational Foundations and Leadership  
University of Akron, OH

“The authors provide a comprehensive and student-centered approach to understanding the often murky dissertation process. Most important, the authors smartly include a chapter which details how to publish manuscripts and present from the dissertation. This skill and topic are not often included as part of the dissertation process—a brilliant and much-needed inclusion.”

Azadeh F. Osanloo, MPA, PhD  
College of Education  
New Mexico State University, NM

“*How to Finish and Defend Your Dissertation* is informative and practical. It is more than just a set of dissertation writing rules and guidelines—this book is a “must have” for doctoral candidates who want to “stay in the flow.”

Elizabeth C. Brennan, EdD  
Associate Head, Academic Affairs  
University School of Nova Southeastern University, FL

“The work is outstanding in providing strategies and direction in publishing the dissertation. For many that is the gateway to the first job and career advancement afterwards.”

Dr. Peter N. Kirstein  
Vice President AAUP Illinois



Professor of History  
Saint Xavier University, IL

“As I write this, I wish I had this book sitting on my desk right now to give to students! Drs. Grant and Tomal have written the book many of us wish we had when defending our dissertations. The advice in this book gives practical prompts, but also supports and promotes rigorous research and scholarship by the doctoral student. I am a fan!”

Noelle Arnold, PhD  
Assistant Professor,  
Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis  
University of Missouri, MO

“This book is an outstanding resource for doctoral students in any discipline. Drs. Grant and Tomal provide practical guidance and support related to the emotional, psychological, and intellectual challenges of the dissertation and defense process. Faculty can also benefit from this excellent work which offers useful suggestions for how faculty and universities can insure that doctoral students finish!”

Susan F. Grossman, PhD  
Associate Dean and Professor  
Loyola University Chicago, IL

“Grant and Tomal’s book is a must have for researchers today and tomorrow’s doctoral researchers. Online and other distance education will gain great insight understanding the *Cloud-Based Communities* approach.”

Carolyn Rogers, PhD  
Associate Dean, School of Education P-12 Programs  
Capella University, WI

“*How to Finish and Defend Your Dissertation* is a wonderfully practical and well researched book that will be an invaluable hands on guide for any doctoral student that really wants to understand the process and how to successfully complete it.”

Fred R. McKenzie PhD, LCSW  
Director, School of Social Work  
Director, DSW Program  
Aurora University, IL

“Drs. Grant and Tomal offer essential information, insights, and guidance regarding the dissertation process and successful defense. I recommend this book as required reading for doctoral candidates and advisors alike.”

Sandra C. Coyner, EdD  
Editor, *ATEA Journal* and Professor and Assistant Chair  
Department of Educational Foundations and Leadership  
The University of Akron, OH

“This book provides comprehensive and excellent coverage of how to pass a doctoral defense is valuable for all doctoral candidates. The authors have provided an outstanding overview of the doctoral dissertation process with clear, concise, and concrete examples that anyone can relate to.”

Thalia MacMillan, PhD, MSW  
Assistant Professor & Mentor,  
Community & Human Services Center for Distance Learning,  
Empire State College, NY

“Drs. Grant and Tomal simplify the daunting journey of earning a doctoral degree using a practical and understandable approach to completing the dissertation and passing the defense. I highly recommend this book as a guide for any candidate.”

Laura S. Meiki, MSW, PhD Candidate  
Louisiana State University, LA

“Drs. Grant and Tomal demystify the complex process of staying on track with your dissertation to defending it that both students and professors can better navigate to a successful completion.”

Paula C. Castillo, PsyD  
Clinical Director,  
Centro Castillo for Personal and Family Wellbeing, Chicago, IL

“A practical and succinct guide for doctoral candidates at the ‘20 mile mark of the 26.2 mile dissertation marathon.’ Even though the book is written for persons pursuing practice doctorates, all doctoral students will benefit from this honest, forthright, and well-written handbook which is full of real life examples and tools for achieving success.”

Lea Acord, RN, PhD  
Professor, College of Nursing,  
Marquette University, WI

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ment*

**H O W T O  
F I N I S H A N D  
D E F E N D Y O U R  
D I S S E R T A T I O N**

**Strategies to Complete the  
Professional Practice Doctorate**

**Cynthia Grant and Daniel R. Tomal**

ROWMAN & LITTLEFIELD EDUCATION

A division of  
ROWMAN & LITTLEFIELD PUBLISHERS, INC.  
Lanham • New York • Toronto • Plymouth, UK

Published by Rowman & Littlefield Education  
A division of Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.  
A wholly owned subsidiary of The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc.  
4501 Forbes Boulevard, Suite 200, Lanham, Maryland 20706  
www.rowman.com

10 Thornbury Road, Plymouth PL6 7PP, United Kingdom

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Information Available

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Grant, Cynthia.

How to finish and defend your dissertation : strategies to complete the professional practice doctrine / Cynthia Grant and Daniel R. Tomal.

pages cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-4758-0400-3 (cloth : alk. paper) — ISBN 978-1-4758-0401-0 (pbk. : alk. paper) — ISBN 978-1-4758-0402-7 (electronic) 1.

Dissertations, Academic—Authorship—Handbooks, manuals, etc. 2.


Academic writing—Handbooks, manuals, etc. I. Tomal, Daniel R. II.

Title.

LB2369.G69 2013

808.02—dc23

2013015522

™ The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992.

Printed in the United States of America

## **DEDICATION**

“In appreciation to all the graduate faculty, administration, staff, and doctoral candidates at Concordia University Chicago who we have had the privilege to teach, learn from, and work with in the doctoral program.”

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## FOREWORD

**D**octoral education in the United States grew from two main roots, one foreign and the other domestic. On the foreign side, it descended from the German research university that was imported to American shores in the late nineteenth century. The German model—with some modifications—served as the basis for great philanthropic ventures like Johns Hopkins and the University of Chicago, and also provided the guide for the transformation of venerable colleges like Yale and Princeton into the research universities we recognize today. The first American PhD was awarded by Yale in 1861, and the others soon joined the doctoral parade.

The domestic origins of the American university lie in the Morrill Act, a law signed by Abraham Lincoln in 1862. The Morrill Act called for the creation of land grant institutions. That law wound up being carried out at about the same time that the private German-based research universities were being created, so we shouldn't be surprised that the university, not the college, soon became the template for land grant institutions. These institutions quickly assumed the contours of research universities and began awarding doctorates before the turn of the century. So there were two different kinds of universities being founded in the United States at about the same time during the late nineteenth century, and the two traditions cross-pollinated from the start.

These diverse historical and intellectual sources of the American university have led us to different ways of thinking about the doctorate. The German method of higher education is based on an idealized model of pure research. Unguided by practical concerns, the scholar pursues the truth—and if it proves to be useful, so much the better. This charismatic model of inquiry, in pursuit of an ethereal goal, can lead to what we might call the “dissertation mystique.”

The land grant model was designed (and here I quote the letter of the law) “to promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes in the several pursuits and professions in life.” This view of education remains resolutely earthbound, centered on craft as well as art. In the Morrill-based scheme, higher learning is not to be divorced from its use value.

Such an emphasis on “practical education” brings me to the fine book by Cynthia Grant and Daniel R. Tomal that is before you. My excursion into higher education’s past at the outset ought to show that when we talk about doctoral education in the United States, we have to acknowledge the diverse range of its historical, intellectual, and political sources. Professional practice and the arts and sciences are, in the United States, two fruits from the same educational orchard.

But those fruits do no good unless they’re harvested. Not everyone is right for a doctorate, but people who start graduate programs in any field deserve their best shot at finishing them. One of my great satisfactions as a dissertation advisor has been to place the hood on a newly conferred doctorate at commencement. I’ve been a teacher of graduate students for over twenty years, and have enjoyed that ritual many times. But I’ve seen plenty of graduate students struggle agonizingly to reach that finish line, harder than they should have had to. And I’ve also seen some creative and deserving candidates fail in their efforts to reach it.

Doctoral education should not be inscrutable. The dissertation mystique—in which one gets hypnotized by the immensity and allure of the doctorate—can easily affect graduate students in any field. Even the most idealistic of them can benefit from a practical approach to their studies. As my little history lesson makes clear, doctoral education in the United States has always brought the idealistic together with the practical. So should graduate students.

*How to Finish and Defend Your Dissertation* offers sound practical lessons that graduate students in any field can apply to their own learning (and I hope too that faculty will use it to inform their graduate teaching), but it's not simply a self-help book. Instead, in the tradition of American higher education, it likewise combines the practical with the scholarly.

In other words, this book offers useful tips, but it also provides the reasoning behind them, and the scholarship that supports those conclusions. Grant and Tomal have mastered a large body of research on the process of doctoral education, from its beginnings (working with an advisor and committee) to its formal conclusion (preparing for the dissertation defense). They wear their learning lightly here (though it's right up to the digital minute), and it firmly undergirds the many recommendations they offer. The abundant background makes their presentation not only more informative but also more interesting—because shouldn't graduate school be interesting too?

You'll learn from this book. Enjoy it too.

Leonard Cassuto, PhD

Professor, Fordham University, New York

Award-winning journalist and author

Columnist for the *Chronicle of Higher Education*



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## PREFACE

**A**ccording to the Council of Graduate Schools, the completion rate of PhD candidates is only 57% (2008), while the completion rate for professional practice doctoral candidates ranges from 40–60%. In other words, only about half of all doctoral students complete their doctoral degree. The objective of this book is to increase your odds of passing your defense, finishing, and getting that degree.

This book has been written to help clear up many of the common questions by doctoral candidates. We believe that many of the existing books on writing the dissertation focus on conventional PhD degree programs, without taking into consideration the realities of what it takes to complete a doctorate while working as a professional. This book is specific to the professional practice doctorate. If you are a professional juggling work, your personal life, and academics all at the same time, this book is for you.

The term “professional practice” doctorate may not be on your radar. This term is used to describe degree programs aimed at disciplines that are profession specific. There continues to be an influx of reputable, useful doctoral degree programs designed to meet the needs of professionals in the fields of education, business, human services, psychology, social work, education, and the health professions. For example if you

are a social worker earning a PhD or a DSW in the field, it is more likely that you are studying for a professional practice degree than a research doctorate. If you are an educator in an EdD program, you probably chose that degree over the PhD because of its more practical nature.

The professional practice doctorate graduate is more likely to be employed than a graduate from a conventional, research-intensive PhD program. It remains tougher to get a job with a PhD in history than a PsyD. Part of the reason for this is that many of you are already employed in your field while working on your doctorate. You are most likely seeking this degree to expand your practical knowledge in the field, to learn how to use research within the context of your work environment, and as a way to advance your employment status within the profession. Enrollment in these programs continues to grow (with good reason), and program offerings are rapidly expanding to the online and for-profit world.

This book is a valuable resource for all doctoral candidates who wish to learn strategies to assist them in finishing their dissertation and passing their doctoral dissertation defense. The final push to complete the dissertation is often an uncertain and emotionally laden event for doctoral candidates. Concurrently the doctoral defense is one of the most grueling and anxiety-ridden experiences of a doctoral candidate. Any strategies a person can gather to accomplish these challenges are essential.

Candidates often have invested significant resources—money, time, career sacrifice, and emotions—and failing to finish the terminal degree can be devastating. Conventional PhD programs rarely ever have a doctoral candidate fail the defense. However our experiences indicate that the same is not true of professional practice doctorates. This book will help doctoral candidates hone their skills and gain an edge during the end stages of the doctorate in order to complete the dissertation and successfully pass the doctoral defense.

Not only is this book good for the doctoral candidates, but the text can be a resource for all people involved in the university doctoral process—faculty, administration, and staff. It provides examples that can assist the entire doctoral program in better administering the doctoral dissertation process and helping support candidates.

We believe that this book will answer many of the questions that often confront doctoral candidates and the doctoral administrative team. Read each chapter and apply the concepts, principles, and strategies to your own situation, and we hope the book will provide the needed edge to have a successful dissertation and defense.

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

**M**y coauthor (Dan Tomal) and I agreed that I would write the acknowledgment page. Like a good coach, he's setting his trainee off and running on her own. So, here we go.

Writing this book was very much like writing a second dissertation. I suppose it is similar to training for a marathon, but to be honest, that's not something I am even remotely interested in accomplishing in my life. Dan hasn't run one either. But the hard work, dedication, persistence, and support needed for both of these tasks are identical and they are best accomplished with some help.

I'd like to first thank Dan Tomal. Dan popped in to my office one day in the fall of 2012 and presented a fully developed book proposal on how to finish and defend the dissertation. He found a way to highlight and share the work and practice I was already doing at Concordia University Chicago and graciously asked me to write with him. I am forever indebted to the incredible support and guidance he gave me throughout this project.

Special acknowledgments must be made to a few other groups of people who have influenced my thinking and my ability to write this book. As an interdisciplinary junior faculty member in my first job post-PhD, many people have taken me under their wing and taught me



more than a thing or two. Art Safer, Kathy Hollywood, Donna Blaess, Kate Green, and Claudia Santin are amazing colleagues who have been incredibly warm, kind, and forthcoming in sharing their experience and knowledge in dissertation management with me. They probably could have written this book in their sleep or while on the road working with and teaching doctoral candidates. Thank you for your collective wisdom and warm support of my development.

I would like to extend many thanks to Chris Golde at Stanford University for her incredibly useful feedback and suggestions on the conceptualization of this book, as well as her personal support of me as a new writer. A big thank you to Lenny Cassuto for sharing his thoughts about the book in the foreword, and for validating the work we are trying to accomplish for professional practice doctoral students across America.

A number of well-respected authors and researchers provided support and permissions to include their work in this text such as Barbara Lovitts, Donna Blaess, Tony Onwuenbuzie, Nancy Leech, Penny Beile, Dave Boote, Hilton Obenzinger, Mary Dee Spillett, Kathleen Moisiwicz, Robert Pollard, and Carol Mullen. We thank each one of you for your contributions and influential works. We would also like to extend gratitude to the many people who endorsed this book and provided insight for this project.

Dr. Juan Tito Vives Jr. pleaded for me to be his dissertation chair well before I felt I was ready for the task. He saw something in me that I had not articulated as a skill I could pass on to others. This book is written for doctoral candidates who may get stuck in “ABD-land” for a multitude of reasons, like Tito and others associated with our Concordia University Chicago partners: the Center for Integrated Teacher Education in Brooklyn, New York, the Ohio Association of Elementary School Administrators, Sports Management Worldwide, and the Confederation of Oregon School Administrators.

No acknowledgment of a book on completing the dissertation would be sufficient without recognizing those who helped me in my own journey. My dissertation committee members, Jim Marley, Susan Grossman, and Stan McCracken, remain inscribed on my medal of dissertation completion. Additionally, my husband and two boys continue to be my biggest supporters, and I could not have completed my dissertation or this book without them.

I'd also like to thank Mary Evelyn César and Susan Webb for their editorial support and Rowman & Littlefield for taking me on as an author for my first book.

But enough about all that. Let's get to work. The finish line is in sight!

~Cynthia Grant

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## INTRODUCTION

**T**here are several objectives for each chapter on how to finish the dissertation, as well as the tools required to conduct and pass a dissertation defense. Each chapter concludes with a summary and several exercise and discussion questions that can help guide the candidate to the finish line.

The first chapter sets the stage for the dissertation experience by comparing it to running a marathon. It provides statistical information related to doctoral completion, and issues that help or hinder the process. It presents the five major reasons why professional practice defenses fail and strategies to avoid these pitfalls. Other topics include handling the stress of the dissertation, responding to committee feedback, and developing good time management skills that can help achieve a successful outcome.

Chapter 2 covers how to build relationships between the candidate and committee members. Topics include candidate-committee relationships, the relationship between the chairperson and candidate, avoiding psychological land mines, and the importance of building intellectual communities of support within a doctoral program.

Chapter 3 covers how to refine the dissertation proposal for the final manuscript. This is an important chapter that helps to explain the components of the final manuscript and expectations of the dissertation.

Topics include the content and structure of the manuscript, key points needed for Chapters 1, 2, and 3 of the dissertation, and articulating the limitations and delimitations of a study. It also presents how the dissertation will be evaluated by the committee according to the *American Association of University of Professors'* guidelines.

Chapter 4 covers how to present the results and discussion of the final manuscript. The chapter is organized based on analysis techniques: quantitative analysis and reporting quantitative results; qualitative analysis and reporting qualitative findings; mixed methods data analysis techniques and reporting mixed methods results. The remainder of the chapter is dedicated to preparing a well-written discussion chapter and the appendices of the final manuscript.

The next chapter presents the use of cloud-based virtual communities in the dissertation process. This chapter is geared toward faculty and administration working with doctoral candidates. Topics include the challenge of dissertation management, an explanation of a cloud, steps to implement a private cloud community in higher education, and how to build a virtual cloud community for doctoral candidates and faculty.

Chapter 6 covers how to prepare for the final defense presentation. Topics in this chapter include the countdown to the dissertation defense, preparing for the dissertation defense, putting together the dissertation defense presentation, how to present data, and acknowledging limitations of the dissertation. The conclusion of this chapter includes tips on questions to anticipate from the dissertation committee during the defense.

Chapter 7 covers the topic of how to improve communications skills in relation to the dissertation experience. Areas include active listening, verbal and nonverbal communications, interpersonal relations, and communication styles. Extensive strategies and examples are provided to help candidates learn and apply these skills with committee members. Other areas of the chapter address theories, principles, and strategies of motivation.

Chapter 8 presents the ins and outs of the dissertation defense. Topics include planning for the defense, understanding and applying stress management techniques, how to give an effective presentation, intellectual conflict management, and how to pass the dissertation defense. Emphasis is placed on what the candidate needs to do to succeed. Several practical strategies and situations are presented.

Chapter 9 is an essential topic of how to edit and format the final dissertation manuscript. This chapter also covers what to do if you fail a defense. Topics include developing a self-reflection analysis, evaluating the dissertation to make necessary edits and revisions, and completing it. Like the other chapters, several discussion questions and exercises are provided to help apply the information to your own situation.

Chapter 10 is the last chapter in the book and covers the area of publishing and publicly presenting the dissertation. Content in this chapter includes procedures for dissertation copyrighting, carving out journal articles from the dissertation, locating conferences to present your dissertation, and closing the chapter on the doctoral journey.

The epilogue includes an invaluable list of contributors who have given their advice and wisdom for candidates finishing and completing a professional practice dissertation. The contributors represent a variety of disciplines from various institutions across the country and abroad. They provide advice based upon their own experience in finishing their doctoral degrees as well as their experiences as a dissertation chairperson.

At the end of the book, in the appendices, there are several helpful resources, including websites, self-assessment instruments, and dissertation guidelines.

## FEATURES OF THE BOOK

One of the biggest attractions of this book is discussion of the use of *cloud-based virtual communities* and technology in relation to the dissertation. Other main features include practical, to-the-point examples, descriptions, and guidance on how to complete and defend a dissertation. There are also several illustrations and examples of how administrators and faculty can support online and ground-based doctoral students in the dissertation process. A number of the chapters incorporate the psychological and emotional resiliency required of the professional practice candidate in order to finish the dissertation.

Another valuable feature of the book is the incorporation of many interpersonal communications and psychological strategies and skills required to interact with defense committee members during the actual doctoral defense. These strategies are provided in a straightforward and



practical manner, and are rooted in the psychological literature. The topics in this book are useful for any doctoral candidate who desires to increase his or her chances in finishing and passing the dissertation defense.

Other topics of this book include:

- practical checklists and tips to improve each chapter of the final manuscript
- guidance on how to prepare and present the dissertation defense
- strategies to manage intellectual conflict during the defense meeting
- group dynamics related to working with the dissertation committee
- techniques in overcoming emotional barriers to dissertation completion
- examples of formatting and editing the final manuscript
- techniques for publishing and presenting the dissertation beyond the defense
- examples of how to handle stress and keep yourself motivated

This book also contains a rich source of reference materials so that candidates can apply the concepts and strategies for finishing and passing the doctoral dissertation, and then move on to publishing and presenting dissertation research. Among these materials are a dissertation completion self-assessment, potential organizations to submit a proposal for presentation, and advice on how to prepare journal articles from the dissertation.



# THE REALITIES OF WHAT IT TAKES TO FINISH YOUR DISSERTATION

## OBJECTIVES

**A**t the conclusion of this chapter you will be able to:

1. Recognize the statistical realities of completing the doctorate.
2. Understand the way a dissertation compares to running a marathon.
3. Know the five major reasons why defenses fail.
4. Understand what it takes to finish the professional practice doctorate.
5. Define issues that can help or hinder dissertation completion.

## THE STATISTICS OF DOCTORAL COMPLETION

Let's start with the numbers. The Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) has conducted the *Ph.D. Completion Project* for over a decade. Researchers have been tracking not only completion rates, but also attrition rates year by year across disciplines among those who are in a doctoral program. By far the most common statistic reported is that 57% of doctoral candidates finish their degree within a decade (Council of

Graduate Schools 2008). Statistically speaking, engineering candidates are the most likely to drop out of the doctoral program by year three at a rate of 20.2%. On the other hand, this same group of candidates are also the most likely to finish within three years at a rate faster than any other discipline—7.1% graduate within three years.

A quick rundown of the numbers by discipline show that after ten years, 54.4% of engineering candidates have completed their doctoral degree, 63.8% of candidates in the life sciences will graduate, 54.7% of math and physical sciences candidates graduate, 55.7% of social science candidates, and 49.1% of humanities candidates will complete their degree within 10 years. Not bad odds in most cases.

The *Council of Graduate Schools* also tracks completion rates based on gender, ethnicity, and international status. International candidates, men, and whites complete their graduate education faster than U.S. candidates, women, and minorities. These facts hold true regardless of one's discipline of study. For example, in the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields, 62% of the male students complete their doctoral degree in 10 years, whereas the female degree completion rate is 54%. On the other hand, females in humanities and social sciences have a higher completion rate than males (Bell 2009).

The median *time-to-degree* (a term that includes the time from initial enrollment in a program until graduation) is 7.7 years across all factors (Council of Graduate Schools 2008). Some researchers have found that individuals who complete their doctorates in a cohort design program have shorter times-to-degree than participants in a traditional doctoral program design. Methodology makes a difference as well. EdD candidates have shorter times-to-degree than PhD recipients when they complete a qualitative dissertation, while PhD recipients finish faster when they use a quantitative approach (Tierce 2008).

As one might expect, *degree completion rates* vary widely across disciplines. Only 24% of biomedical and behavioral science doctoral candidates who start a doctoral program finish (Pion 2001) compared to 67% of humanities and social science degree seekers (Bowen and Rudenstine 1992). Attrition rates in distance programs are consistently 10–20% higher than residential PhD programs (Rovai 2002).

A significant flaw exists in the story of these numbers. Data drawn for most of these reports comes from the National Science Founda-

tion *Survey of Earned Doctorates*, a survey completed by 93% of all people who complete a PhD in America (2012). That's right—PhD completers only, and only these specific categories of study, as shown in Figure 1.1.

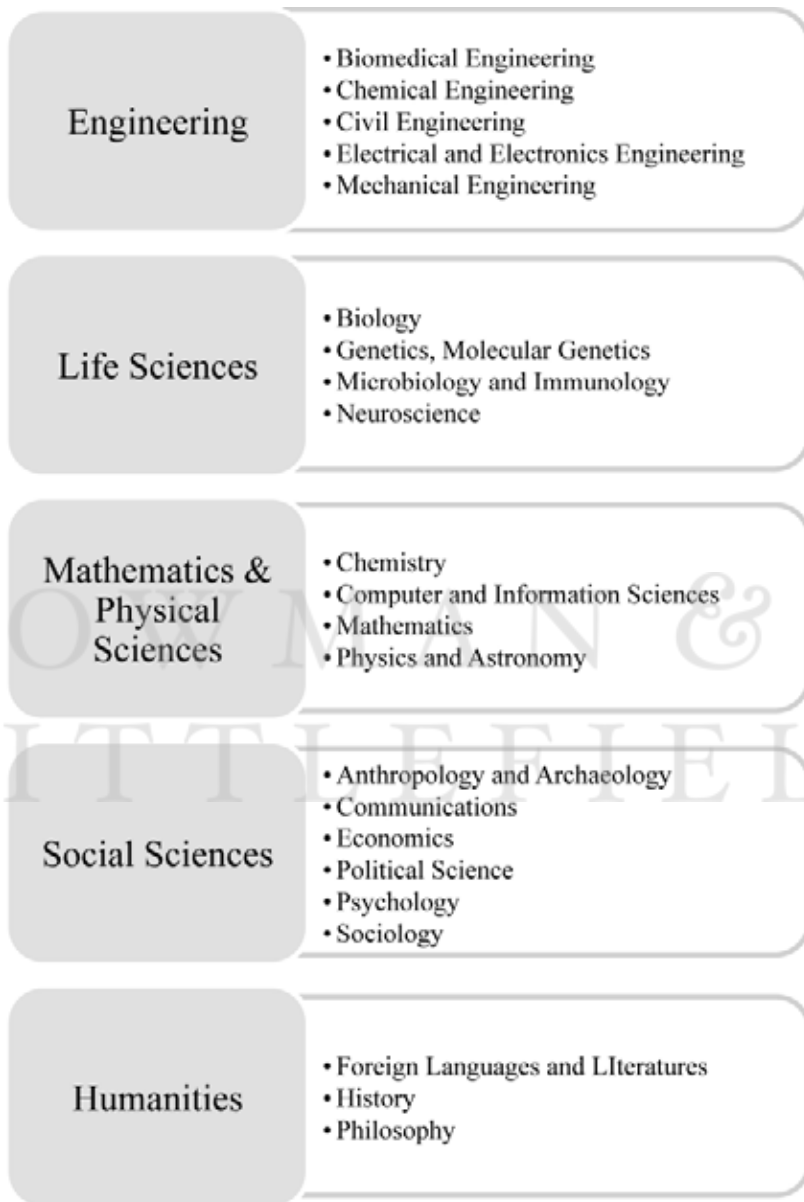
Conspicuously absent from the survey are those who earn a degree in a professional discipline. A conventional (or traditional) PhD is aimed at research and teaching. On the other hand, demand is increasing for terminal degrees that classify as *professional practice doctorates* intended mainly for the practical application of theory to one's field.

Professional practice doctorates were first offered in the United States in 1921. Examples of these alternative terminal degrees include the DBA (business), PsyD (psychology), EdD (education), DSW (social work), DNP (nursing), and DPT (physical therapy), as shown in Figure 1.2. These professions also offer a PhD. Yet data from degrees tied to professional practice are routinely excluded from the national datasets.

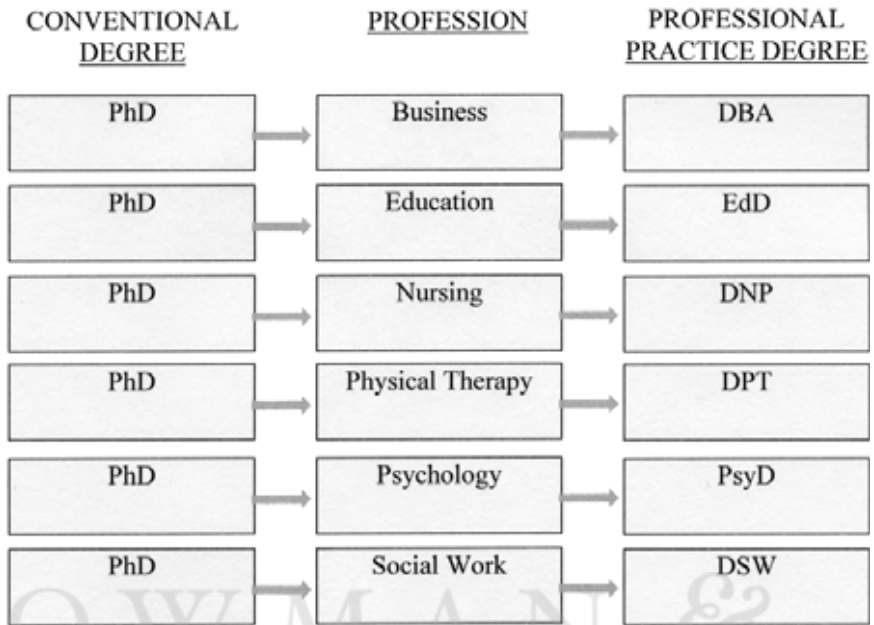
Professional practice doctoral dissertations are typically completed in the workplace or professional field. Candidates in these programs often work full-time, and are rarely in residence during the pursuit of their degree. They may study part-time or at a distance while juggling other life, work, and familial responsibilities. Most do not usually have the close-knit relationship with faculty members typical with a conventional, residential PhD candidate and his or her chairperson.

Completion rates for professional doctorates are difficult to gather, especially given the expansion of degree programs offered by for-profit and online institutions. One study mentioned that professional degree programs have less than a 40% completion rate (Kohun, Ali, and DeLorenzo 2004). Other researchers show completion rates for professional doctorates to be in a similar range of conventional PhD programs, at 40–60% (Bair and Haworth 1999).

It has been reported that, in practice, the professional practice doctorate is “nearly indistinguishable” from the conventional PhD (Servage 2009, p. 769). On the other hand, discussion among hiring committees and those seeking employment in academia or research have reported disparities and differences in regard to the degree. Regardless of one's opinion of the status of the doctoral degree earned, these well-established terminal degree programs continue to show rapid growth in enrollment and draw many working professionals.



**Figure 1.1. Survey of Earned Doctorates Discipline Categories**



**Figure 1.2. Sample Terminal Degrees by Profession**

### Why Candidates Drop Out

It is been said that too many people who start a doctoral program do not finish. Much research has been done to determine the reasons why candidates do not complete the dissertation (D'Andrea 2002; Gardner 2008; Lovitts 2001). Special attention is needed to address the realities and challenges specific to the pursuit of a professional practice doctorate.

Completing a dissertation is hard work. It requires tremendous time, effort, expense, and persistence. Nationally, 43% of PhD doctoral candidates across all disciplines do not move past ABD status. No data are available to report completion rates of candidates in professional practice doctoral programs.

Being a graduate student is a very structured, organized process. There are deadlines and course criteria in a syllabus that helps keep students on track in their course work. But all who pursue a doctorate will begin to step away from being a student and transition into being

a *doctoral candidate*. This is part of the transition to becoming an academic scholar and a producer of knowledge. It can be a very stressful experience.

The *dissertation process* has no predetermined deadlines or finite structure. Although some chairpersons will give guidelines for when work can be turned in for review, each candidate must establish his or her own deadlines and organization of content relative to his or her topic. There are no assigned readings or formal discussions of others telling a candidate exactly what to do. The ambiguity of this unstructured task can create quite a bit of worry and uncertainty.

Writing the dissertation is a large, independent project with many components. It is an original scholarly piece of work that is highly personal, and the undertaking is often quite a lonely experience. In most cases, the professional practice candidate will decide on the topic, the theoretical framework, the methodological plan, as well as the desired timeline for completion. The ability of a doctoral candidate to make these decisions is a hallmark of the development of a scholar.

However, this independence can be very intimidating and intellectually isolating or overwhelming for some people. The sheer length of the dissertation as well as the fact that it is a project completed by only one person can be an overpowering reality, but one that is very much worth pursuing.

Each person who begins a doctoral program enters his or her program of study with the expectation that he or she will finish. Like a marriage, no one makes vows and promises to love and respect one another with the intention of one day filing for divorce, although statistically speaking this is often the case. This challenging process requires intellectual, emotional, psychological, financial, and personal resources and abilities.

The reasons for not completing a doctoral program are diverse. The financial requirements of pursuing a doctoral degree may be too great. The lure of a promising job at the master's level may no longer necessitate the completion of a terminal degree. The lack of a strong mentor may lead one to drop out due to the absence of academic support. However, faculty and dissertation chairpersons know the biggest challenge for candidates in a doctoral program is the actual work required to complete and defend the dissertation.

The purpose of this book is to help those who want to achieve success at completing the doctoral degree overcome the barriers to completion and move into the 57% category. It would be terrific if those completion rates would go up, and if dissertation committee members could follow guidelines in this book to help increase program completion rates at their institution. To help achieve this goal, a discussion of the reasons why some people fail to complete the doctorate is warranted to better understanding the experience of non-completers.

### **The Challenge of ABD Status**

All candidates have had some training to complete the dissertation. The completion of rigorous, stimulating course work in one's discipline and the comprehensive exam has allowed the candidate to reach a feeling of accomplishment with ABD status. *ABD*, *all but dissertation*, (which is referred to tongue in cheek as "all but done") signifies that a remarkable milestone has already been reached. In most cases, course work related to the doctoral program of study is finished. Faculty connections for scholarship and mentoring are established, and there should be a peer group in place for collegial support and encouragement in the process.

Aside from the task of being admitted to a doctoral program, completing the dissertation is considered the most difficult part of earning a doctoral degree. It also takes the longest amount of time, and has the least amount of direction or structure. Rudestam and Newton (2001) report the average amount of time to write a dissertation is two years across all disciplines. Yet no two programs are alike, and no two dissertation chairpersons want the dissertation written in the same way. Completing the dissertation is a distinctive, novel endeavor for each person that must be accomplished in order to advance from ABD status.

### **RUNNING THE DISSERTATION MARATHON**

Reaching ABD status is a mixed bag—both a tremendous relief and an overwhelming reality of all that lies ahead. Consider all that has occurred prior to being designated as an ABD as training for the



*dissertation marathon*. Completing the dissertation is similar to running a marathon for the first time. A small percentage of the American population has run this race before. The most recent United States Census Bureau data report available (2012) reveals only 1.2% of the population hold a PhD, and 1.9% have earned a professional degree (EdD, DBA, DVM, MD, JD, etc.). But this race, this marathon, is unique to each candidate.

Unlike a marathon course designed by race organizers, professional practice doctoral candidates must chart their own course. It can be a long, arduous one, with incredibly rewarding experiences along the way. If a candidate treats a marathon like a sprint, he or she will tucker out and will quit before reaching the halfway mark, missing out on the full experience of the race. Completing a dissertation requires training, pacing, and hydration along the way in order to reach the finish line. There are many pit stops and crowds cheering for each runner along the way.

The racecourse closes a set amount of time after starting. Most universities require doctoral candidates to complete their degree within 10 years of beginning a program. This common timeline for degree completion is consistent with the statistical picture of time-to-degree and program completion data determined by the Council for Graduate Schools. There may be aches, pains, and injuries along the way, but finishing one's dissertation can and will be done by approximately 57% of those running the race now; hopefully the percentage of finishers will increase for future scholars to come. Like completing a marathon, this huge life accomplishment changes a person's status and identity forever and is an incredibly rewarding experience.

## **What It Takes to Run 26.2 Miles**

It is worth noting that this book is not a substitute for a head coach (i.e., the dissertation chairperson) who has presumably helped condition and train the candidate for the marathon. Instead, this text can be viewed as a trainer stationed at mile marker 20 of the 26.2-mile marathon.

Why *mile marker 20*? Veteran runners will know this answer. Mile marker 20 is the point in a marathon where those who are running their first (or fifteenth or fortieth) race are likely to hit the "wall." When a

runner hits a wall, he or she may feel weak due to a loss of stored energy and excessive fatigue. He or she may slow their pace to a walk. A runner may fear he or she won't make it to the finish line. The same thing can happen with the dissertation.

This book offers guidance on how to stay motivated, how to write up results, make recommendations, and come to conclusions about findings. There are suggestions for how to make it to the finish line and how to successfully defend the dissertation. After the finish line has been crossed, strategies for how to publish and present the dissertation are described.

It is ultimately the doctoral candidate's responsibility to complete the dissertation. This book may help candidates get there. It may also be of assistance to committee members and administrative support staff who have poured heaps of energy and effort into working with a doctoral candidate. The authors assume that readers have already received guidance in research design, methodology, and data analysis. This book is for those who have made it most of the way through the dissertation marathon and are looking to avoid hitting the runner's wall, or to work through it if it's already been hit. Thus the focus in this book is to offer supportive and specific guidance on the home stretch.

Drawing from the available empirical literature on the topic of dissertation completion, this book offers a comprehensive discussion and application of the existing research. Additionally, each chapter incorporates decades and dozens of interdisciplinary dissertation committee experiences by the authors—some of them good, and some of them not so good.

## **THE FIVE MAJOR REASONS WHY DEFENSES FAIL**

It is important to understand that there are times when the dissertation experience does not go well for doctoral candidates. Metaphorically speaking, there are some people who do not finish a marathon despite hard work and training. Let's address these issues first to get them out of the way and then move on toward how to make the final stages of the dissertation experience a good one.

In almost all cases, by the time a dissertation defense presentation is scheduled the work has already been done and the candidate is

literally one step away from crossing the finish line. The committee has reviewed the dissertation, has (presumably) conferred with one another about the readiness of the candidate to present his or her dissertation, and the candidate has the mental acuity and confidence about his or her abilities to defend the work.

Despite a massive majority of *positive outcomes* with the dissertation defense, there are a few situations when it is possible for a candidate to fail the defense. A web forum on the *Chronicle of Higher Education* titled “Failed Dissertation Defense?” has almost 100,000 reads, reflective of the anxiety associated with this task.

There are no empirical studies that describe the underlying reasons why dissertation defenses fail, perhaps due to the small number of occurrences in the field. Anecdotal experience seems to indicate that failed defenses may be more common in professional practice doctoral degree programs. However, most committee members can identify and describe the key reasons why candidates do not pass their final dissertation defense.

Although a candidate’s anxiety will be high at the defense, the confidence in one’s work and collaborative feedback received on earlier drafts of the dissertation should override any doubt. A common practice for most dissertation chairpersons is to schedule the dissertation defense only after the faculty member is confident the candidate will pass the defense. Thus, *candidates are set up to succeed*—not fail—in this stage of the doctoral experience. It’s important to keep that positive thought in the forefront of one’s mind.

As a means of learning from the mistakes of others so that mistakes are not repeated, here are five explanations, in no particular order, for candidates’ failure to successfully defend the dissertation and the “lessons learned” from committee members.

**Reason #1 for a failed defense: The candidate is not ready to defend.** Candidates may push their advisors to defend, in spite of the dissertation chairperson’s belief that *the candidate is not ready*. A candidate may be overly confident and eager to finish the dissertation, perhaps motivated by a job prospect that requires completion of the degree, family pressure to finish, or personal finances. A candidate may think data have been sufficiently analyzed, results thoroughly explained, and may be exasperated by the hundreds of track changes and com-

ments received to date. Sometimes candidates get impatient and reach a point when they say, “I just want to be done already.” Don’t do it.

Going to defense when the dissertation chairperson (or a committee member) does not believe the candidate is ready is a disaster in the making. This is the number one reason for failing a defense discussed among faculty, administration, and candidates who have experienced this epic disappointment. Anguished candidates who believe the committee unjustly failed them have filed lawsuits. Yet to date, no case law has ruled in favor of a doctoral candidate when the advisor warned the candidate ahead of time that they were not ready to defend their dissertation.

In one situation, a candidate e-mailed his dissertation chairperson threatening to go to the dean of the school if the chairperson did not schedule the dissertation defense. The candidate had been offered a leadership position with his employer, which was conditional on finishing his degree. This same candidate informed the dissertation chairperson that he would no longer make revisions to his document. The candidate counted the number of comments and track changes sent by the committee, and reported that he felt the feedback was excessive. The dissertation chairperson was flustered and reported feeling harassed by the doctoral candidate. The chairperson reluctantly scheduled the defense. Needless to say, it did not go well and the candidate did not pass the defense.

*Lesson Learned:*

If the committee (and especially the chairperson) does not believe a candidate is ready to defend, the candidate should not push to hold the dissertation defense. By this stage in the pursuit of a doctorate, the dissertation chairperson knows the strengths and deficits of the dissertation document inside and out.

Don’t for a second think that the committee has not read the materials. When a candidate is ready to defend, the dissertation chairperson will let him or her know. Wait for it.

**Figure 1.3. Lessons Learned**

***Reason #2 for a failed defense: The candidate is not prepared for the defense.*** There have been situations in which candidates do not know how to *answer questions about their own research*. This most

frequently occurs regarding data analysis strategies and results. Candidates must be able to explain results, how results were derived, and statistical or qualitative analysis techniques used to come to conclusions.

It's one thing to be flustered during the defense if a candidate feels caught off guard by a question, or struggles to answer a complicated request. This type of response does not typically warrant the failure to pass the defense. But not being able to recall basic procedures and describe one's decision-making process in the research experience is not acceptable.

One candidate used a statistics tutor to assist with advanced data analysis procedures. This is considered an ethical practice at most institutions, as long as the tutor is not doing the work for the candidate. However this candidate brought her tutor to the final public dissertation defense. When questioned on the reason for choosing a particular statistical test, the candidate asked the committee if her tutor could answer the question on her behalf. Because of this misstep, the candidate did not demonstrate the ability to defend her work, perhaps because it was not her own. The final defense is not the time to bluff or skirt one's knowledge base about the research. Jeff Horowitz (2011) has reported the same phenomenon about running—there's no way to way fake a marathon.

**Lesson Learned:**

It is possible to anticipate many of the questions the committee will ask (see Chapter 6 for more details). Be prepared. Candidates must be ready to answer questions about all aspects of the research study, what has been written to date, and to explain decision making and thinking behind the analysis.

**Figure 1.4. Lessons Learned**

***Reason #3 for a failed defense: The candidate cannot overcome psychological and emotional barriers to dissertation completion.*** Candidates who fail to reach the dissertation defense in its entirety often fall into this category. But the *psychological hurdles* one must overcome to complete the dissertation are by far the most preventable reasons for failure.

The professional practice doctoral dissertation can be an overwhelming document for some candidates, especially those who do not see the

project as five separate papers, each of a manageable length. There are no external deadlines imposed by a committee. Self-directed learning and intrinsic motivation are some of the psychological keys to successful perseverance in a doctoral program.

Negative thoughts and self-doubt regarding one's ability to accomplish the dissertation can immobilize a doctoral candidate to the point that the document is never completed or ready for the proposal defense. One must overcome the unrealistic desire for the dissertation proposal to be perfect.

A fear of or resistance to committee members' feedback can lead to failure—not the success that one so strongly desires. Rudestam and Newton (2001, p. 180) have written: “Candidates who are willing to invite, insist upon, and manage through, sometimes critical, feedback early in the dissertation process end up not only with superior studies but also with proposals that glide smoothly through almost any knowledgeable reader's hands in the later stages.” Thus candidates must respond to committee feedback throughout the entire dissertation process.

The purpose of committee feedback is to move the candidate closer to dissertation completion. Candidates should *assume positive intent* related to feedback from the committee. There is no value to the committee in a candidate's failure to finish the dissertation after the investment of such extensive time and resources. Both authors have witnessed students work on the dissertation for years and fail to complete a final product. This experience can be very taxing on faculty members who may lose interest and motivation to work with candidates who make little progress from year to year.

Some candidates enjoy being an *eternal student*, and are unable to finish due to fear of the unknown after receiving a terminal degree. In some cases, candidates have been a student their entire lives, bridging the academic world from high school to the pursuit of an undergraduate degree, to graduate school. But at this stage in one's pursuit of the degree, he or she is nearly ready to earn the title of “doctor” to designate an area of specialized expertise in the field.

Most candidates are advised to select a research topic that is an important problem warranting meaningful investigation relevant to the field, that will sustain the candidate's interest over time, and for which they have some *passion*. A word of caution here: it is possible to have too

much passion in one's convictions. This may interfere with successfully defending the dissertation.

One candidate discovered during the course of her dissertation in the field of psychology that she had a history of child abuse, much like her study's subjects. She attempted to sublimate and intellectualize her own history by choosing a highly personal and emotionally laden topic. As such, she refused to respond to the committee's feedback due to how much she personalized her passionate beliefs about the topic. The candidate failed her defense due to her failure to incorporate committee feedback. However, the root cause of this resistance was psychological.

*Lesson Learned:*

Many dissertation committee members will recognize when a candidate is experiencing the emotional toll, anxiety, and stigma of being stuck in ABD status. Instead of focusing on content, writing, and analysis of the dissertation research, be sure your committee is aware of your well-being. Within reason, it is OK to share how you are handling the work-life balance.

Explore potential underlying psychological reasons why you may have difficulty receiving feedback from the committee. Leonard Cassuto appropriately wrote, "Our job is to lead students toward the finish line, but it's also to let them choose their own finish line" (2010).

**Figure 1.5. Lessons Learned**

***Reason #4 for a failed defense: There is conflict among committee members.*** While candidates may or may not be aware of dysfunction among the committee as it is happening, conflict among committee members is a situation for which candidates must be highly attuned. Committee member disagreement is one of the more difficult reasons why candidates fail their dissertation defense. Candidates must pay attention to these nuances as they arise.

Situations that involve *faculty attrition* for reasons such as sabbatical, retirement, research activity, illness—anything that changes the composition of the dissertation committee midstream—will inevitably lead to increased time to complete the dissertation. These situations are unavoidable in academia, and there is little the candidate can do to impact these life events of faculty. Getting a new committee member due to these circumstances does not typically lead to the candidate's failure.

*Interpersonal or professional conflict* among committee members is a more difficult phenomenon. Current candidates and graduates alike whisper of unfortunate situations in which a committee member or the dissertation chairperson had to be removed from the committee due to personal conflict or a personal reaction to the candidate or committee. This unlucky situation has a negative effect on the candidate, as it leads to a setback while the committee is restructured and new perspectives are added to the mix.

Changes in the dissertation committee structure inevitably result in delays of completion of the dissertation. Nevertheless it is better to have a delay and even a last-minute committee member change than for a candidate to fail the defense due to a skirmish among committee members unrelated to the dissertation.

The candidate has more influence and control over a high-conflict situation among committee members than he or she may think. It is true that the dissertation committee chairperson is responsible for coordinating all aspects of the dissertation process, including the defenses. The chairperson is charged with the responsibility to resolve conflict among committee members. This may or may not happen.

When the chairperson is not able to resolve conflicts, or in situations where the chairperson is the source of the conflict, this may require active intervention by the candidate. Candidates who fail to advocate for themselves or who do not communicate committee disagreements in feedback to their dissertation chairperson or department chairperson are at a greater risk of seeing this conflict, posturing, and dysfunction play out during the defense at their own expense.

Unfortunately there are a plethora of examples of conflict among committee members in the annals of doctoral candidate horror stories. Most of these conflicts are addressed outside of the defense so that the committee can come together to support the candidate. Worst-case scenarios involve a committee member's use of displaced conflicts with another committee member on to the doctoral candidate or the candidate's research.

In situations where committee conflict plays out during the defense, the candidate may feel in a helpless position of panic. One candidate had a dissertation chairperson whose reputation with the university (and the committee) had come into question due to ethical concerns



in a situation unrelated to the candidate. The chairperson attempted to shepherd her candidate through the dissertation defense as quickly as possible, perhaps to avoid interacting with other faculty colleagues.

The candidate was acutely aware of the tension among committee members, but was not aware of the background circumstances involving the lack of trust of her chairperson. When the committee reviewed the candidate's final defense document, it was found that there was a change in the data collection procedures that the chairperson had approved without the committee's involvement. This unilateral decision led the committee members to express unanimous concern over the ethics of the data collection procedures. This committee conflict ensnarled the candidate during her defense. As a result, her dissertation required massive revisions prior to final approval.

**Lesson Learned:**

Candidates should take a proactive role with the committee by keeping lines of communication open with all members, including the chairperson. Ask the dissertation chairperson if he or she is keeping the committee apprised of progress and changes in the dissertation. If the chairperson is not doing this, the responsibility falls on the candidate to take ownership of communication between all committee members.

And if the chairperson is the Achilles heel in the group, be sure to copy the entire committee on email communication regarding changes and for confirmation from all members before moving forward.

If a situation reaches a point of no resolution, consider approaching a higher level of authority such as the department chairperson, a Dean, or the doctoral program director to discuss the situation.

**Figure 1.6. Lessons Learned**

**Reason #5 for a failed defense: The candidate runs out of resources (pun intended).** Without a doubt, pursuing a professional practice doctorate is an expensive, time-consuming endeavor that impacts each candidate's personal and professional life. Sometimes the toll on one's health, bank account, family, and job is just too much. There are times when a candidate will need to drop out of a doctoral program prior to the final defense and receipt of the degree. Candidates who fail to complete their doctoral degree when they are so close to finishing the

dissertation present an unacceptable outcome for all and require special attention (and intervention).

Tinto's model of *doctoral persistence* offers a conceptual framework for understanding the personal dynamics associated with doctoral completion. Tinto's (1993) longitudinal research has found that doctoral persistence occurs when doctoral students are integrated into their program, department, or field of study in three areas: *academics*, *financial support*, and *social connections*. This optimal trifecta creates a successful combination of doctoral support, financial support, and social support to the individual doctoral candidate. A lack of resources in any one of these areas can lead to failure for a candidate.

Committees focus too often on the academic side of degree completion while ignoring the financial and social challenges of pursuing a doctorate. Much has been written on the psychological challenges of pursuing a doctorate (see Lovitts 2001), the cultural contexts and structures that contribute to attrition (see Gardner 2008), as well as what are considered to be valid professional and personal reasons why a candidate may leave a doctoral program (Council of Graduate Schools 2004). But it was Lovitts's influential research finding that has taken the severity of this situation one step further when she claimed that doctoral attrition "can ruin individuals' lives" (2001, p. 6). Despite these harsh realities, little information exists to guide faculty on what to do when students run out of resources.

The *cost* of a doctoral education has continued to rise for the past century, while grant monies, assistantships, and scholarships have continued to decline across the disciplines. This is especially a concern for professional practice doctorates, which are much less likely to be grant funded than a conventional PhD degree program. Nevertheless this inverse relationship between cost and doctoral funding has not deterred enrollments. Institutions need to reconsider admission policies and enrollment numbers when funds are limited.

Doctoral candidates are less likely to graduate with student loan debt than those who earn a master's degree, but they borrow considerably more. Forty-eight percent of all doctoral candidates graduate with debt. Longitudinal data reports from the American Council on Education (2005) reveal that the median accumulated debt in federal loans for doctoral candidates was \$44,743 per person in the 2003/2004 academic

year, almost triple the amount of \$14,927 in 1992/1993. This figure does not account for those candidates who take out personal loans or whose employers foot the bill for the pursuit of their degree, nor does it include undergraduate or graduate loans the candidate may have upon entry into the doctoral program. For those candidates who do not have full financial support to pursue their doctorate, this is an extremely expensive degree.

Accommodations for common *familial responsibilities* need to be permitted in doctoral work. Policies should exist to allow opportunities for stepping out of a doctoral program for personal reasons such as marriage, childbirth, illness, and caring for aging or sick family members. Similarly a strong culture of community needs to be established within a department so that faculty are cognizant of relevant personal issues that impact a candidate's degree completion.

*Doctoral support programs* to maintain connection to doctoral candidates are encouraged. These are especially relevant for ABD candidates who may no longer have regular contact with departmental faculty and classmates after completing course work. Programs could offer a weekly support group, a writing meet-up, or a lunch-and-learn series to offer guidance on topics related to the dissertation experience. Some institutions have implemented successful monthly seminars, webinars, boot camps, or newsletters to provide virtual or face-to-face connections among candidates and faculty.

**Lesson Learned:**

Dissertation committee members must advise the whole student. Be sure the committee is acknowledging not only academic challenges, but personal, financial, and social struggles impacting doctoral completion. As the marathon begins to come to the final miles, increase the amount of support by seeking out doctoral support services, opportunities for collaborative dialogue, and peer mentors.

The committee should not stop supporting the candidate when they are the most exhausted from the process. Seek out energy boosts from personal connection with the department, within one's field of study, and with the dissertation committee.

**Figure 1.7. Lessons Learned**

## WHAT IT TAKES TO FINISH

The *time commitment* required to complete a dissertation could be categorized as no less than immense; Foss and Waters (2007) estimate it to be 1,078 hours. This time commitment will have a significant impact on work productivity for those who are employed while also a doctoral candidate. Candidates pursuing a professional practice-based doctorate will find time management of the dissertation to be especially difficult.

Doctoral persistence requires incredible personal sacrifice and time. Candidates struggle to finish when significant life experiences intervene (i.e., birth, death, job loss, job promotion) (Spaulding and Rockinson-Szapkiw 2012). For all degree programs, the pursuit of a doctorate has an uncanny way of interfering with personal relationships and a candidate's ability to engage in social activities.

Dissertation work is not equivalent across disciplines, methodologies, or institutions. The average *length of a dissertation* in the social sciences and humanities is much longer than in the natural sciences. Quantitative experimental studies tend to be shorter than historical, qualitative studies. A cursory review of the *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses* database reflects a wide range in page length. Some dissertations are as short as 50 pages, whereas others are over 400 pages. Very few programs have minimum and maximum page numbers.

Faculty loathe the question "How long should this chapter be?" Candidates need to beware that the focus of the dissertation is about *quality, not quantity*. For the record, the average page length across disciplines is about 150 to 200 pages. Regardless, this is no small feat and is unlike anything a candidate has ever written before. There's no way around the fact that it will take much time, energy, and personal sacrifice to complete the dissertation.

### What the Dissertation Is (and Isn't)

It's important to keep the dissertation in perspective in terms of what it is and what it isn't. As previously described, the dissertation is like a marathon, not a sprint. Be very careful to treat it as such. Candidates need to pace themselves, and get nourishment and support along the way. Don't expect to finish the race quickly. Sprinting may actually

produce an inferior product and limit the research data collection strategy. Everyone runs a marathon at her or his own pace. The goal here is to finish. A common statement among those teaching and supervising doctoral work is “The best dissertation is a done dissertation.” So true.

The dissertation is not a masterpiece or a test of one’s intelligence. It is not going to change or save the world and it is not intended to be perfect. In fact, a quest for perfection will most certainly slow down the completion of the work.

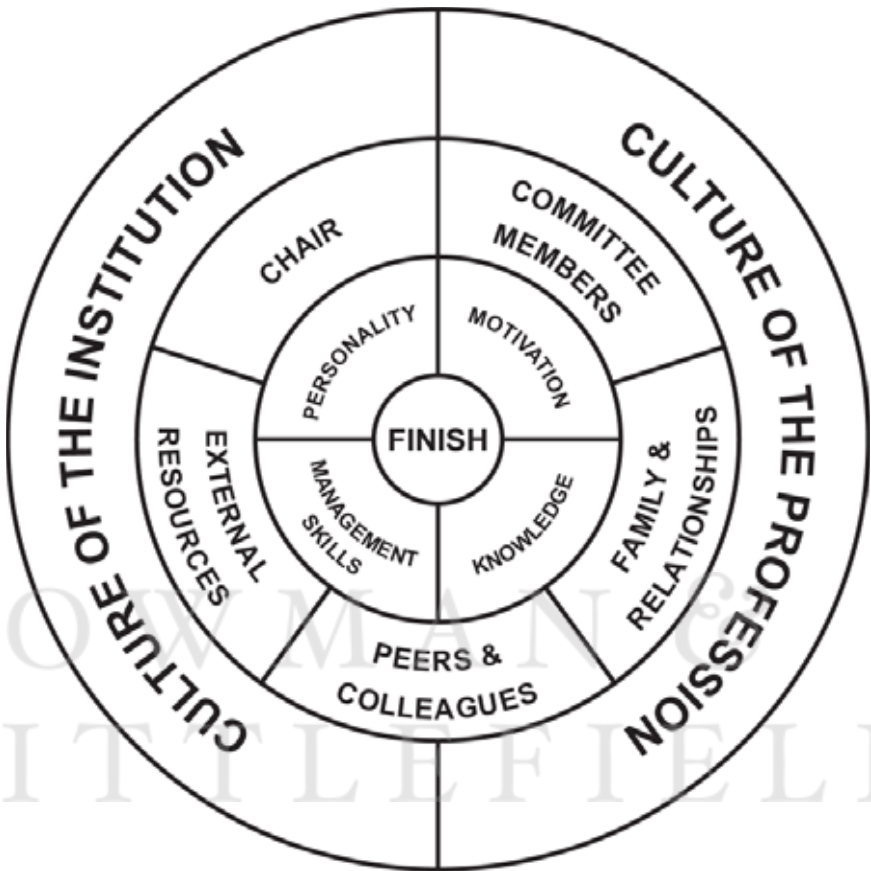
The emphasis on this experience is the *dissertation process*. Learning to think analytically, synthesizing complicated information, writing efficiently and eloquently, and organizing one’s time are skills that will serve the doctoral candidate well regardless of the career that follows. For those who choose to pursue a career in academia, the systems of support, research strategies, work schedules, and writing techniques that help candidates complete the dissertation will likely transfer to the ability to write books, articles, and lectures for many years to come.

A dissertation is the medal granted at the end of the marathon to earn a doctoral degree. It is a doctoral-level piece of writing and research that contributes to one’s field of study. It is indicative of expertise in the topic area and serves as a new starting line for the launch of a candidate’s postdoctoral career. It is a reflection of the dissertation committee’s mentoring, as their names are forever inscribed on the medal as well. The dissertation represents the first piece of work in one’s future career as a doctoral-degree-holding scholar.

### **Issues That Can Help or Hinder Dissertation Success**

Figure 1.8 illustrates a doctoral dissertation completion model adapted from the seminal work of Dr. Barbara Lovitts, a noted researcher in the field of the doctoral experience. Blaess and Grant (2011) slightly modified this model to offer a visual depiction of the social, personal, institutional, and cultural factors that can help or hinder completion of the doctoral degree.

The *bullseye* or target in the center is all about getting the dissertation done. But how each candidate gets to that target can be a complicated process that requires a lot of resources and effort.



**Figure 1.8. Doctoral Completion Wheel (Adapted from Lovitts 2001 by Blaess and Grant 2011)**

Immediately surrounding the target are the *individual, personal factors* that most closely impact dissertation completion and success. This includes issues related directly to the candidate such as his or her personality, personal or professional motivation, management skills, and knowledge. Studies of faculty perceptions regarding barriers to dissertation completion among doctoral candidates show that committee members view procrastination, a lack of independence, and unrealistic thinking as key factors that impede completion (D'Andrea 2002).

There is a great need for the candidate to develop independence and to take responsibility for the dissertation rather than depending on the

institution or the dissertation committee to structure the product. Candidates must be able to make decisions, to learn how to make meaning out of data, and to successfully organize their thinking in writing. These factors encompass the necessary skills involved in conducting independent research.

The next circle includes the *psychosocial environment* of the candidate working on the dissertation. The availability of resources, family and personal relationships, as well as peers and colleagues within the department of one's degree program all have an influence on dissertation completion. All candidates benefit from peer support in the dissertation phase.

It is safe to say that the support of peers, colleagues, coworkers, family, and friends can most definitely help or hinder one's progress on the dissertation. Unfortunately sometimes others may not be supportive. Coworkers, friends, a partner, or a colleague may feel *threatened* or intimidated by a candidate's success and progress on the dissertation. In many cases the pursuit of a doctorate has a direct impact on others in terms of the candidate's emotional and physical availability, as well as financial contributions to a household.

In terms of *external factors* in the model, there are hidden costs of pursuing a doctorate. Many families do not fully anticipate the unexpected reality of these expenses. Limited financial resources or loss of income while pursuing a professional practice doctorate can be especially taxing on doctoral candidates with families if the completion of the dissertation appears to be taking longer than expected.

Most candidates pursuing a professional practice doctorate are fully responsible for the costs of their doctoral degree program. Yet even those candidates who receive stipends for tuition and a research assistantship at a tier-one research university are nowhere close to their earning potential. This limited income may continue beyond the degree for those who take a postdoctoral fellowship. The extended time of low earnings can be a tremendous challenge and sacrifice for doctoral candidates and their loved ones.

Undermining comments made to the candidate by others may reflect their personal insecurities. "When are you going to be done?" "Why is it taking so long?" are common sentiments that can be very difficult to hear. Check out *PhDComics.com* for a laugh or two to identify

the shared nature of the doctoral experience—among candidates and among their families.

Sabotage or unintentional insults can keep a candidate from succeeding and may negatively affect relationships. These comments may lead the candidate to question his or her choice to spend so much time and devotion on the dissertation at the expense of other responsibilities and people. Candidates should ask themselves reflective questions regarding whether or not others are helping or hindering the completion of the doctorate. Committee members should be aware of the answers in order to supplement any gaps in support.

- Does the candidate receive emotional support and encouragement from his family and friends?
- Do coworkers and employers value the pursuit of a doctorate?
- Are coworkers complaining about the candidate's decreased investment at work due to the demands of the dissertation?
- Is resentment brewing due to a loss of income and availability within the family?
- Are significant others jealous of the lack of time available due to the dissertation?
- Is there competition to finish (or competition for resources) among doctoral program candidates?
- Are classmates able to offer psychological support to one another within the program department?
- Is there a bifurcation of connection to the program now that each candidate is working independently?
- Does the physical distance from the institution impact the candidate's connection to the field?
- Is the program compatible with the candidate's personal needs and professional goals?

Conscious attentiveness to these factors may help the candidate to see where psychosocial factors may be helping or hurting his or her progress. An exercise at the end of this chapter offers a self-assessment for the candidate to consider.

The outside circle surrounds each candidate and includes the *culture of one's school* where he or she is pursuing a professional practice doctoral degree and the *culture of the profession* for each candidate.



There is much variation in culture in terms of institutions, program delivery methods, and disciplines. Candidates who are pursuing a degree at a research-intensive university on full-tuition scholarship who are simultaneously employed as a research assistant for their dissertation chairperson will have a very different experience than an online candidate in a cohort program who is working full-time and has never physically met his or her chairperson. The cultural experience of each candidate needs to be understood in the context of where one is pursuing a degree. As previously stated, no two doctoral programs are alike.

The Council of Graduate Schools' Ph.D. Completion Project (2008) offers recommended directions and promising practices for institutions and departments to support dissertation completion. *Institution level* suggestions include offering workshops on dissertation writing, academic support groups, dissertation "boot camps," and the importance of training faculty in how to help candidates through to dissertation completion.

At the *department level*, the Council of Graduate Schools recommends discipline-specific tracking of student achievements (or lack thereof) toward dissertation completion. Departments need to monitor and evaluate dissertation progress of candidates to address areas for improvement. Another excellent recommendation is to offer program-specific websites with clear directions and academic resources related to the dissertation to clarify the process for all candidates and dissertation committee members.

Attention to each interconnected layer of this model—social, personal, institutional, and cultural—will best aid program administrators, dissertation committee members, and the doctoral candidate on the multifaceted factors that can help or hinder completion of the professional practice doctoral degree. Candidates are encouraged to complete a self-assessment to take an inventory of how each of these factors may be influencing the final stages of the dissertation experience.

### **The Importance of Addressing Personal Doubts**

Research by Gordon (2003) on the feeling of *ambivalence* tied to the doctoral degree reveals that some candidates experience disillusionment, disappointment, and fear about their own abilities and desire to work as an independent scholar. Furthermore, some candidates have unmet expectations related to their beliefs about what they thought

a doctoral program would entail. The heavy demands of completing a degree, coupled with the uncertainty of employment following graduation, can contribute to one's self-doubt and ambivalence about finishing a doctoral program.

Gordon (2003) and Lovitts (2001) have both reported that questions and *self-doubt* about one's future may arise as the culmination of the doctoral degree approaches. Fatigue, impatience, and struggles with perseverance may be present in this stage of the dissertation process. These doubts can lead candidates to question their professional identity, the chosen topic and area of expertise he or she will be associated with, and the reasons behind pursuing a doctorate in the first place. These are all personal issues to consider, especially if they are presenting as hurdles to dissertation completion.

It is essential to participate in a personal and professional reassessment of the reasons for pursuing a professional practice doctoral degree. Reminding one's self of the reasons for choosing to pursue a doctorate is appropriate. This is a good task to process with the dissertation chairperson, family, and perhaps even with a therapist. It's important for candidates to reconnect with the purpose and goals of earning the doctoral degree.

Many people struggle with both a fear of success and a fear of failure. The *approach-avoidance* behavioral model explains the ambivalence and increased anxiety experienced by some people as they near completion of their degree. Certain candidates desperately want to finish the degree; at the same time, they fear degree completion. These conflicting thoughts can result in decreased motivation and increased procrastination behaviors.

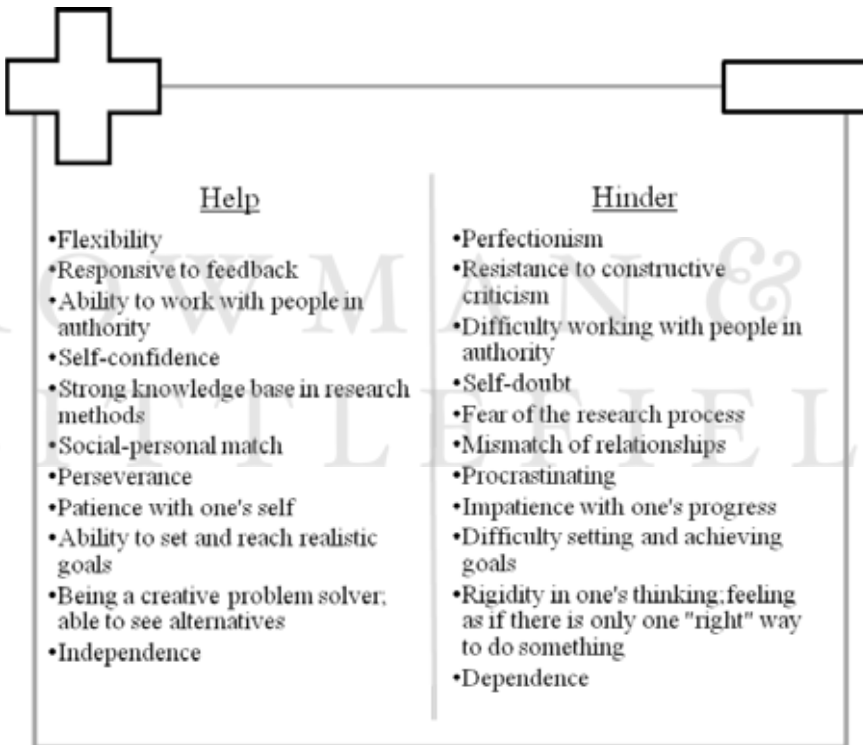
It's important not to let this ambivalence be incapacitating. Do the psychological and emotional work required to figure things out and then move forward. The hope is that these existential, meaningful questions have been answered so that the candidate will continue in the marathon and cross the finish line.

### **Accepting the Realities of Being a Doctoral Candidate**

Perhaps the single most important factor in the entire dissertation completion experience is the candidate himself or herself. What are the personality strengths seen in candidates who finish their degree? What

personality characteristics make it more difficult to finish the dissertation? It's worth spending some time to take an inventory and reflect upon personal characteristics that may impede one's process or help one move forward in the dissertation.

Derived from available research from the Ph.D. Completion Project, Lovitts (2001), Spaulding and Rockinson-Szapkiw (2012), and the authors' experiences, here are some personality traits that have a direct influence on a candidate's successful completion of the dissertation.



**Figure 1.9. Personality Characteristics that Can Help or Hinder Dissertation Completion**

Doctoral candidates may find it helpful to seek out *role models* or mentors who are successful in the academic world and who can model healthy self-care. As previously stated, there are many sacrifices to be made in one's personal, professional, emotional, and social life in exchange for the efforts required in the academic pursuit of a doctorate.

Each of these must be managed on an individualized level in relation to others in the candidate's life.

Take *personal accountability* for the choices made in pursuing a doctorate, as well as any barriers that keep a candidate from finishing. Address each of these in ways that are feasible to overcome personal hurdles. Include family in this process. Moms, dads, partners, or friends in other disciplines may not be familiar with research methods and the intellectual rigor required to complete a dissertation. However that is not a reason to exclude others from progress updates and a discussion of pieces of the dissertation. Involving a spouse, a partner, or a friend in the experience may decrease resentment and tensions that arise due to the lack of time and resources available to them.

## SUMMARY

Candidates must learn to *find balance*—to find their stride and healthy pace in the dissertation marathon. Issues related to time management, organizational skills, and staying motivated during the final miles of the dissertation marathon will be discussed in later chapters, as will discussion of the interaction between candidates and the dissertation committee. Ultimately it is the candidate him or herself that is the biggest variable of all in the successful completion of the dissertation.

## EXERCISES AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Your own case history is the best indicator of your future performance in a doctoral program (or in your involvement as a dissertation committee member). Consider your own educational experience to date. How does the doctoral experience compare to your experiences as an undergraduate or graduate student?
2. Take out three sheets of paper. Label the first "Undergraduate," the second "Graduate School," and the third "Doctoral Program." List three columns on each sheet of paper: academic, personal, and social. Write personality characteristics, people, cultural factors, situations, instructional practices, etc., that may have helped

or hindered your progress in each stage of your academic career. Compare these lists to one another to identify similarities and strengths that can be applied to your current work.

3. Identify two characteristics in each category of the *Dissertation Success Self-Assessment* (Blaess and Grant 2011), found in Appendix F, that are most likely to facilitate your successful completion of the dissertation.
4. Go back through each category and identify the top two characteristics that are most likely to hinder your successful completion of the dissertation.
5. Create a Venn diagram to look for similarities and differences in factors that help or hinder the dissertation experience.
6. Review your Venn diagram with those who are participating in your dissertation marathon with you. Include your dissertation committee, family, close friends, coworkers. Talk through the supports and resources you anticipate you will need to finish the dissertation.
7. Strategize how you can address the barriers to dissertation completion either within yourself or with others.

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## 2

# YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE COMMITTEE AND YOUR CHAIRPERSON

## OBJECTIVES

**A**t the conclusion of this chapter you will be able to:

1. Understand the importance of the relationship between a candidate and the dissertation committee.
2. Recognize various interaction styles of dissertation chairpersons.
3. Understand group dynamics of the dissertation committee.
4. Identify psychological blind spots that interfere with the committee relationship.
5. Create intellectual communities of support beyond the dissertation committee.

## CANDIDATE-COMMITTEE RELATIONSHIPS

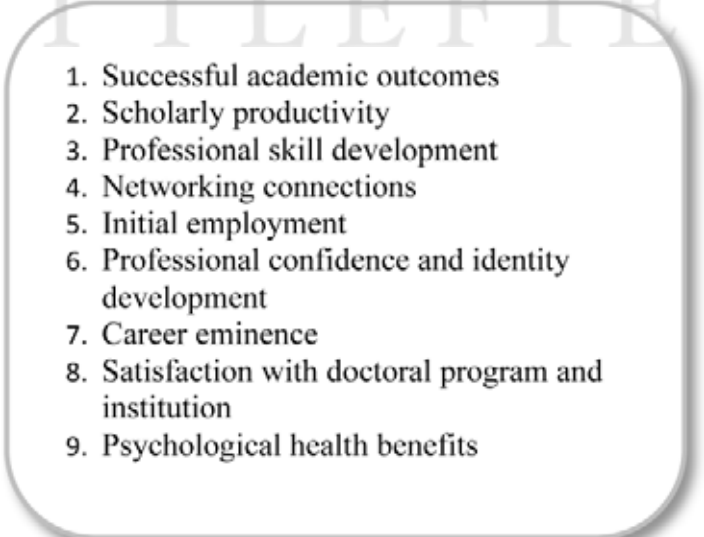
The relationships between a doctoral candidate and his or her committee members (especially the chairperson) are the most powerful learning experiences for the developing scholar. These unique relationships are an essential component of a doctoral candidate's success or failure within a discipline and profession. An effective committee member



will be accessible, respond in a timely manner, offer clear information, expectations, and norms to socialize the candidate to the profession, as well as provide personal and professional support and opportunities.

Johnson (2007) identified nine positive outcomes associated with strong mentoring relationships. These outcomes easily apply to candidate-committee relationships in the experience of completing the doctorate, as shown below. When candidate-committee relationships are healthy, the candidate's dissertation experience will inevitably be a positive one.

But significant cracks in the interpersonal relationship between a candidate and committee members will lead to great angst and delays in dissertation completion. Literature on the negative impact of candidate-committee relationships highlights an unfortunate connection to doctoral attrition, neglect of the candidate, relational conflict, and exploitation. Problems tend to be more prevalent in distance programs when candidates have limited to no face-to-face interaction with the committee. These negative outcomes are most associated with conflictual relationships with the chairperson.

- 
1. Successful academic outcomes
  2. Scholarly productivity
  3. Professional skill development
  4. Networking connections
  5. Initial employment
  6. Professional confidence and identity development
  7. Career eminence
  8. Satisfaction with doctoral program and institution
  9. Psychological health benefits

**Figure 2.1. Positive Outcomes Associated with Strong Candidate-Committee Relationships (Johnson, 2007)**

A lack of clarity of the dissertation process at one's institution and unknown disciplinary cultural expectations are cited as challenges to a candidate's success. Zhao, Golde, and McCormick described how discipline-specific *cultural expectations* "manifest themselves in the policies and practices of doctoral education, for example, how research is funded, and what the dissertation looks like, how a dissertation topic is selected, and how students and faculty interact" (2007, p. 265).

Candidates deserve clear communication and discipline/institution-specific guidance and expectations of how to write a dissertation. Unfortunately candidates are often uncertain of what is expected of them in terms of scholarly writing and statistical analysis, and may struggle with the lack of guidance on the dissertation experience. This information should be provided in the context of the candidate-committee relationship. The absence of these relational-based factors and exchange of information will impede dissertation completion.

When preparing the final manuscript the candidate may want to step back and reflect on the *relationship dynamics* with each committee member. The candidate has already defended the dissertation proposal and has spent a considerable amount of time researching, writing, and preparing the final manuscript. The candidate has seen and felt how the committee functions as a small group and individually. These prior experiences give the candidate insight into the interpersonal characteristics and group dynamics of committee members, which allow him or her to anticipate how these dynamics will impact the final stages of the dissertation.

## THE DISSERTATION COMMITTEE AS A SMALL GROUP

*Group dynamics* exist within each committee structure. The process of selecting a dissertation chairperson and committee and most stages of group development have occurred prior to the topics covered in this text. Yet the experience of managing a small group of three to five members is worth exploring in relation to one's efforts to finish and defend the dissertation.

The candidate is ultimately responsible for the management of his or her dissertation, although the chairperson typically maintains a position of power and control over the candidate's work. In some situations this

power imbalance extends to the group dynamics of the committee as well, which can result in *group conflict*.

The candidate may have involved committee members in drafts and periodic updates on the dissertation progress, whereas in other programs committee members serve an ancillary role on the periphery of the dissertation experience and may not have closely read prior versions of the manuscript. Knowledge and awareness of group dynamics can help the candidate anticipate reactions to the final dissertation manuscript and may even prevent conflict.

Each member of the dissertation committee has a purpose. Professional practice doctoral programs typically designate one person as the chairperson (although occasionally there are two people in this role), one person as the methodologist, and one or more persons serve as a reader or content expert. Yet some committees do not assign roles to members, which can result in *role ambiguity*. Regardless of the group's working style, each person is a vital source of information who offers expertise and support to the candidate.

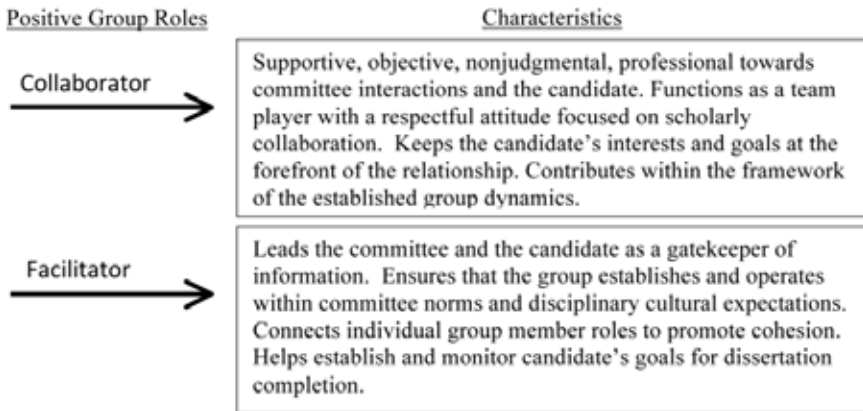
Group politics within academia center on the expertise, image, and existing peer relationships among committee members (Reybold et al. 2012). The individual amount of prior experience serving on dissertation committees at a specific institution also influences the functioning of the group as a whole. These personal and professional issues relate directly to the functional role of individual committee members on the committee. The identification of *negative group roles* (Figure 2.2) might be helpful to label the working efforts of a difficult committee member, as well as the *positive group roles* (Figure 2.3) for a high-functioning committee member.

*Group collaboration* within the dissertation committee should involve a focus on a combined best interest of the candidate. A well-run group will have a facilitator, autonomous group functions, and a sense of connectedness among its members, who have come together with a shared purpose: the candidate's pursuit of the doctorate. There are classic areas of internal group dynamics that take place in all groups, as described in the group therapy literature (see Yalom, 1995, for more details). Figure 2.4 offers categories for what to expect when working with the dissertation committee.

Candidates who have a cohesive dissertation committee with positive group roles can expect to have positive outcomes and a clear course

<u>Negative Group Roles</u>	<u>Characteristics</u>
Dictator →	Assertive, analytical, demanding and rigid; believes he or she is always right. Monopolizes committee. Can be demanding and judgmental of entire committee and/or the candidate.
Procrastinator →	Seems committed, but is always late and needs constant follow up to review work. May exhibit passive-aggressive behavior. Appears to go along with the committee, but then suggests major changes at the last minute.
Abdicator →	Does little work, gives minimal input, and defers to the chairperson. May have limited knowledge of content and research or little investment in the candidate. A follower who may express agreement, but rarely offers opinion.
Aggressor →	Always disagrees. May try to impose his or her ways on others. May seek to expand discussion to tangential topics and ideas that slow down the candidate's progress. Believes candidates learn best by being faced with intellectual challenges. Offers little affirmation or support.
Avoider →	Withdraws from committee to avoid group interaction. Too busy or a lack of interest in doing the work of a committee member. May resent being on the committee or have interpersonal conflict with others. May hold belief that it is not his or her responsibility to provide feedback, but that the candidate should learn things for themselves.
Narcissist →	Views committee as a way to transmit his or her knowledge and beliefs. Insists the feedback he or she provides must be incorporated. Believes his or her opinions have greater weight in the committee. Expresses superiority above others. Calls attention to self at the expense of the candidate.
Utopian →	A do-gooder. Pushes for ideal, unrealistic pursuit of information that goes beyond the capabilities or purpose of the dissertation. May masquerade as a high intellectual, yet no one can meet his or her expectations.
Comforter →	Helpful, kind, attentive, and a cheerleader, but may offer little constructive input. May want the candidate to like him or her and/or be unwilling to critique. Offers limited value in advancing the candidate's work, but a strong psychological support to the candidate.

**Figure 2.2. Individual Negative Roles of Dissertation Committee Members.**



**Figure 2.3. Individual Positive Group Roles of Dissertation Committee Members**

for how to prepare the dissertation manuscript and the final defense. Candidates who experience group conflict, a lack of group congruity, or role ambiguity should address these issues with the help of the dissertation chairperson. A department chair or a university administrator may also help to improve challenging group dynamics prior to the defense. If issues are unresolved at the institution, a good therapist can help the candidate think through how to avoid, prepare for, and cope with these dynamics.

The importance of the need for a candidate to take some responsibility for the management of committee group dynamics cannot be understated. Learning to manage the committee (while also managing one's self) is a requisite skill for dissertation success—especially before submitting the final manuscript for review.

## THE DISSERTATION CHAIRPERSON

Working with a dissertation chairperson is one of the most complex pedagogical relationships in higher education. Faculty enjoy the stimulation and excitement of dissertation supervision as the candidate blossoms into an independent scholar. In some cases, graduates become known by the name of their dissertation chairperson, and faculty

#### Communication Patterns

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- Attend to verbal and non-verbal communication.
- Helps the candidate to effectively move the group toward its goal.
- Establish acceptable practices, especially for the review of the final manuscript.

#### Cohesiveness

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- A major factor in successful outcomes related to the overall dissertation experience.
- Member's respect for each other and toward the group as a whole makes an open, supportive, and accepting group.

#### Social Control

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- Includes norms, roles, expectations, and status that let a group function effectively, if not always smoothly.

#### Norms

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- Rules of behavior may be tacit or explicit, informal or formal, veiled or overt.
- The candidate seeks out clarifying norms from other group members.

#### Role Expectations

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- Individual committee members perform different functions.
- Task and maintenance roles are defined to help keep the candidate on track
- Individual role congruity aligns with purpose of committee.

#### Status

---

- Behavior within the group is professional and respectful.
- Chairperson often holds highest status and weight.
- Candidate should take notice of in-group ranking of members.
- Willingness to conform to group norms is effected by status.

#### Group Culture

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- Arise from beliefs, customs, and values of its members and the discipline in which the group is set.
- Group culture influences objectives, tasks, interactions, and methods.
- A microcosm of its own embedded within the institution.

**Figure 2.4. Group Dynamics**

transfer academic capital to their candidates in the form of papers and presentations accomplished with their guidance (Burawoy 2005). The reciprocal nature of the relationship between a candidate and his or her dissertation chairperson is often a source of pride in a faculty member's academic career.

In an ideal world, a candidate is able to select a “perfect” dissertation chairperson with whom he or she has had a prior relationship. The perfect chairperson will be someone who has time available, a temperament and personality that matches the candidate's needs, expertise in the topic of inquiry (and methodology), and is genuinely interested in working with the candidate as he or she develops into an independent scholar. The reality of the dissertation chairperson matching process, like most things in life, is that there is no such thing as perfect.

Professional practice doctorate candidates may not have had a prior relationship with their chairperson before the dissertation committee is formed. Some will experience a mismatch in terms of their working styles. The candidate and his or her chairperson can heed these conflicts by establishing clear expectations and guidelines for the chairperson-candidate relationship.

- The chairperson and the candidate have *complementary working styles*.
  - Agree on feedback needs (amount, type, and timeline)
  - Confirm communication interactions
  - Determine chairperson's availability
- The chairperson provides *advocacy* for the candidate with other committee members.
  - Establish agreement in the working relationship
  - Determine timeliness of feedback
  - Clarify role expectations
- The chairperson and the candidate develop a *backwards timeline*.
  - Mark milestones and due dates
  - Align timeline with the institution
  - Determine feasible timeline given other responsibilities of candidate and chairperson
  - Keep momentum going toward dissertation completion

**Figure 2.5. Recommendations for a Successful Chairperson-Candidate Relationship (Storms, Prada, and Donahue 2011)**

Interaction styles between the dissertation chairperson and the candidate will greatly impact dissertation completion. Dissertation chairpersons can be categorized into different types: the *domineering/egocentric* or *inclusive/participative* (Grover and Malhotra 2003). Within each of these types, the chairperson may be hands-on or hands-off.

The *hands-on* chairperson who is *domineering and egocentric* may have great knowledge about the topic of inquiry and may be in a position of power and prominence within the field. This person may schedule frequent lengthy meetings in which they dominate the conversation and offer limited opportunity for the candidate to express his or her own intellectual views. This chairperson may micromanage the dissertation experience, be overly critical with unrealistically high expectations that make it very difficult for the candidate to move forward unless he or she conforms to the demands of the chairperson.

If this same interaction style is demonstrated by a dissertation chairperson who is *hands-off*, the candidate may have little to no contact with the chairperson. This chairperson may offer status or notoriety to the candidate based on affiliation. However, this type of chairperson is of little help to the candidate's actual growth and development as an independent scholar; the candidate is left on his or her own to figure things out that will hopefully meet the expectations of the chairperson.

The *inclusive and participative* dissertation chairperson who is *hands-on* will call for frequent meetings. The candidate and the chairperson may enjoy much scholarly conversation and feel a strong connection in their working relationship. Yet the relationship can become tedious if the lengthy conversations offer no conclusions or if the chairperson is living vicariously through the candidate. In the worst-case scenario, these interactions send the candidate down a rabbit hole seeking an endless supply of information, resulting in paralysis as the candidate feels a great sense of dread that the dissertation will never be completed.

A *hands-off* approach to inclusive and participative interaction styles between the dissertation chairperson and the candidate are another possibility. These relationships offer the same intellectual debate as mentioned above, but the amount of time the dissertation chairperson is available to the candidate is minimal. This lack of time interferes with the candidate's ability to move forward.



An effective dissertation chairperson will have an appropriate, student-centered interaction style that boosts the candidate’s self-confidence, stretches his or her intellectual capacity and critical thinking, and keeps the dissertation research within scope. The dissertation chairperson will know when intervention is needed to provide clarification and focus for a candidate who may be overwhelmed with feedback or revisions. The chairperson will know when to advocate for the candidate in relation to his or her committee.

Dissertation chairpersons serve simultaneous roles of *cheerleader*, *coach*, *counselor*, and *critic* (Spillett and Moisiejewicz 2004). They pro-

<b>SUPPORT FUNCTIONS</b>	<p><u>Cheerleader</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Offers support, time, and access</li> <li>- Trustworthy</li> <li>- Encourages effort</li> <li>- Highlights strengths</li> <li>-</li> </ul>
	<p><u>Counselor</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Identifies and removes psychological barriers</li> <li>- Focuses on dissertation process</li> <li>- Normalizes the dissertation experience</li> <li>- Motivates the candidate</li> </ul>
<b>CHALLENGE FUNCTIONS</b>	<p><u>Coach</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Provides structured, small steps</li> <li>- Connects to the big picture</li> <li>- Provides clear direction</li> <li>- Builds research skills</li> </ul>
	<p><u>Critic</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Provides constructive criticism that energizes the candidate</li> <li>- Develops candidate’s critical thinking skills</li> <li>- Promotes candidate’s sense of ownership and voice</li> <li>- Helps candidate articulate practice purpose of dissertation</li> </ul>

**Figure 2.6. Support and Challenge Functions Played by the Dissertation Chairperson (Adapted with permission from Spillett and Moisiejewicz 2004)**

vide a supportive, strengths-based approach to the candidate's learning that is balanced with intellectual challenge.

They focus on positive steps toward dissertation completion in the context of the profession. They guide the candidate to take small steps in the dissertation marathon, and provide gentle redirection and encouragement as needed. They understand the cultural and professional expectations of the institution and the profession, and mentor candidates in their development. They allow candidates to keep on at a steady pace. They provide the marathon medal (i.e., a doctoral diploma) to their candidates at the finish line.

### **MANAGING THE CANDIDATE'S EXPECTATIONS OF THE DISSERTATION COMMITTEE**

The candidate and the committee are working toward a common goal—to have the candidate complete a high-quality dissertation. Thus it is important for the candidate to be mindful that the dissertation committee has a desire for the candidate to finish and successfully defend the dissertation. Faculty members do not want their time and energy to be lost on the lack of completion of a dissertation or an eternal ABD. Committee members invest great time, intellect, and personal stakes in working with each and every candidate.

Notwithstanding the many strengths of the relationship between a candidate and his or her dissertation committee, there are clear power dynamics at play with the dissertation committee appearing to hold the key to the castle while the candidate stands outside the pearly gates, uncertain how to proceed.

*Power relations* between the dissertation committee and the candidate are described as “imbued by an expectation of independence and autonomy” and “are more complex than simply domination on the part of the supervision and submission on the part of the candidate” (Grant and Graham 1999, p. 77). Yet it is imperative that candidates reconceptualize this power dynamic as one in which he or she has more control, especially as the end of the dissertation experience approaches.

Candidates must not allow the power balance to tilt too far toward the chairperson—especially as the dissertation experience approaches

its final stages. Instead, candidates must take a more active role in the process in understanding what is expected of them and what work needs to be done to successfully finish and defend the dissertation. Here are some suggestions adapted from Grant and Graham (1999):

1. *Be open to challenge and criticism.* Try not to take feedback personally. Candidates who persevere and finish their doctorate often have personal qualities that include resiliency, flexibility, responsiveness, and the ability to integrate new information.
2. *Be mindful of the type of candidate you are.* If a candidate is overly compliant and obedient of the dissertation chair or easily swayed by suggestions, these may be at the expense of one's own development as an independent scholar. Be willing to disagree or challenge feedback with one's own thinking.
3. *Talk with other candidates who have the same chairperson.* Great insights may be gained by conferring with others regarding strategies that have worked (or not worked) in interactions with the dissertation chairperson and his or her expectations.
4. *Increase one's self-management as a researcher.* Maintain project plans, goals, and timelines. Make these skills evident to the dissertation chairperson to clarify one's own sense of agency in the dissertation experience. Do not make excuses related to other life responsibilities. A professional practice doctorate necessitates the ability of a candidate to balance work, health, and family life with academic requirements.
5. *Take a more active role in meetings and interactions with the dissertation chairperson and committee.* Take initiative to schedule regular meetings. Be prepared with a plan for the meeting. Have questions written out ahead of time, ask clarifying questions and for specific guidance where needed.
6. *Be explicit about the feedback needed and desired.* Candidates must communicate to the committee what feedback is needed, how that information needs to be conveyed, when the candidate can expect to receive feedback, and where the strengths and areas for improvement are at this stage in the dissertation.

As candidates prepare for the final defense, now is not the time to be ambiguous or hesitant in the identification and clarification of necessary

revisions to the dissertation manuscript and preparations needed for the final defense. Candidates must take an active role in their relationship with the dissertation committee and management of information in these final stages of dissertation completion.

Keep the discussion of the final manuscript focused on consultation with the chairperson rather than the committee as a whole. Follow the direction of the chairperson regarding the cycle of review of the final manuscript, and one's readiness to defend. Candidates are the ones running the marathon, and they are the ones who will cross the finish line. Cheerleaders and the head coach can't cross it for them.

## **AVOIDING PSYCHOLOGICAL LAND MINES IN THE RACE**

There are five psychological blind spots described by Sills (2004) in regard to the personality characteristics, behavioral patterns, beliefs, and emotions that get in the way of life—specifically in relation to achieving success.

1. A need to be right
2. Feelings of superiority
3. A fear of rejection
4. Creating drama
5. Holding on to rage

Candidates may find themselves experiencing one or all of these psychological barriers while working with dissertation committee members, and will need to raise their self-awareness of these potential land mines. Crose (1990) reports that dissertation candidates “are not warned that it is normal to be crazy during the dissertation process” (p. 117). Perhaps this may feel somewhat true.

The first blind spot (or psychological land mine) to success is *a need to be right*. Individuals who have a desire to be right are productive, perfectionistic, purposeful, and have a passion to know everything. Unfortunately this same group of people may be controlling, may fear shame and humiliation, be argumentative, and require clear, linear expectations to a nonlinear task required to present an original piece of scholarly work.

A need to be right interferes with one's ability to accept constructive criticism from the committee, or may lead a person to be immobilized in responding to edits and revisions. It is expected that a candidate will not be 'right' all the time. Be willing to admit mistakes and accept feedback from the committee. Candidates must not be too hard on themselves and should understand that the dissertation is an experience and an opportunity for intellectual growth.

Another barrier to success is the *feeling of superiority*. Candidates are at risk of presenting an aura of expertise and grandiosity that can be problematic in committee relationships. All dissertation research makes a unique, scholarly contribution. But unrealistically high expectations, underlying narcissism, and a sense of entitlement are not healthy in working relationships with the dissertation committee.

On the one hand, having confidence in one's abilities, feeling empowered, and holding a strong belief in one's accomplishments are very positive traits of a doctoral candidate. The self-esteem that accompanies a sense of superiority fosters achievements. Getting approval and acknowledgment from one's committee is a highly validating experience. Yet candidates need to be open to criticism as well as demonstrate the ability to self-critique their work.

Try not to compete with the committee's knowledge, or compare one's self to others in the doctoral program. Be realistic and honest about one's work. Stop thinking the dissertation is going to change the world; think of this as a brick in the wall of knowledge in one's discipline.

A *fear of rejection* is another blind spot that can debilitate a candidate during the defense. It is impossible for a candidate to avoid the possibility of rejection unless he or she avoids completing the dissertation all together. A person who lives his or her life in fear of rejection is often hesitant to take risks, fears being judged by the committee, and tends to be highly obedient and diligent in response to feedback on the dissertation manuscript. They are often dependent on the chairperson to guide them and may be especially nervous heading into the defense. They ask "what if" questions constantly and do not like to be pushed out of their comfort zone.

There is great cost to the doctoral candidate who is afraid to step away from the security of the dissertation committee and present one's self as an independent scholar. The dissertation is an ideal time to assert one's self; to push past the emotional barrier of fear, and demonstrate one's

intellectual autonomy. Try to control the feelings of doubt and worry by writing them down or answering “what if” questions with a rational response. If the candidate needs to redo his or her work after receiving negative feedback, develop a plan of action and get back to work.

Some candidates *create drama* around the dissertation. Sills (2004) specifically refers to the “drama of the deadline” that adds excitement and anxiety to an experience. Candidates who experience strong emotions around the dissertation experience are often passionate about their work and are highly creative. But they may also sensationalize by exaggerating small events. They may embellish results to find meanings. They may seek out conflict, even in small amounts, to generate heated discussions regarding superfluous details related to the dissertation.

Feelings cannot guide a person’s responses to committee members. One must approach the doctoral experience with intelligence—not just emotions. Do not seek out the attention or interest of others by embellishing a situation or creating tension. Keep these emotions in check. Take time to think things through rather than reacting emotionally or impulsively. Focus on achieving goals independently in a professional manner without drama.

Candidates who *hold on to rage* display a different sort of psychological land mine that gets in the way of dissertation completion. While a little bit of anger is healthy in response to the frustration and intellectual challenge of a defense, the emotion becomes problematic when a candidate regularly feels offended, vulnerable, and is unable to accept criticism. Underlying rage is often a mask for depression, resentment, guilt, or jealousy. Candidates may misinterpret committee comments, hold a grudge, feel they are being treated unfairly, and react as if they are under attack.

Rage often manifests as a fight for justice and can be a good quality. Candidates may hold a desire to right the wrongs of the world by, for example, advocating for one’s subjects of study, or for one’s own needs related to the dissertation. It is highly recommended that candidates who are holding on to rage find ways to forgive past experiences, and not lash out or direct this emotion at the committee. The ability to control anger and let go of feelings of rage can lead to acceptance of the complexities of life and one’s growth as a scholar. This is the biggest blind spot and will require the most self-awareness by the candidate.

## INTELLECTUAL COMMUNITIES OF SUPPORT

As identified on the dissertation completion wheel (Blaess and Grant 2011) in Chapter 1, the completion of a dissertation requires great doctoral persistence and personal sacrifice. The challenges of completing this intellectual endeavor can be compounded by psychosocial deficits such as a lack of support from friends, family, and coworkers; competing demands at work and in one's personal life; and the lack of connection with classmates.

All candidates benefit from peer support in the dissertation phase. This is especially true for working professionals who may have weaker connections and less contact with their dissertation committee than candidates pursuing a conventional PhD in residence. Candidates cannot rely solely on their dissertation chairperson or committee to provide intellectual stimulation. Doctoral candidates can offset this isolation by creating or seeking out *intellectual communities* of support.

Candidates who are in a *cohort-based* program model have an advantage due to the potential for socialization, interaction with peers, and a sense of community (Lovitts 2001). It is easier to establish trust and provide encouragement among members of a cohort who spent time together during their coursework. Candidates should strive to maintain these connections after course work is completed so that they can provide empathy, support, and direction for each step along the road to dissertation completion.

Candidates attending a *distance program* have a disadvantage due to increased feelings of isolation and a low level of interaction with peers (Terrell, Snyder, and Dringus 2009). Yet with the rampant availability of 21st century technologies, candidates can connect via social networking sites such as LinkedIn or Facebook. Candidates at the same institution may want to establish their own blog, Google Plus Hangout, or Wikispaces to collaborate and commiserate about the shared experience of completing the dissertation. The Internet makes it possible to foster feelings of connection and support around the pursuit of a professional practice doctorate.

Faculty and program administrators involved in doctoral work may want to consider ways to support and create doctoral intellectual com-

munities in a collaborative online format by developing a virtual cloud-based community. The use of a *cloud-computing model* for resource management and communication offers an opportunity to link a collection of materials, processes, and resources that can be beneficial to both faculty and candidates (Mell and Grance 2011). Further details on how to build a cloud-based resource database and virtual community of support for doctoral candidates are included in Chapter 5.

Many adults learn best when given the opportunity to collaborate with peers about situations or problems that are related to their own (Freire 1971). This belief is consistent with the principles of andragogy as applied to nontraditional students pursuing a professional practice doctorate. Candidates from the social and behavioral science fields (such as education, psychology, social work, and communications) may be especially interested in the use of small learning communities for support.

Candidates benefit from the *scaffolding* provided within a peer-based doctoral community. Peer mentors can model healthy self-care and dissertation management skills. More experienced peers can explain, encourage, and listen by providing guidance and encouragement regarding their own doctoral experience, perhaps reflecting on their experiences with the same dissertation chairperson. This sharing of experience allows the developing candidate to expand his or her zone of proximal development (Vygotsky 1978).

The scholarly or intellectual community—both within one's department and among peers—plays a key role in the doctoral experience (Golde 2005). Professional practice doctorates in particular benefit from peer support in that doctoral peers will help the candidate develop an understanding of how their dissertation fits contextually into the field of practice. Peers that mirror a candidate's demographics can be especially helpful when there are differences between the candidate and his or her committee members in regard to ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, family status, and age.

A healthy and successful intellectual peer group community offers personal accountability and reflective learning opportunities. These communities allow candidates to respect one another, to listen to different perspectives on a topic, and should offer intellectual motivation to



encourage doctoral persistence. Peer-based doctoral-level intellectual communities should follow these principles, outlined by Mullen (2007, p. 108) and reprinted here with permission:

1. Candidates respect all members and exhibit kindness, tolerance, and understanding but also strive for rigor in their feedback on scholarly writing and research. Importantly, they also participate in fostering a safe learning environment for all group members.
2. Members accept constructive criticism graciously, monitor personal defenses, and internalize the wisdom and advice of their peers. Respecting others does not mean blind conformity or silence; if they have a point of view different from others, they express it without being confrontational.
3. Members actively teach and learn from their peers and motivate one another to stay the course, read vigorously, produce quality work, and prepare for all exams, meetings, and defenses.
4. Candidates share concerns with their major professor that pertain to their work and development or that could impede their academic progress. They are honest and transparent.
5. Candidates avoid gossip and slander and think before speaking about others, and they also steer clear of closed cliques.

Candidates are strongly encouraged to develop *doctoral peer support groups* for dissertation completion if these entities do not exist at their institution. Kiparsky (2007 para. 3) stated, “The only way to finish your dissertation is through forward progress in the face of uncertainty. Fortunately, there is a secret weapon to guide you through the confusion, improve your writing, and help you spend your time wisely. It comes in the form of your peers.”

A doctoral support group or dissertation writing group may lead to faster progress in the doctoral program, increased productivity, and psychological support. Kiparsky recommends that these groups contain no more than three people who are at roughly the same stage in their dissertation experience, whereas others have described groups three times bigger (see Wasburn 2001). The group should require that each member set individual goals for small tasks and meet weekly. It may also be helpful for support group members to trade much-needed services such as peer review, interrater reliability checks, and proofreading.

Peer support in these groups should focus on encouraging, non-threatening feedback that offers specific, descriptive guidance (Lee and Golde n.d.). Watch for negative, scattered, aggressive, or judgmental feedback that will need to be interrupted by group members in order for the group to remain supportive and safe. A helpful doctoral support group will be able to balance the personal and the professional needs of all of its members, and keep the team of marathoners running smoothly.

## SUMMARY

The relationships between a candidate, the dissertation chairperson, and the committee are all important elements of the dissertation experience. Positive and negative outcomes of the nature of these relationships were explored, as well as the identification of the need for candidates to take an active role in navigating these interpersonal dynamics. While there is no perfect dissertation chairperson, it's important to recognize the interaction styles of faculty members and how this impacts the candidate's learning experience.

Ideal chairpersons serve in both support and challenge roles that align with the candidate's realistic expectations of the committee. Candidates were warned in this chapter of the personal and psychological land mines that can get in the way of dissertation completion. The use of intellectual communities of peer support beyond the dissertation committee is emphasized as a way to keep pace with the dissertation marathon.

## EXERCISES AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Using the hands-on and hands-off interaction styles described by Grover and Malhotra (2003), how would you classify your dissertation chairperson? Knowing this interaction style, consider how you can approach the relationship more effectively.
2. What are your relational needs in regard to the dissertation marathon? Do you benefit more from a cheerleader and counselor, or a coach and critic?

3. Which of Sills's (2004) blind spots might you be experiencing that are interfering with your interactions with your dissertation committee?
4. What are the advantages and disadvantages of creating a peer support group at your institution?
5. Determine how you could go about creating an effective online dissertation support group. Which peers would you like to invite into the group? Which media site or provider can you use to coordinate the group? Determine key ground rules for the group and write an e-mail to describe your plan and invite others. Describe the expectations of group members. Identify your individual goals prior to the first meeting.

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ROWMAN &  
LITTLEFIELD

## REFINING YOUR DISSERTATION PROPOSAL FOR THE FINAL MANUSCRIPT

### OBJECTIVES

**A**t the conclusion of this chapter, you will be able to:

1. Understand an overview of information to include in each chapter of the professional practice dissertation.
2. Attend to common mistakes and omissions in the dissertation.
3. Be aware of objective requirements specified for each chapter.

### ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL

A review of dissertations completed in *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses* or *WorldCat Dissertations* shows a noticeable pattern in the content and structure of the dissertation. Regardless of one's field of study or whether the dissertation research involves quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods, or action research approaches, the format is often quite similar. Many professional practice dissertations follow a *five-chapter model* that consists of an introduction, a review of the literature, research methods, results, and discussion. Yet, if only the manuscript were as simple as those few words.

The content and structure of the final dissertation manuscript is highly discipline specific to the culture, norms, and expectations of a candidate's degree program. Not all disciplines or institutions follow the five-chapter model. Each candidate's doctoral program of study deeply situates the doctoral experience within the current disciplinary and methodological framework.

Some methodologies and disciplines will require additional chapters with a slightly different format. Some dissertations are more scientific, while others focus on practical approaches to problems in society. Others will heavily address epistemological and ontological issues related to the philosophy of knowledge. The dissertation is a discipline-specific project created with the approval of the dissertation committee that operates within the traditions, culture, and standards of an institution. No claims are made that dissertations follow a one-size-fits-all model.

For example, a hermeneutics dissertation completed by a candidate pursuing a degree in theology from one of the top PhD programs in the country will not (and should not) read the same as an evaluation research manuscript prepared by a practitioner-based EdD candidate at a for-profit online institution, or a cost-benefit policy analysis dissertation completed by a candidate pursuing a DBA funded by his or her employer.

Students attending these programs are not there for the same purpose; they will not have the same academic experience, and the dissertations will not be of the same quality and scope. Although everyone who completes a dissertation will be eligible for a terminal degree, not all doctoral programs are of an equivalent rigor and caliber.

Candidates should not expect that guidelines provided in this text mirror the expectations utilized in their program of study. Candidates should review the components of the five-chapter model discussed in this chapter with their chairperson to determine what additional items may be needed, and which items discussed here may not be necessary.

Candidates preparing the final dissertation manuscript have the laurels of their previously approved dissertation proposal to serve as a guide not only for the expectations within the profession, but also the dynamics of the relationship with committee members. The successful dissertation proposal should have accomplished the following:

1. Demonstrate that the candidate selected a viable, original topic that will contribute one more brick in the wall of knowledge or practice in one discipline.
2. Demonstrate that the candidate framed a problem that can be addressed in a reasonable amount of time in order to complete the dissertation research and graduate within the university's program time limits for degree completion.
3. Demonstrate that the candidate had sufficient understanding and research abilities to carry out the proposed research.
4. Give confidence to the dissertation committee that the results of the research would be valid and useful to practice or the profession.
5. Demonstrate approval by the committee members for the candidate to proceed with the dissertation.

More than half of the dissertation is finished by the time the proposal is approved. These numbers work in favor of all ABDs. The dissertation proposal experience should serve as a predictor event for how the final review of the manuscript will unfold. This chapter focuses on how to improve and polish the dissertation proposal to be ready for the final manuscript.

## **PREPARING THE FINAL DISSERTATION MANUSCRIPT**

Before delving into the components of the manuscript, it is worth noting the purpose of the final dissertation. The dissertation is one of many parts of a degree program. The dissertation is the ticket to graduation and to earning the doctorate. It's a simple idea, but one that can be misconstrued by candidates who try to define themselves by a document that is one of many parts of their doctoral education. It is not a book or magnum opus. Candidates need to be careful not to make it more than it is.

One of the procedural missteps to watch at this stage in the dissertation experience is the onslaught of new or additional feedback from committee members—whether in a specific chapter or the final manuscript in its entirety. It may be possible that a dissertation chairperson has



approved a candidate's work, but then a committee member may unexpectedly critique the final manuscript and require significant revisions.

This setback must be dealt with immediately and in consultation with the chairperson. The dynamics between the candidate, the committee members, and the chairperson are discussed elsewhere in this book and deserve great attention and care. However, this chapter is about writing, so let's explore each of the elements of a traditional dissertation.

## Front Matter

Dissertation manuscripts include a number of required elements in the *front matter*. All dissertations contain a title page, abstract (or executive review), a table of contents, a list of tables and figures (if applicable), and a list of appendices. Most dissertations also have a dedication page, acknowledgments, a signature page with approvals from the degree-granting institution, and a copyright page.

The *abstract* includes a brief summary of the problem investigated, the method of investigation, a summary of research findings, and the conclusions or implications of the research. While journal articles typically limit abstracts to 120 words, most dissertation abstracts will be up to 350 words.

Candidates tend to make common mistakes in the front matter, the most obvious of which is to fail to include all of the required elements. The best preparation a candidate can have for each chapter of the dissertation is to review the university or departmental form and style guide, or existing content and structure guidelines provided by the doctoral program of study (e.g., the APA Manual, MLA Manual, Chicago Manual of Style).

Prior dissertations completed at a candidate's institution (preferably within his or her department) are the best source of information for how to prepare required front matter. Some additional issues to watch for and strategies to correct mistakes in the front matter are highlighted in Table 3.1.

## Chapter 1: The Introduction

The first chapter of the dissertation proposal will likely remain close to its original format for the final dissertation. This chapter, *the intro-*

**Table 3.1. Tips to Improve the Front Matter**

<i>Front Matter</i>	<i>Common Mistakes</i>	<i>Strategies</i>
Title	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Too short</li> <li>• Too long</li> <li>• Non-descriptive</li> <li>• Inconsistent for discipline or department</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Check style manual for title length requirements</li> <li>• Be descriptive (i.e., variables, sample, method)</li> <li>• Review prior dissertation titles in one's department. Follow typical patterns (e.g., no questions as titles, methodology included or omitted from title)</li> </ul>
Table of Contents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does not align with chapter subheadings</li> <li>• Wrong page numbers</li> <li>• Does not include labeled appendices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Print out hard copy of entire dissertation to ensure consistency with chapter subheadings</li> <li>• Use hard copy to align page numbers</li> <li>• Check style manual for formatting guidelines</li> <li>• Identify and label each appendix included in the manuscript</li> </ul>
Abstract	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Written in future tense</li> <li>• Too long</li> <li>• Too short</li> <li>• Missing key elements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Write in present or past tense (as directed)</li> <li>• Confirm word count requirements</li> <li>• Include all elements of executive summary (purpose, subjects, design, results, conclusions, implications, etc.)</li> </ul>
Tables and Figures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Missing from front matter</li> <li>• Combined list</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Usually required if five or more of each</li> <li>• Separate page for tables</li> <li>• Separate page for figures</li> <li>• Labels must be consistent with the title of each element and associated page number</li> </ul>

*duction*, should require the least revision or editing in preparation for the final manuscript, with the exception of some possible reorganization and refined focus of the scope of the study. It is typically the shortest chapter of the dissertation, averaging from 10 to 20 pages in most disciplines. It is also the most critical for setting the context and organization of the entire dissertation manuscript.

The *American Association of University Professors* (AAUP) publishes generic criteria for Chapter 1. The objectives of the *Introduction* are to:

- Provide an introduction to the problem statement
- Make clear the research question to be addressed

- Describe the motivation for the study
- Describe the context in which the question arises
- Summarize the dissertation's methodology
- Discuss the importance of the study
- Provide a roadmap for readers

Furthermore, Figure 3.1 includes general subheadings and a description for each header commonly found in Chapter 1.

Statement of the problem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A concise introduction to the topic of inquiry.</li> <li>• Identifies the purpose, aims, and/or objectives of the study.</li> </ul>
Background of the problem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describes background information about what is known about the problem/topic of study.</li> <li>• Situates the research in the context of other works.</li> <li>• Highlights gaps in prior research and what is not yet known.</li> </ul>
Rationale for the study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explains the significance of the study and motivations for research on the topic.</li> </ul>
Theoretical framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describes the appropriate theory that is applied or developed.</li> <li>• Aligns with the research questions and/or hypothesis.</li> <li>• Includes introductory descriptions of theoretical constructs.</li> </ul>
Research questions or hypothesis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clearly stated and logically follow from the statement of the problem and the title of the dissertation.</li> <li>• Connect to the purpose and rationale of the study.</li> <li>• Often grounded in theoretical framework.</li> </ul>
Delimitations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Candidate's assumptions are explicitly stated.</li> <li>• Identifies relevant issues and approaches that the study includes and excludes.</li> </ul>
Definitions of key terms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include only terms that enhance understanding of the topic of concepts that have specific relevance and meaning to the dissertation.</li> </ul>
Summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides an overview of the structure and shape of the dissertation.</li> </ul>

**Figure 3.1. Commonly used Subheadings for Chapter 1**

Not all universities, disciplines, or methodologies for dissertation research will include each of these headers or in the order listed. Some doctoral programs may require expansion of these headers to include other categories, such as the role of the researcher (for qualitative research) or positionality (for action research dissertations). Some candidates wait to introduce a theoretical or conceptual framework until Chapter 2.

The dissertation committee already made decisions regarding sub-headings for Chapter 1 prior to the successful completion of the dissertation proposal. Thus there is no need to create unnecessary anxiety about a section that may or may not be missing from Chapter 1 of the final manuscript. At this point in the dissertation marathon, Chapter 1 should need limited editing of one's performance during those beginning miles. Few mistakes emerge in relation to this chapter, each of which should be fairly easy to remedy. Tips to improve Chapter 1 can be found on page 60 (Table 3.2).

## **Chapter 2: The Literature Review**

The second chapter, *the literature review*, was likely polished and perfected with many strokes prior to the dissertation proposal defense. It is typically the longest chapter of the dissertation with a minimum of 20 pages, although many dissertations will have reviews three times as long. Candidates need to reach a point of saturation with the dissertation literature review—not that all sources have been reviewed and included, but that a sufficient, rich categorization of research related to the topic of the dissertation are completed. The overall purpose is to present a coherent discussion that “funnels” the reader to the dissertation study.

Each discipline tends to have different standards and presentation for the dissertation literature review. Therefore it is recommended that candidates examine dissertations in one's field of study to ensure the writing aligns with the discipline and research approach. As previously mentioned, full-text dissertations are readily available through *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses* or *WorldCat Dissertation*. These documents will provide a snapshot of the average length, scope, and organization of the dissertation literature review.

**Table 3.2. Tips to Improve Chapter I**

<i>Chapter I</i>	<i>Common Mistakes</i>	<i>Helpful Tips</i>
Statement/ Background of the Problem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lacks motivation</li> <li>• Makes sensational claims regarding the scope of the problem</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer a brief, compelling introduction that articulates interest in the topic.</li> <li>• Provide a clear, objective statement of the problem.</li> <li>• Use statistical data to support claims when appropriate.</li> </ul>
Theoretical Framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Missing</li> <li>• Not properly applied to the topic</li> <li>• Reads as an afterthought</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include a coherent, appropriate application of a theoretical framework.</li> <li>• Align theory with the research questions.</li> <li>• Provide the reader a clear grasp on the chosen theory and weave it throughout the document.</li> </ul>
Research Questions and Hypotheses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Worded as closed-ended (yes/no)</li> <li>• Too many</li> <li>• Null hypotheses are absent</li> <li>• Lacks connection to theoretical framework and/or research design</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When appropriate, reword question to be open-ended.</li> <li>• Confer with dissertation committee about the number of research questions. Be sure each one has a clear purpose and was answered during the study.</li> <li>• Include null hypotheses in tandem with research or alternative hypotheses.</li> <li>• Work with the dissertation committee to ensure theoretical framework connects to the questions asked and/or hypotheses tested.</li> </ul>
Definition of Terms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Includes commonly known words, phrases in one's discipline</li> <li>• Not included</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Edit to include only those terms that have a specialized meaning in relation to the dissertation study. Delete commonly known terms.</li> <li>• Not all dissertations will list a definition of terms. Check with the chairperson to see if these are needed.</li> </ul>

A good literature review offers readers a synthesized, clearly organized trail of the rationale, background, and purpose of studying the research questions and hypotheses. It describes previous theoretical and empirical research on the topic or problem and offers a connected path to show the candidate's thinking about the subject matter. It should

be comprehensive, critical, and contextualized within the framework of how the candidate understands the area of inquiry (Hofstee 2006).

Presumably the purpose of the literature review was delineated during the proposal in accordance with Sternberg's (1981, p. 93) seminal tenants:

1. Establish to the reader that the author has a full grasp of the subject.
2. Connect the specifics of the dissertation subject with the larger themes of the discipline.
3. Indicate how the dissertation topic will make an original contribution to the field.
4. Generate the dissertation bibliography.

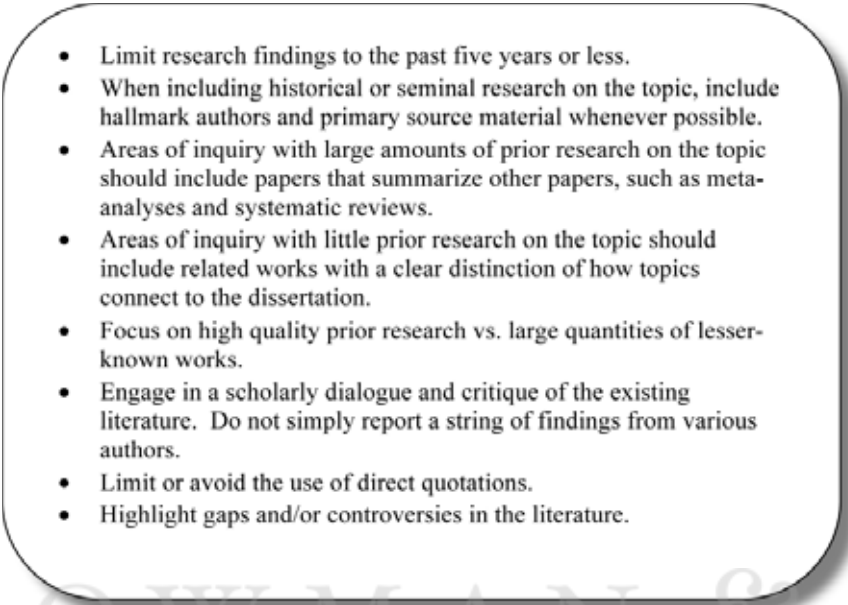
The literature review in the final dissertation manuscript should be updated to reflect current research if more than a year has passed since the dissertation proposal defense. It may be necessary to narrow the scope of the review or to add additional literature topics due to ideas and findings that were uncovered during data collection. This is especially relevant for qualitative or flexible designs, but less of a concern for fixed, quantitative studies.

For example, dissertation research studies using *grounded theory* methodology will likely include a literature review in the dissertation proposal written to define concepts and to historically place the current study in the context of what has been done in the past. Thus these dissertations will require candidates to more extensively revisit and rewrite Chapter 2 in the preparation of the final manuscript.

Generic components of the literature review, as defined by the AAUP, will meet the following objectives:

- Is comprehensive and up-to-date
- Shows a command of the literature
- Contextualizes the problem
- Includes a discussion of the literature that is selective, synthetic, analytical, and thematic

Further best-practice rules among scholars have expanded these criteria to include additional recommendations.

- 
- Limit research findings to the past five years or less.
  - When including historical or seminal research on the topic, include hallmark authors and primary source material whenever possible.
  - Areas of inquiry with large amounts of prior research on the topic should include papers that summarize other papers, such as meta-analyses and systematic reviews.
  - Areas of inquiry with little prior research on the topic should include related works with a clear distinction of how topics connect to the dissertation.
  - Focus on high quality prior research vs. large quantities of lesser-known works.
  - Engage in a scholarly dialogue and critique of the existing literature. Do not simply report a string of findings from various authors.
  - Limit or avoid the use of direct quotations.
  - Highlight gaps and/or controversies in the literature.

**Figure 3.2. Recommended Guidelines for the Dissertation Literature Review**

Dissertation committee members have been known to judge the overall quality of a dissertation based on the quality of the literature review. Candidates should give special attention to revising the literature review in accordance with expectations and guidelines in their discipline. An excellent source to self-evaluate one's literature review for relevance, organization, and connection to the research topic can be found in Boote and Beile's (2005) Literature Review Scoring Rubric, included in Table 3.3.

No two literature reviews follow the same categorization of topics, which presents an intellectual challenge for candidates. Unlike the shared standards and commonalities found in outlines for Chapter 1, there is no list of required subheadings for a dissertation-specific literature review. The organization of the literature review is determined by each candidate and specific to his or her inquiry. However, all literature reviews are holistically organized with an introduction, the body of the review, and a conclusion.

**Table 3.3. Literature Review Scoring Rubric (reprinted with permission by Boote and Beile 2005)**

Category	Criterion	1	2	3
1. Coverage	A. Justified criteria for inclusion and exclusion from review	Did not discuss the criteria for inclusion or exclusion	Discussed the literature included and excluded	Justified inclusion and exclusion of literature
	B. Distinguished between what has been done in the field and what needs to be done	Did not distinguish what has and has not been done before	Discussed what has and has not been done	Critically examined the state of the field
	C. Placed the topic or problem in the broader scholarly literature	Topic not placed in broader scholarly literature	Some discussion of broader scholarly literature	Topic clearly situated in broader scholarly literature
	D. Placed the research in the historical context of the field	History of topic not discussed	Some mention of history of topic	Critically examined history of topic
	E. Acquired and enhanced the subject vocabulary	Key vocabulary not discussed	Key vocabulary defined	Discussed and resolved ambiguities in definitions
	F. Articulated important variables and phenomena relevant to the topic	Key variables and phenomena not discussed	Reviewed relationships among key variables and phenomena	Noted ambiguities in literature and proposed new relationships
	G. Synthesized and gained a new perspective on the literature	Accepted literature at face value	Some critique of literature	Offered new perspective
3. Methodology	H. Identified the main methodologies and research techniques that have been used in the field, and their advantages and disadvantages	Research methods not discussed	Some discussion of research methods used to produce claims	Critiqued research methods
	I. Related ideas and theories in the field to research methodologies.	Research methods not discussed	Some discussion of appropriateness of research methods to warrant claims	Critiqued appropriateness of research methods to warrant claims
4. Significance	J. Rationalized the practical significance of the research problem	Practical significance of research not discussed	Practical significance discussed	Critiqued appropriateness of research methods to warrant claims
	K. Rationalized the scholarly significance of the problem	Scholarly significance of research not discussed	Scholarly significance discussed	Critiqued scholarly significance of research
5. Rhetoric	L. Was written with a coherent, clear structure that supported the review	Poorly conceptualized, haphazard	Some coherent structure	Well developed, cohesive



The *introduction* offers a snapshot of the topic and structure of the literature review. What is the central theme? What is the purpose of the review? This section should introduce the organizational pattern of the literature review for the reader. This is an introduction to the literature review—not an introduction to the present study. Be mindful to keep the review focused on previous works. There should be little to no mention of the dissertation study in this chapter. One to two paragraphs to introduce the literature review should suffice.

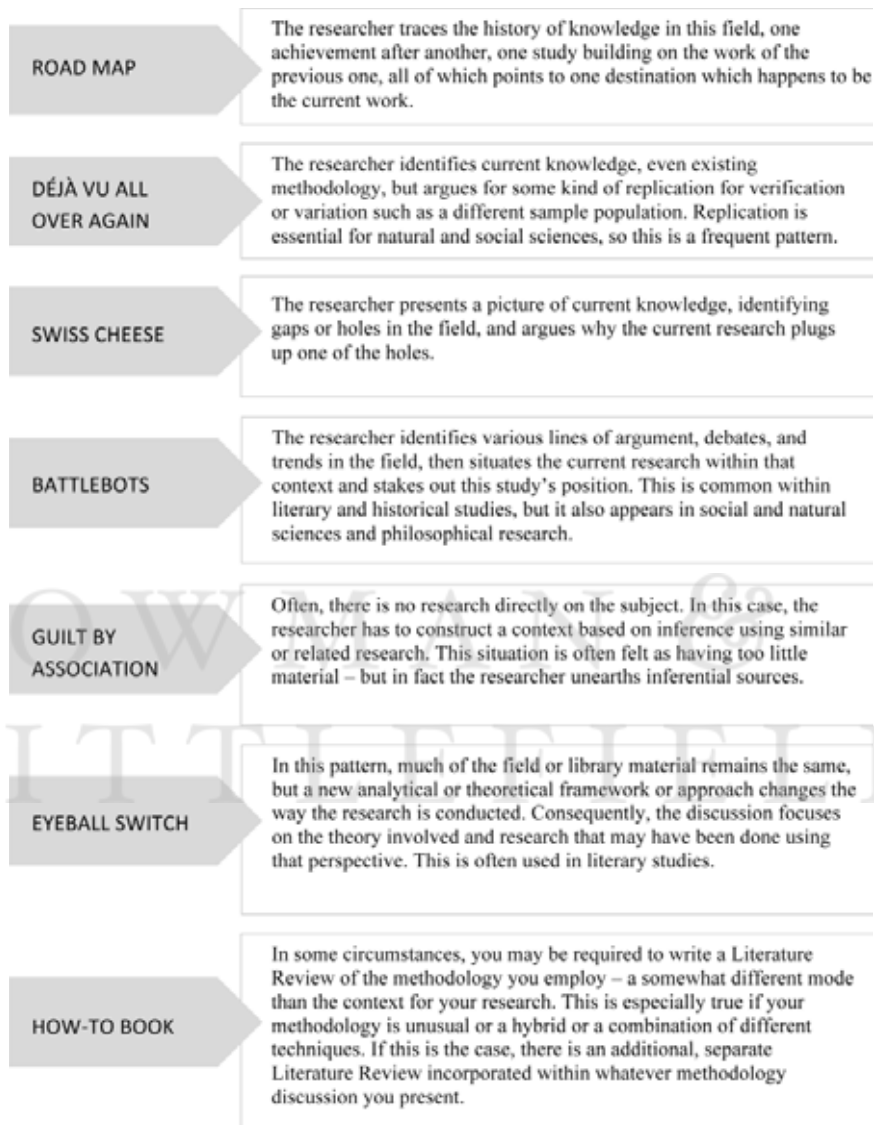
The *body* of the review is most commonly structured historically, conceptually, or methodologically. Historical reviews organize prior literature chronologically by telling a story of the evolution or development of a topic. A conceptual review organizes the contents of the chapter around key concepts and topics relating to the research questions. Methodological reviews arrange the discussion of prior studies around the various research approaches to the topic of inquiry.

Of even greater relevance, the body of a literature review typically follows one of a few *rhetorical patterns*. These patterns (see Figure 3.3) are often used in combination. It may be helpful for doctoral candidates to step back from the dissertation proposal iteration of the literature review to determine which of these patterns characterize the chapter. Candidates should then ensure the pattern of writing is consistent throughout the chapter.

Finally the last section of the literature review consists of *conclusions*. Providing conclusions of the review are a crucial means to offer scholarly critique of the existing body of literature on one's topic. The conclusions should summarize the major contributions, evaluate the current positioning of the research study, and point out flaws in prior research.

The candidate must also identify gaps in the existing research, contradictions, and areas for further study—essentially funneling the reader to the rationale for the current dissertation study. Some dissertation chairpersons may suggest the candidate prepare a summary table of the literature at the end of this chapter to organize his or her thinking and to visually display the thought path that leads to the current study.

Candidates are cautioned not to use the subheaders identified above (i.e., introduction, body, conclusions) or to identify a specific rhetorical pattern in one's writing. These structures are identified only to help cat-



**Figure 3.3. Rhetorical Patterns for Literature Reviews (Reprinted with permission from Obenzinger 2005)**

**Table 3.4. Tips to Improve Chapter 2**

<i>Chapter 2</i>	<i>Common Mistakes</i>	<i>Helpful Tips</i>
Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Includes subjective opinion of the author</li><li>• Disorganized without a logical plan for the reader</li><li>• Too long</li><li>• Written in wrong tense</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Remain objective in presentation of prior information; present a balanced argument.</li><li>• Provide a road map of how the review is organized.</li><li>• Limit introduction to the literature review to no more than one to two pages.</li><li>• Write in past tense when discussing literature that has already been written and research that was completed previously.</li></ul>
Body of Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lack of rhetorical pattern</li><li>• Disconnected from Chapter 1</li><li>• Tangential literature included that is far afield from purpose of study</li><li>• Out-of-date literature</li><li>• Reads like an annotated bibliography streaming from one study to the next</li><li>• Overuse of direct quotes</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use a rhetorical pattern to organize and tell the story of prior works on the topic.</li><li>• Consider the use of concept mapping to organize themes of review for the reader.</li><li>• Select only relevant literature to include in the review.</li><li>• Limit research findings to the most recent five years or less (except for seminal works).</li><li>• Offer a synthesized dialog with the literature rather than a mechanical report of “he said, she said.” Include meta-analyses and systematic reviews when possible.</li><li>• Include direct quotes sparingly; use only to highlight significant statements that cannot be paraphrased.</li></ul>
Conclusions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lack of balance in reporting literature</li><li>• Missing summary of literature review</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Do not try to convince the reader of the rationale for the study. Offer a funnel to lead the reader to an area of inquiry.</li><li>• Present discursive writing of multiple perspectives on a topic.</li><li>• Create a literature review table to organize materials related to key components, variables, or constructs of the dissertation.</li></ul>

egorize writing styles and the organization of the review. Some common mistakes and tips for how to improve the literature review are included in Table 3.4.

### Chapter Three: Methodology

For many candidates, revisions to Chapter 3 are concrete and easiest to accomplish in preparing the final dissertation manuscript. This chapter was previously “proposed” during the proposal stage of what a candidate “could do.” Now is the time to update the work to reflect what was actually done for the dissertation study.

Revisions to Chapter 3 can first begin by changing the writing from future tense (the proposal) to past tense (the final dissertation). The research has already been completed, so it is appropriate to write this chapter in the past tense, as is customary in most journal articles.

Chapter 3 typically includes five subheaders: *research design*, *sample*, *data collection tools*, *procedures*, and *limitations and delimitations*. Some institutions will include a section on data analysis in Chapter 3 (as is typical in the dissertation proposal), however, this material is best presented in Chapter 4 with the discussion of results.

**Research Design.** Plan to include the following elements in the section on *research design*:

- Research paradigm
- Research approach
- Purpose of study
- Theoretical framework
- Research design
- Research questions
- Hypotheses
- Variables
- Limitations
- Delimitations

The research design offers an overall understanding of how the selected research methods accomplish the aims of the study. Try to follow a logical, coherent sequence of events when writing up this section for

the final manuscript. Begin by stating the *paradigmatic approach* to the study (i.e. positivist, postpositivism, constructionism, critical theory) and then the overarching *research approach* (i.e., qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods, action research, evaluation).

Next describe the *purpose* of the study's methodology in relation to the problem. The main purpose of most studies can usually be categorized with the words *describe*, *explore*, *explain*, or *evaluate* in relation to a problem germane to the profession or to practice. The research problem often determines the choice of design, so this should be stated early on in this section.

Move next to an overview of the *conceptual*, *theoretical*, or *clinical framework* for the inquiry. Although this discussion is covered in previous chapters, it should be briefly mentioned in this subheading as well. Root this description in the existing literature or field of practice and in the problem.

Describe the study's *design* in specific terms and an explanation for this choice of design. This explanation should be well developed and explicit. Figure 3.4 shows many of the specific types of research designs, although there are other variations.

Include a summary description of the methodology, using relevant research-based source material. Textbooks from doctoral-level research course work are commonly cited. Readers who are unfamiliar with research methods should have a clear understanding of the research plan based on the information provided.

Clearly list the *research questions* or *hypotheses*. The dissertation proposal (and Chapter 1 of the manuscript) contained significant detail about the statement of the problem. The literature review explained the relationship between past research and the rationale for the present study. A theoretical framework undergirds the entire study. The importance of the study in relation to the profession has already been specified. Be sure that each of these elements are directly connected to the objectives of the study.

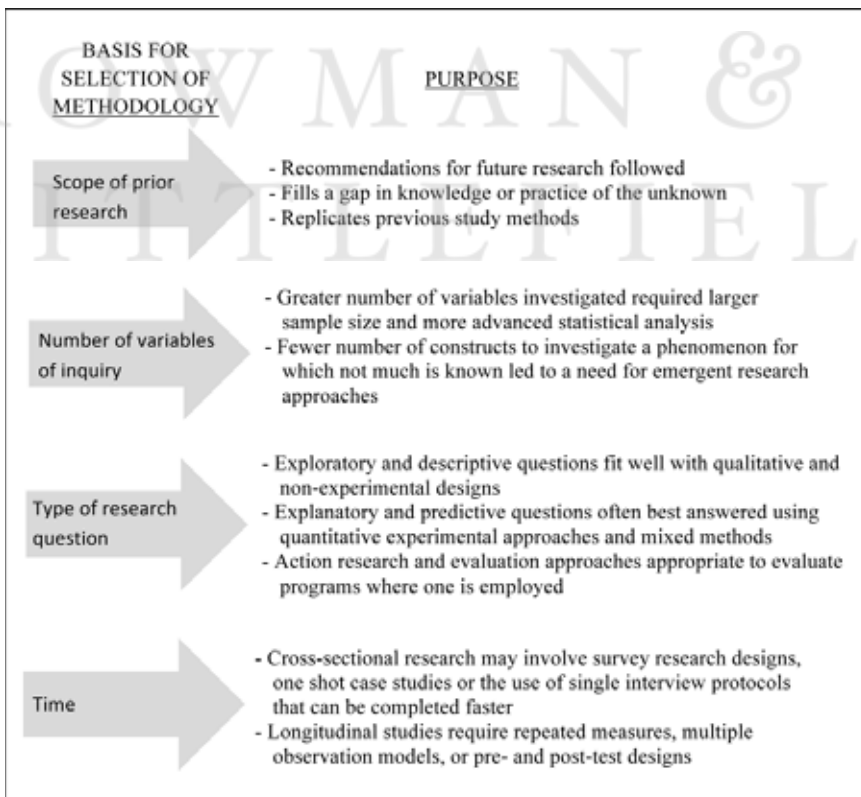
*Research questions* often have a central question and subquestions. Be sure prior chapters demonstrate a rationale for the inclusion of each question. No one wants to read about unnecessary questions that do not relate directly to the topic of inquiry or the available data.

<b>Methodological Approach</b>	<b>Research Design</b>
<b>QUANTITATIVE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Non-experimental</li> <li>• Quasi-experimental</li> <li>• Experimental</li> <li>• Case Study</li> <li>• Correlational</li> <li>• Cross-sectional</li> <li>• Longitudinal</li> <li>• Survey</li> </ul>
<b>QUALITATIVE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Case Study</li> <li>• Consensual Qualitative Research</li> <li>• Ethnography</li> <li>• Grounded Theory</li> <li>• Hermeneutics</li> <li>• Historical Research</li> <li>• Narrative Inquiry</li> <li>• Phenomenology</li> </ul>
<b>MIXED METHODS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Embedded Design</li> <li>• Explanatory Design</li> <li>• Exploratory Design</li> <li>• Triangulation Design</li> <li>• Concurrent</li> <li>• Sequential</li> </ul>
<b>PROGRAM EVALUATION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formative Evaluation</li> <li>• Process Evaluation</li> <li>• Outcomes Evaluation</li> <li>• Case Study Evaluation</li> <li>• CIPP Model</li> <li>• Utilization-focused Evaluation</li> </ul>
<b>ACTION RESEARCH</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborative</li> <li>• Critical</li> <li>• Participatory</li> <li>• Practical</li> </ul>

**Figure 3.4. Methodological Approaches**

*Hypotheses* must be testable using the instruments selected for the study. Like research questions, they should logically connect to the existing literature, the theoretical framework, and the problem. Check to see if the research, alternative, or directional hypothesis and the null hypothesis are required. Use appropriate written notations for all hypotheses (e.g.  $H_1, H_{01}; H_2, H_{02}$ ).

After the design and research questions have been identified, the candidate must make a case for *why* a particular design is the best choice of methodology to answer the inquiry. The rationale for the design will allow the reader to understand how the research methods fit the research questions, theoretical framework, sampling plan, and data collection tools. Figure 3.5 shows some of the reasons the candidate may wish to incorporate into his or her rationale for the design.



**Figure 3.5. Rationale for Choice of Methodology**

In most cases the methodology chapter will identify the *variables* of inquiry. These tend to be listed more explicitly in quantitative research approaches. Non-experimental research should identify which variables are the *predictor* variables (i.e., the presumed “cause”) and which are the *criterion* variables (i.e., the presumed effect or outcome). Experimental research studies should specify which are the *independent* (e.g., treatment) and *dependent* variables. Quantitative researchers may also want to specify any covariates.

It is appropriate to include both *conceptual and operational definitions* of variables in this chapter. Include relevant moderating, confounding, or intervening variables. Candidates should be mindful that threats to internal validity may be required in this section as well.

Next revisit the *who, what, where, when, why, and how* components of the methodological plan for the dissertation study. These are referred to as the “5 Ws and an H” in journalism. Candidates are encouraged to readdress these questions and to pay particular attention to updates needed for each category. Who was included? Where and when did data collection take place? How were data collected? Why were data collected in this way?

**Sample.** A description of the sampling plan may include the following elements:

- Size
- Sampling frame
- Sampling strategy
- Inclusion and exclusion criteria
- Sample recruitment
- Response rates
- Power analysis
- Generalizability (or transferability)

Include a description of the population from which the study was drawn, and the study’s actual sample *size*. Use a capital N when referring to the entire sample. Use a lowercase italicized *n* when referencing a subset of the sample. Mention whether a *sampling frame* existed.

Describe the specific type of *sampling strategy* used (i.e., probability or non-probability) and then the specific *sampling technique*. A detailed



description of the sampling technique is required to demonstrate transparency in the approach. For example, if a non-probability purposive theoretical sampling approach was used, explain the specific reason for selecting participants and how each participant fit within the theoretical framework.

Specify if *random sampling* or *random assignment* was utilized to match the study's research design. Remember that random selection is used to obtain a sample that resembles the population (i.e., to obtain a representative sample). Random assignment is a procedure used by the researcher to create groups that are similar to one another to fit within the study's research design. Details about random assignment should be specified in the procedures section.

Candidates should refer to other sources for a more detailed exploration of sampling techniques based on research methods. For example, Patton (2001) does an excellent job explaining a myriad of qualitative techniques, whereas Onwuegbuzie and Collins (2007) offer extensive coverage on the complex nature of mixed method sampling schemes. Some basic categories of sampling techniques are included below.

Sample *inclusion criteria* should be identified. Provide a clear discussion of the units of analysis that were eligible to be drawn from the population. It may also be appropriate to specify sample *exclusion criteria*. Who was purposefully excluded from the sample and why?

Next describe the *sample recruitment process*. How were units of observation (or units of analysis) selected? Include a description of the

<u>Probability Techniques</u>	<u>Non-probability Techniques</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Simple random sampling</li> <li>• Systematic random sampling</li> <li>• Cluster sampling</li> <li>• Stratified sampling (proportionate or disproportionate)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Convenience sampling</li> <li>• Availability (or accidental) sampling</li> <li>• Purposive sampling</li> <li>• Quota sampling</li> <li>• Snowball sampling</li> </ul>

**Figure 3.6. Commonly used Sampling Techniques**

use of any gatekeepers or key informants such as with chain-referral or respondent-driven sampling methods. Include relevant details such as the use of phone screening, recruitment flyers, e-mail solicitation, incentives to participate, use of wait-list control groups, etc. Describe confidentiality of master lists, the use of pseudonyms—any details that might be asked by the dissertation committee.

Certain designs require the researcher to specify *response rates* and attrition rates, and describe reasons for dropouts or non-availability of samples. This is especially important in longitudinal and survey research studies. Address sample bias directly rather than waiting for a committee member to point it out. Qualitative dissertations should mention how the researcher knew that he or she had researched saturation.

If applicable, results of a *power analysis* computed based on the requirements of the design of the study and the analysis plan may be included in this subheading. Decisions about sample size and sampling design are made prior to the final manuscript but are worth highlighting here due to their importance in regard to the study's generalizability.

Quantitative researchers will need to discuss issues related to *external validity*. The sampling section is a good place for this information. Although generalizability has been said to be “of little, or even no, importance for many qualitative researchers” (Winter 2000, Generalisability, para. 1), it is highly recommended that qualitative researchers address issues of *transferability*. A good description of the sample provides context of the fieldwork and how findings may be applied to another setting.

Some dissertations will hold off on a discussion of the sample's characteristics until Chapter 4, whereas it may be standard practice at another institution to include characteristics of the sample in this chapter. Check with the dissertation chairperson for clarification.

***Data collection tools.*** Ahhh, data. Data, data, data. By this point in the methodology section, the committee is eager to see what the candidate has done to collect data. Like previous sections, all preliminary decisions regarding the data collection tools were determined and approved not only during the dissertation proposal defense, but by the Institutional Review Board. This section of the manuscript will reflect many details that are familiar to the committee, but with greater truth in the realities of how data were actually collected.

Elements of the data collection subheading vary based on methodology. Some common points may include:

- A section for each data collection instrument or tool
- Internal validity and reliability information
- Role of the researcher
- Sample items

What were the *data collection strategies* used for the study? A detailed description is necessary to describe the “what” of each of the study’s instruments, tools, and protocols. Do not try to overlap the discussion of more than one data source at a time. Define how and *why* each data collection tool was selected. Update the proposal to describe pilot testing procedures, critical friend review, peer review, or member checking activities that may have influenced and changed the original data collection plan. Identify for the committee what changed from the proposal stage to the final dissertation.

Include a separate description for each measure in this section. This is especially important for research involving triangulation of data sources. Clarify for the committee the types of data collected (e.g., tests, questionnaires, self-report surveys, interview transcripts, observation protocols, field notes, documents). Explain how each data source connects to the problem being investigated.

Describe the *instruments* used for the study. If using a quantitative tool, identify the response categories, the range or scale of possible responses, the level of measurement of variables, and any permissions obtained to use a standardized measure. If a measure was created for the purpose of the study, describe how the instrument was developed, pilot tested, peer reviewed, normed, and validated. Modified instruments require explanation to compare and contrast changes in the original.

If *validity* and *reliability* checks were conducted as part of the instrument selection process (i.e., during instrument testing prior to the start of the study), detail these findings in the methods section of the dissertation to support the use of an instrument. Include statistical results and psychometrics for measures of internal consistency reliability such as Cronbach’s alpha or item analysis.

Address issues of face, content, and, when possible, convergent, and construct validity for quantitative instruments. Detail relevant measures of validity for action research dissertations, such as outcome, process, catalytic, democratic, and dialogic. Qualitative instruments should include a discussion of parallel issues related to confirmability, credibility, dependability, and triangulation.

Qualitative researchers will need to describe the *role of the researcher*, as the researcher is the instrument of data collection in most qualitative studies. Much description is needed in this area for observational and naturalistic designs. The candidate's personal experiences and reflections are an important part of the dissertation study and critical to understanding the phenomenon. Describe how assumptions were bracketed, any use of memoing or reflexive journaling, and debriefing activities. Do not omit these important details.

Include *sample questions* from each data collection tool (in accordance with copyright issues). The committee should have a clear understanding of the actual measures used for data collection. For example, sample test questions can be listed. Themes of a survey can be labeled. Include qualitative interview schedules and a description of any observation category for field notes. It is only appropriate to refer the committee to the actual instrument included in the appendix after providing a rich description of the data source.

Ground data collection approaches in the theoretical framework of the study and the literature. Provide readers with a clear thread of how data collection tools were derived. Connect the data collection strategies to previous chapters and, most importantly, to the research questions and hypotheses. Be sure to identify *why* each particular data source was used.

The data collection methods should always fit the research questions being asked. Research questions should be answered or hypotheses tested using the data sources. Consider posting them on a piece of paper that is within eyesight—to be sure research questions are always front and center in the dissertation process.

The dissertation manuscript should include a natural progression and connection from one chapter to the next, especially in defining and explaining how each data collection tool was used in the study. Do not include the interpretation of results in this section.

**Procedure.** The procedures section must include a tremendous amount of detailed instruction about *where*, *when*, and *how* data were collected. Assume no existing knowledge of the procedures for a study. The candidate is charged with providing explicit, step-by-step written instructions for the procedures of the study.

Explicate the exact *procedures* that were carried out to collect each piece of datum. Think of the detail required in this section as if giving instructions to someone using a computer for the first time. “Turn the computer on” would not make any sense unless the person is told exactly where the “on” button is, and what to do with it. Leave no stone unturned in this section. Better to be overly detailed and have the committee recommend condensing the description rather than omitting a key step in the data collection process, especially in disciplines that seek generalizability and replicability.

Elements of this section of the methodological chapter will include data collection details such as:

- Location
- Length of time
- Method
- Sequence of events

*Where* were instruments administered? *When* were data collection procedures (especially interventions) implemented? *How* were data collection procedures administered? How long did each one take to complete? Include the timeline for data collection and the management of tests, interventions, treatments, or programs. It is not necessary to include exact dates in the dissertation, but general estimates of the temporal nature of data collection are useful information.

For example, “The first intervention involved the use of mobile technologies to collect employee behavior in real-time over a two-week time period. Employees were contacted by the researcher once a day in the early afternoon using text messaging prompts. Employees had 30 minutes to respond to the prompt with a text reply.” The task at hand for the doctoral candidate is to explain the exact work completed during data collection.

Describe the procedures in the *order* or *sequence* in which data were collected. Include specific details regarding the method of data collec-

tion (e.g., paper or electronic surveys, face-to-face or Skype interviews). Provide information about the where, when, and how for each data source. Candidates often omit these details, which can reveal procedural holes in the manuscript.

Qualitative researchers should also explain how they knew when to stop collecting data. Lincoln and Guba (1985) offer four commonly cited reasons to stop:

1. All sources have been exhausted.
2. Categories of information have been saturated (i.e., no new information is generated).
3. Regular patterns have emerged resulting in “a sense of integration” (p. 350).
4. The researcher has overextended the search for data—new information is too far afield from prior data.

***Limitations and Delimitations.*** Chapter 3 will need to address methodological limitations and delimitations of the study. The *limitations* section of the dissertation in the methodology chapter should be brief. Limitations refer to methodological restrictions in the study that the researcher could not control. This may include design issues such as access to samples, the availability of existing data, or threats to internal validity such as mortality.

Do not state that the limitation of a qualitative methodology is that it is not quantitative or vice versa. Focus instead on the limitations of the selected approach in relation to the research questions being investigated or the hypotheses being tested.

What information could not be gathered because it was not available to the researcher? A discussion of the limitations of the use of *secondary data sources* is especially relevant in this section. One example of a limitation in a nursing dissertation involved the researcher’s limited access to health-care data. Existing governmental data sets were available only from Medicare and Medicaid patients, since private insurance data sets were not accessible to the researcher. Thus the study was limited to Medicare and Medicaid recipients.

Other methodological examples that limit a study may include sample recruitment barriers, low response rates, or the lack of inclusion of individual (versus aggregate) perspectives.

*Delimitations* refer to purposeful choices the researcher has made to deliberately limit the scope of a study. It is not possible to research all possible variables for a research study. For the example mentioned above, the doctoral candidate had to purchase Medicare and Medicaid data sets from the government to conduct analyses. The cost to be able to access the data limited the study to just one region of the country. The study's delimitation was that only regional data were used.

Candidates should identify the scope and delimitations of the study in the final manuscript. What parts of the dissertation inquiry were addressed with this methodology and what parts have purposefully not been researched? If the purpose of the study was to explore group differences anonymously by way of surveying program attendees who have visited a clinic during the past month, a delimitation of the study is that the research did not include all program members, and that the individual perspectives of this portion of the population were not captured.

The constraints under which a study applies should be identified here. Choose a few points to discuss that will be noticeable to the committee or professionals in the field of study. The delimitations may be explained by the foci of existing research discovered in the literature review. Do not belabor the point of what a study is not, nor undermine the work that has been accomplished. This section should be concise and brief.

Always ensure that objectives of the methodological chapter have been met prior to submitting the final document for review. The AAUP states that methods applied during the dissertation study must be:

- Appropriate
- Described in detail
- In alignment with the questions addressed and the theory used

In addition, the AAUP reports that the candidate should demonstrate:

- An understanding of the methods' advantages and disadvantages
- How to use the methods

Chapter 3 serves as a testament to all the hard work that has been completed for the dissertation research. The length of Chapter 3 var-

**Table 3.5. Tips to Improve Chapter 3**

<i>Chapter 3</i>	<i>Common Mistakes</i>	<i>Helpful Tips</i>
Overview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Repeats material from previous chapters</li> <li>Introductory summary for Chapter 3 missing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide succinct summary of purpose of the study in relation to the design choice.</li> <li>Do not rehash details that were already discussed.</li> <li>Be sure to include an introductory paragraph for this chapter.</li> </ul>
Sample	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unclear who or what sample was eligible to participate</li> <li>Sampling method is not specified</li> <li>Sampling for different phases of the research plan are grouped together</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Describe sample inclusion and exclusion criteria. Wait to discuss recruitment in procedures section.</li> <li>Clarify sampling terms used in the research literature (i.e., probability, non-probability) and specific technique utilized.</li> <li>Provide sampling plan for each phase of the research plan and data collection strategy.</li> </ul>
Data Collection Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Writing refers reader to the appendix for explanations</li> <li>Unclear why instruments were chosen</li> <li>Rationale for modifications to existing instrument are not included</li> <li>Validity issues not addressed</li> <li>Complex, multiphase procedures are jumbled together and confusing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide description of each data collection tool along with sample items from each instrument or measure.</li> <li>Connect data collection strategy to research questions, hypotheses, and theoretical framework to justify appropriate fit and intended use of instrument or measure.</li> <li>Address limitations and delimitations of data sources and research plan.</li> <li>Detail how an existing instrument was modified.</li> <li>Reliability and validity (or credibility and trustworthiness) of data sources needs to be explained based on the sample used for the dissertation research.</li> <li>Use subheadings to separate each phase of data collection. Consider including a table to display each piece of the data collection strategy.</li> </ul>
Procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not enough direction for the reader to understand procedures</li> <li>Unclear how subjects were selected</li> <li>Uncertain how subjects consented to research participation</li> <li>Confusing procedures with limited detail</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Read the dissertation aloud to someone outside the field to determine holes in procedural description.</li> <li>Explain recruitment procedures or how data were obtained.</li> <li>Informed-consent procedures should be clarified concerning ethical, institutional, and organizational requirements.</li> <li>Consider creating a flowchart or data collection timeline to delineate procedures (especially when there has been data triangulation).</li> </ul>



ies depending on the methodology selected, but it is rarely less than 10 pages. Expect to have a longer, more detailed chapter for more complex studies such as those that use mixed methods.

Similarly, any study that utilizes an intervention, multiple phases of the research process, more than one experiment, pilot tests, or validation of instruments prior to implementation will require documentation of each step in the research process, which will necessitate a lengthier chapter. Interventions introduced by the researcher or programs evaluated for the dissertation are best described in a separate subheading within the procedures section of this chapter.

Plan to finish Chapter 3 with one to two summary paragraphs to describe the methodology. Suggested areas to avoid and tips to improve this chapter are identified in Table 3.5.

## SUMMARY

Components of each chapter of the dissertation have been outlined in this chapter as identified by the AAUP and may serve as a starting point for understanding expectations of the final product. Candidates should review each chapter to ensure key aspects, categories, and subheaders are included in accordance with one's discipline. The process of deciding what to include and what to exclude in the final manuscript can be challenging.

There are many elements of the specific chapters of the dissertation manuscript that are discipline specific and tailored to one's methodology and thus cannot be covered with the necessary depth within the scope of this book. We have chosen to provide a broad overview of questions for review in regard to basic required elements for each chapter, as well as helpful tips to address deficits.

## EXERCISES AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Explore the notion of replicability in relation to the data collection procedures identified in the methods chapter of the dissertation. Have someone not familiar with your topic review your data col-

- lection procedures. Then have them verbally describe to you what was done and how. Take notice of any missing steps that were not explained thoroughly enough in the chapter. Identify the Swiss cheese like “holes” in the description of your data collection plan.
2. Compare the content included in each of your chapters against the tips included throughout this chapter. Discuss any omissions with your dissertation chairperson. Are these items required at your institution?
  3. Read your manuscript aloud to check for awkward grammatical errors and to confirm the organizational flow of content.

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## PRESENTING YOUR RESULTS AND DISCUSSION IN THE FINAL MANUSCRIPT

### OBJECTIVES

**A**t the conclusion of this chapter you will be able to:

1. Conceptualize the necessary components of the results chapter.
2. Understand how to analyze and present quantitative data.
3. Understand how to analyze and present qualitative data.
4. Understand how to analyze and present mixed-method data.
5. Develop a well-written discussion chapter for the dissertation.

### THE RESULTS

The purpose of dissertation research is not just to answer a research question or test a hypothesis, but to communicate these answers and findings to a larger audience. Dissertations eventually become public information when they are entered into library or open-access databases, disseminated to stakeholders, presented at conferences, and published in journals (more on that in the last chapter). But the results from each candidate's dissertation study must first be presented to the dissertation committee.

The *results* section of the dissertation does not have to prove a theory, find statistical significance, or be groundbreaking. It would be an ethics violation to fabricate findings. Positive outcomes of an intervention or an experiment are not required in order to pass the final defense for a professional practice doctorate. There can be great value in a lack of significance in one's results. The results chapter allows the candidate to communicate his or her understanding of the research findings to the dissertation committee in a way that is meaningful and relevant, regardless of the outcome.

Chapter 4 presents results of the data analysis. That's it. In the famous words mistakenly attributed to Dragnet's Sgt. Joe Friday, this chapter includes "*Just the facts, ma'am.*" It does not include conclusions, interpretations, or implications of the findings.

This is the time in the dissertation marathon when the rubber hits the road. The candidate must "find a way to make the research make sense to others" (Bachman and Schutt 2010, p. 425). Unfortunately, candidates often lack confidence in how to write up results.

Elements of this chapter of the dissertation will include:

- Data management
- Data analysis for each data collection strategy
- Results/Findings
- Data displays
- Summary

The results chapter (referred to as *findings* for qualitative researchers) should start with an overview of how results are presented in the chapter. Introduce the *organizational structure* of the chapter to set the stage for the reader. Consult the appropriate style guide, an institution-specific dissertation manual, and follow professional standards for reporting results with the methodology used in the study.

Results may be presented in the chronological order of the data collection strategies specified in Chapter 3, or be organized around each research question or hypothesis. Results can also be arranged next to key variables. Other candidates may report results from the most to least significant findings. Results that are most important are those that directly answer the central research question.

Regardless of the approach, keep the results section as succinct as possible. A well-written results chapter requires the candidate to demonstrate his or her ability to communicate findings with as much evidence and clarity as possible. Plan to include data that are relevant to the research questions, while omitting superfluous details. Finding a balance of what to include and what to exclude is a tremendous yet necessary challenge for doctoral candidates.

Before writing up the results, it is important to first explain the *management of raw data*. How were data stored confidentially? How were participants de-identified? How were audio recordings transcribed? Describe the process of cleaning the data, transcription, or entering data into a software program for analysis. Do not repeat the data collection procedures in this chapter, but focus on what happened after data were collected.

One of the most important parts of the results chapter is the discussion of the *data analysis plan*. Identify, cite, and explain the data analysis approach used. State how these approaches relate to the study's aim, and how the data analysis plan used may be different from what was originally proposed. The results section must convey how the data analysis plan is appropriate for the data. A comprehensive discussion of data analysis goes well beyond the scope of this text. However, the following sections offer a glimpse into common approaches to data analysis strategies for quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods of data.

## QUANTITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS TECHNIQUES

For those candidates with strong mathematical skills, good “left brain” functioning, and the ability to understand and apply statistics, this section will be a breeze. Candidates with experience conducting research in their organization, who have had prior positive educational experiences with statistics or who have had the opportunity to learn by osmosis as a research assistant, have an advantage in terms of their statistical knowledge base. For the rest, it will probably be a headache.

Quantitative data analysis is technically faster than qualitative analysis. But there are a number of caveats to that claim. If the study's design or instruments are flawed, the data will be bad. If the sample size

is too small, the analysis won't work as planned. There's an old adage, "garbage in, garbage out," that presents quite a challenge for doctoral candidates at this stage in the dissertation.

Quantitative data analysis plans must discuss the type of statistical analysis used to test hypotheses or answer research questions. Choosing the right statistical test is serious business, and a mistake will likely be obvious to the committee. There are a number of factors that must be known before choosing an appropriate statistical test. These factors include:

- The level of measurement of variables
- The purpose of the test
- The size of the sample
- The distribution of the sample

Dig back into Statistics 101 knowledge and be sure to differentiate the two broad classifications of statistical procedures: parametric and non-parametric. As a reminder, *parametric statistics* are used with a sample that has a normal distribution and is large enough that the central limit theorem (CLT) applies to the population distribution. These statistics are based on the sample mean and are typically associated with interval and ratio data. It is typically considered acceptable to use parametric tests if there are at least 25 data points in each group, although some statisticians call for 30 data points in each group.

*Non-parametric alternative tests* should be used when the researcher cannot make assumptions about the normality of the population distribution (e.g., the distribution is skewed or there is too small a sample for the CLT to apply). These are tests of median or rank scores used with small samples that do not achieve statistical power and are typically associated with nominal and ordinal data.

There are parallel non-parametric alternatives for many of the parametric tests, as shown below.

The researcher must know the *level of measurement* of the variables to be tested when choosing a statistical test. Variables that are measured at the interval or scale level (such as IQ, test scores, a total count of the number of children in a family) are considered to be *continuous* variables and allow for more advanced statistical tests.

<u>Parametric Tests</u>	<u>Non-Parametric Alternatives</u>
-Mean, SD	-Median, range, percentage
-One-sample t-test	-Wilcoxon test or Chi-square
-Unpaired t-test	-Mann Whitney U or Fisher's test
-Paired t-test	-Wilcoxon or McNemar's test
- One-way ANOVA	- Kruskal-Wallis test
- Repeated measures	- Friedman test
-ANOVA	- Spearman's rho test of association
-Pearson correlation	

**Figure 4.1. Parametric Tests and Non-Parametric Alternatives**

Variables that are measured at the nominal level (either binary responses or classifications that can only fall into one category at a time, such as religious affiliation or marital status) or ordinal level (ranked in order, such as level of education categories or age ranges) are referred to as *categorical* variables.

Each statistical test is used for a different *purpose*. A researcher who wants to compare the responses of three groups in response to two different variables would use a completely different test (e.g., the two-way repeated measures ANOVA) than a researcher who wants to compare one group's pre- and post-tests (e.g., the paired t-test). The candidate must be able to explain the goal or purpose of each statistical test in relation to the research question or hypotheses.

Table 4.1 merges the aforementioned information into one statistical matrix. Candidates should double check this chart to be sure they selected the correct test. Are the variables continuous or categorical? Are data derived from a normal sample distribution with sample sizes for each group >30 or does a non-parametric alternative test need to be utilized? What is the purpose of the statistical analysis?

Although this matrix is not exhaustive by any means (see [www.microsiris.com](http://www.microsiris.com) for a more comprehensive decision tree for statistics), it should



**Table 4.1. Choosing the Right Statistical Test**

Statistical Test	Purpose	# of independent variables	# of dependent variables	Continuous or categorical IV	Continuous or categorical DV	Non-parametric alternative
t-test (independent sample)	Comparison of two unmatched groups; each group tested once	1	1	Categorical	Continuous	Mann-Whitney U Test (compares medians)
t-test (paired sample/ dependent sample)	Comparison of one group at pre and post test (one group tested twice)	1	1	Categorical	Continuous with two measures	Wilcoxon test
One-way between groups ANOVA	Between group comparison (different people in different groups)	1 or more	1	Categorical (at least three group categories)	Continuous	Kruskal-Wallis Test
One-way repeated measures ANOVA	Comparison of one group on three or more occasions	1	1	Categorical	Continuous	Friedman test
Two-way between groups ANOVA	Comparison of different groups	2	1	Categorical	Continuous	
MANOVA	Group comparison	1 or more	2 or more	Categorical	Continuous	
Chi-square (goodness of fit test)	Proportion of cases that fall into various categories and compares to hypothesized values			Categorical	Categorical	
Chi-square (test for independence)	Relationship between two categorical variables			Categorical	Categorical	
Simple linear regression	Predict value of the DV based on the IV	1	1	Continuous	Continuous	
Logistic regression	Predict value of the DV based on the IV	1	1	Continuous	Categorical	
Multiple regression	Predict value of the DV from several IV to relate variables	2 or more	1	Continuous	Continuous	
Pearson's product moment correlation	Quantify association between two continuous variables			Continuous	Continuous	Spearman's Rho (ordinal data)

give the candidate an opportunity to check his or her work for accuracy prior to presenting to the committee. Better to catch common statistical errors now than during the defense.

Some statistical methods of analysis do not necessarily answer questions directly, but may be used to transform a dataset into something more meaningful for analysis. *Data reduction* techniques include procedures that reduce a dataset into fewer variables (i.e., principal components analysis and factor analysis), to group observations (i.e., cluster analysis and discriminant analysis), or to perform correlation analysis between groups of variables (i.e., canonical correlation analysis).

Candidates can expect to include descriptions of these data analysis issues in the manuscript as a precursor to the discussion of results. It's imperative to demonstrate data management and data analysis plans before showing the data.

There are a number of commonly used *statistical software packages* that offer pre-programmed quantitative analysis and data management. Popular programs include STATA ([www.stata.com](http://www.stata.com)), SAS ([www.sas.com](http://www.sas.com)), SPSS ([www.spss.com](http://www.spss.com)), R (<http://cran.r-project.org>), and Minitab ([www.minitab.com](http://www.minitab.com)). Microsoft Excel can also be used for basic statistical procedures.

These computer programs are all user friendly, assuming that the candidate knows how to use them correctly. For example, SPSS will compute an  $F$  ratio of an ANOVA when only two groups are defined, even though three or more groups are required for the statistic to be used. The computer is not a substitute for statistical knowledge. Candidates must know exactly what they want to know before having a computer generate a result.

## REPORTING QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

Determine the expectations of the audience regarding what information is to be included and what will be excluded from the results section of the final manuscript. For example, a candidate using an experimental approach in the field of psychology may have a very different format to the results section of the manuscript than a teacher-leader candidate who used a non-experimental approach. As with other sections of the

final dissertation, always check with the chairperson to determine what is expected within the discipline and at the institution.

Quantitative results often begin with a reminder of the rationale for the study and a brief overview of the purpose of the analysis. This helps organize the chapter. Following a description of the data analysis plan, the candidate should next discuss the characteristics of sample. An overview of the sample might include relevant demographic data, the number of records analyzed, a description of groups, representativeness, response rates, and other desired information that was introduced in Chapter 3.

Quantitative researchers must always analyze the data based on the type of questions being asked (e.g., Do questions seek to describe or compare groups? Do questions seek to find relationships among variables?), the number of variables, the level of measurement of variables, and whether or not the population is normally distributed. Decisions regarding each of these issues should be reflected in the hypothesis being tested.

Chapter 4 often presents results with simple statistics and graphic displays prior to inferential methods. The main purpose of this order is to provide data that will help the reader understand the nature of the variables and the relationships among variables, and to summarize results. Thus, it is helpful to first present statistical summaries about the sample and the measures using descriptive statistics.

## **Descriptive Statistical Analysis**

*Descriptive statistics* describe a population or sample in a research study. They are used only to describe the group (or groups) being studied for the dissertation. These statistics include *measures of central tendency* (to summarize a group of observations or scores into a single score) and *measures of variability or dispersion* (to show the distribution of scores). Statistics for each of these classes are shown in Figure 4.2. Some researchers will also report additional statistical data in this category, such as the standard error of the mean, confidence intervals, and *z*-scores.

Certain descriptive statistics are used most efficiently with categorical variables, such as frequency distributions and percentages. Other descriptive statistics are more appropriate to report with continuous

<u>Measures of Central Tendency</u>	<u>Measures of Dispersion</u>
- Mean	- Standard deviation
- Median	- Variance
- Mode	- Interquartile range
	- Range

**Figure 4.2. Descriptive Statistics**

variables, such as the standard deviation, the mean, the range, or a  $z$ -score.

Descriptive statistics can be reported using *data displays*. Bar or pie charts, line graphs, histograms, and box-and-whiskers plots are a few examples of how the candidate can support the written text with visuals. However, these should not replace (or repeat) descriptions of the data.

Quantitative shape statistics relative to the sample mean may be described in terms of *skewness* and *kurtosis*. A single sentence or two to identify these issues is all that is needed to demonstrate knowledge and relevance. As an alternative, the shape can be communicated descriptively.

Many things can be discovered by carefully exploring and describing the data. Some dissertation research will be done exclusively with descriptive statistics. The ability to convey this information in a clear manner may be of great interest and may be all that is needed to answer the research questions based on the choice of design. Watch for data overload in this section. Just because data are available does not mean all should be included in the final manuscript. Choose wisely.

### **Inferential Statistical Analysis**

When hypotheses are tested, results are reported using inferential statistics. *Inferential statistics* allow the researcher to make predictions (inferences) about a population based on observations and analyses of a sample. The candidate will need to demonstrate how the results of an

analysis using his or her sample can be generalized to the larger population that the sample represents.

Inferential statistical tests address two questions about a hypothesized relationship between two or more variables. Candidates should anticipate being able to demonstrate competency about answers to both of these two key questions:

1. What is the probability that the relationship exists?
2. If a relationship does exist, how strong is the relationship?

Inferential statistics show the probability that the results of the analysis on the sample are representative of the population that the sample represents. Sample size is critical, because the smaller the sample, the greater the risk the sample will not be representative of the population being studied. This is part of why it is so important for candidates to be able to describe, in painstaking detail sometimes, the sampling plan in Chapter 3. If the sample size is too small or if the sample distribution is not normal, remember that non-parametric alternatives are always an option.

As shown in Figure 4.3, there are many parametric *tests of significance* used for inferential analysis to compare groups such as the various t-tests and ANOVA families of statistics. There are also tests of significance to determine the probability of relationships among variables, such as chi-square, Pearson's correlation, regression analyses or HLM, and structural equation modeling (SEM).



**Figure 4.3. Commonly Used Statistical Tests**

The candidate will typically need to report the following information:

- Research hypothesis
- Null hypotheses
- Probability of committing a Type I error (most researchers select an  $\alpha = .05$ )
- The test statistic selected and the result
- The degrees of freedom
- Interpretation of results

While tests of significance estimate the probability that the relationship exists, measures of association estimate the strength (and sometimes the direction) of the relationship. Each has its use, and they are best when used together. It is becoming increasingly more common across the disciplines to report measures of association along with tests for statistical significance.

Just because a result is statistically significant does not mean that the relationship is important. A *measure of association* is a statistic used to indicate the strength of the relationship between two variables. Measures of association take on values ranging from  $-1.0$  to  $+1.0$ , with the positive and negative signs indicating the direction of the relationship, not the strength of the relationship. Values closer to 1 indicate stronger relationships. Continuous variables use the correlation coefficient  $r$  or  $R^2$ , whereas ordinal variables can be computed using Spearman's rho ( $r_s$ ). Be sure to explain this correctly in the write-up.

Like with tests of significance, be sure to select the appropriate test based on the variables. These are sometimes considered to be estimates of *effect size*. This value tells the reader how great an impact one variable had on another. If the calculation is based on nominal or ordinal variables, phi or Cramer's V should be reported. Ordinal only variables use Gamma, Somer's D, or Kendall's Tau-b. Effect size results are described in the research literature as small, medium, or large. Include citations from the research literature for how effects were categorized.

Effect size differences between groups, or *post-hoc testing* (also called *post-hoc comparisons*), may be needed after running a test of significance. Post-hoc tests examine statistical results more carefully so that the researcher can say exactly where the significant differences are. For

example eta squared ( $\eta^2$ ) further explains how variability in the dependent variable can be explained by the independent variable in a t-test. Tukey's HSD test is commonly reported with ANOVA. An odds ratio, Cohen's  $d$ , or Glass's delta may be appropriate in other analyses. These tests serve different purposes and, again, must be selected correctly.

There are multiple pieces of information that must be reported when writing up the result of a test of significance. The first is the type of test used and the purpose of the test. Then state whether or not there was a significant difference between condition means. Report the test statistic with all corresponding notations (e.g.,  $df$ ,  $F$ ,  $t$ ), and include a clearly written sentence to explain what the results mean. Post-hoc comparisons and effect sizes may also need to be reported depending on the type of test (online calculators are available to help with these calculations). Here's an example:

A paired-samples t-test was conducted to compare the average running pace in those who had trained for the marathon and those who had never trained [*type of test and purpose*]. There was a significant difference in the running pace for those who trained for the race ( $M = 9.41$ ,  $SD = 1.14$ ) and the no training condition ( $M = 12.45$ ,  $SD = 1.14$ );  $t_{(1)} = -5.66$ ,  $p = 0.005$  [*significant difference, test statistic and notations*]. These results suggest that prior training for a marathon has an influence on the average running pace. Specifically the results suggest that when people train for a marathon, their average running pace decreases, which should result in faster completion of the race [*explanation of results*].

Follow reporting requirements based on the discipline's form and style manual. Anticipate that the chapter will not include the actual computer-generated outputs, but that results will be explained in a logical and coherent narrative style that makes sense to the committee. Candidates must go beyond reporting results, and will need to interpret statistical findings.

Use convincing statistical analyses. Include a concluding sentence to indicate if there is rejection or retention of the null hypothesis, when appropriate. Data displays should supplement results rather than serve as a substitute. And remember to include research literature citations to support the rationale for choosing key statistical tests, especially when reporting effect sizes and post-hoc comparisons.

## QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS TECHNIQUES

Making sense of observation field notes, interview transcripts, documents, and notes about audiovisual data can feel like (and often is) a daunting task. For years qualitative researchers have been treated as the little guy in research circles. This perception has been worsened by the emphasis on evidence-based or data-driven decision making at the national level, which places lower value and status on qualitative research. This is just flat out unfair and inaccurate—especially among those in a professional practice program.

While the purpose of this book is not to debate research paradigms, it is certainly worth noting that qualitative researchers have more work to do in terms of justifying their understanding of data. It is not possible to simply report a data analysis plan and then report results, as is done with quantitative research. Qualitative researchers must describe, in great detail, the process of how the researcher made sense the data beyond the three I's—insight, intuition, and impression (Dey 1995).

Qualitative researchers must watch out for *black box* reporting of results (Tesch 1990). This term refers to the mysterious process of generating a research narrative based on the data. The black box is a metaphor for an object that stores information in secret. It must be opened up in order for everyone to truly understand the analysis of the data.

Most qualitative data analysis begins to occur at the same time as data are collected. This is especially true with emergent designs, where data collection strategies are flexible and depend on the context and findings as they emerge. The researcher uses reflexivity to critically self-reflect on the data collection experience. Field notes, journals, or memos are created that later become additional sources of data for analysis. The candidate must make decisions to narrow the study during data collection or risk never being able to analyze the data (and finish).

There will be a large stack of papers or a sea of observation notes in front of the candidate ready to analyze his or her data. Hundreds of pages of data and images can incapacitate the doctoral candidate to think that it cannot be managed. In addition, lots of cool things that are not related to the topic of inquiry often come up when analyzing the data. Thus just like quantitative research, it is important to keep the research questions in mind with all qualitative analysis.



The goal of qualitative research is to describe people's lives, a situation, an event, or experience using a "thick description" (Ponterotto 2006). Candidates will need to provide rich detail, a meaningful context of the study's findings, and emotional insights of participants.

Qualitative data are collected and analyzed differently based on the chosen research methods. After clarifying all data management techniques regarding those hundreds of pages of transcripts, etc., it is best for the candidate to describe the steps in analysis selected to fit the methodological design choice.

For example, an ethnographic study will involve much data analysis at the same time data are collected. Grounded theory will require analysis to begin and then the researcher will need to return to his or her participants. A case study may lead the candidate to wait to analyze data until all perspectives have been gathered.

Be sure to clarify which strategies were selected at the start of this section of the manuscript. Figure 4.4 displays some of the key patterns of data analysis strategies based on the type of qualitative research completed. Take special note of the research terminology used to describe these data analysis techniques and plan to incorporate terms into the manuscript in accordance with the type of research used for the study.

There are a number of key ways to analyze or make sense of qualitative data. All qualitative data analysis involves three common elements: *data reduction*, *data organization*, and *data explanation and verification*. Each of these steps must be identified and described in Chapter 4, regardless of the qualitative approach utilized for the study.

*Data reduction* is the process of selecting, focusing, and abstracting raw data (more on this in just a minute). The researcher first needs to explain how codes were developed. *Codes* refer to meaningful labels given to units of analysis in qualitative text. They can be defined by the researcher before the analysis begins (*a priori*), developed during the data analysis process (*emergent* or *grounded* coding), or after (*a posteriori*). A combination of all three coding strategies is common.

There are three types of coding: *open*, *axial*, and *selective*. *Open coding* involves labeling phenomena and developing categories from the data. *Axial coding* occurs when the researcher makes connections between categories. Finally, *selective coding* is when the researcher finds the story or overarching themes to organize the data.

<b>NARRATIVE INQUIRY</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Construction of narratives based on time and context</li> <li>- Storytelling</li> <li>- Plots as organizing themes</li> <li>- Characters</li> <li>- Chronological sequence of events</li> </ul>
<b>PHENOMENOLOGY</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Epoche and bracketing (researcher's view)</li> <li>- Horizontalization of the data</li> <li>- Phenomenological reduction</li> <li>- Textural description</li> <li>- Imaginative variation</li> <li>- Describe the essence of the experience</li> <li>- Composite description</li> </ul>
<b>GROUNDED THEORY</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Open coding of categories using constant comparison</li> <li>- Axial coding to connect categories to create a coding paradigm</li> <li>- Selective coding to build a story of categories</li> <li>- Constant comparison method</li> <li>- Generate hypotheses based on core categories</li> <li>- Develop theoretical perspectives</li> </ul>
<b>ETHNOGRAPHY</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Description of "a day in the life"</li> <li>- Analysis to sort data</li> <li>- Typologizing for patterned regularities</li> <li>- Determine relationships</li> <li>- Sociocultural and cognitive mapping</li> <li>- Sociograms</li> <li>- Interpretation of the culture-sharing group</li> </ul>
<b>CASE STUDY</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Build case study database</li> <li>- Detailed description of the case</li> <li>- Description of setting or context</li> <li>- Categorical aggregation to uncover issue-relevant meanings</li> <li>- Direct interpretation of a single instance by "pulling data apart and putting them back together in more meaningful ways" (Creswell 1998 p. 154)</li> <li>- Establish patterns between categories</li> <li>- Triangulation of data sources</li> <li>- Develop naturalistic generalizations from the data</li> </ul>

**Figure 4.4. Qualitative Data Analysis Strategies based on Type of Approach (Creswell 1998; Merriam 2009)**

*Data organization* occurs when the researcher organizes the reduced data to begin to make general explanations for the findings. This will involve *descriptive coding* to describe or summarize what is in the data, and *analytical* (or *theoretical*) *coding* based on the researcher's thoughts and analysis of the data.

The third general element in qualitative analysis is *data explanation and verification*, which occurs when the researcher draws conclusions based on the previous analysis steps. This final step leads to the write-up of findings based on the aforementioned transparent and trustworthy data analysis procedures.

It is worth mentioning a few common analytic strategies used in many different types of qualitative research. For example, the *constant comparison method* originated in grounded theory with Glaser and Strauss (1967). Its principle is simple—the researcher constantly compares new data against old ones to look for similarities and differences, which is why it is now applied to all types of designs beyond grounded theory.

*Content analysis* is an objective method of describing and quantifying qualitative data. It is often used with documents. It can be a useful tool to describe the frequency and percentages of coding categories, and a way to count or *quantitize* the qualitative data. There are many good reasons to report numbers in a qualitative analysis. How many coding categories were there during the first read of the document? How were these categories consolidated? How frequently did the researcher observe a behavior? Consider including some descriptive statistics related to the qualitative data analysis process as appropriate.

*Thematic analysis* allows the researcher to abstract codes from the data and then look for relationships to build a set of themes to describe the phenomenon of the study by placing 'like with like' (Morse and Field 1995). Patterns in data are placed in grouped categories with a meaningful label or code. This is a common analytic practice used by researchers trying to make sense of data in relation to the human experience. The transition from codes to themes involves analysis by abstraction.

*Abstraction* is a process of gathering general descriptions of the data through coding and categorization of data. There will likely be a hierarchical order of headings and categories that emerge based on content-characteristic words associated with coding. Subcategories are

developed with subthemes. Qualitative data may be organized using hierarchies, networks, taxonomies, tables, cross-tabulations (based on the quantization of qualitative data) or visual displays. Explain this abstraction process in writing. A categorization matrix or the use of figures to display the process would be helpful in this chapter.

*Narrative analysis* allows the researcher to use the stories people tell to understand the complexities of their experiences. The candidate will need to make sense of participants' personal past experiences in relation to a particular time, event, or piece of history in their lives in order to create "storied knowing" (Bruner 1986).

Do not confuse the analysis of narratives as narrative analysis. When a researcher wants to compare one story to another to search for similarities and differences, he or she is using the constant comparison method. Narrative analysis requires that the researcher construct a story that provides a new understanding of the participant's situation based on the theoretical framework.

With any of these qualitative data analysis techniques, researchers may code by hand with pens and highlighters, Post-it notes, cutting out text and gluing themes on note cards, or through old-fashioned traditions such as the "long table" method (i.e., spreading everything out on a table). Microsoft Word is always a popular option too.

Computer-assisted *qualitative data analysis software* (CAQDAS) is used with greater frequency as candidates become more versed in technology. It can be especially useful with data collected electronically. Popular programs include ATLAS/ti, NVivo, and NUD\*IST. Open Source software programs such as Weft QDA might be considered. Be sure to define the actual analysis techniques used so that no black box exists by the end of this section.

## REPORTING QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

Given the emergent nature of qualitative inquiry, it should be no surprise that there is no standard format for writing up qualitative findings. Exemplars can be found for each of the different types of qualitative inquiry by reviewing journal articles and dissertations in one's field of study.

The author sources, terminology, and definitions for each of the types of methodology and analysis plans have fairly consistent themes. Candidates should follow in the footsteps of the qualitative greats by citing key research literature sources in the write-up. Be mindful of the need to use appropriate research terms when discussing qualitative data. These are always written as *findings*, not results. Some committee members are sensitive to these details.

The qualitative report will inevitably include an explanation of how data were managed, coded, categorized, reduced, and interpreted. General *descriptions* of the data as a whole are needed before providing detailed analysis of its parts. The candidate must display evidence of the findings as a way to demonstrate trustworthiness of the data. The difficulty of writing this chapter is that the candidate must decide how much evidence to present. Making decisions about what to include and what to exclude is a scholarly skill to develop.

Patton reports that the written analysis must organize the description of information in a way that is manageable. “Description provides the skeletal frame for analysis that leads to interpretation” (2002, p. 503). Another way to look at the initial description is the marathon race course map. This map identifies key roads and directions for the run, but it does not offer the runner details about the terrain or what the actual experience will be running the route. Those details will come later.

Go back to the 5 *W*'s and an *H* noted in the methodological chapter and consider applying these techniques to decision-making regarding the findings. Consider where, when, what, why, who, and how the experiences, events, narratives, observations, or documents reveal information. The inclusion of vignettes may be useful.

Organize findings around “descriptive accounts, themes, or categories that cut across the data or in the form of models and theories that explain the data” (Merriam 2009, p.176). Some of these ideas will be brought back to participants in the form of stakeholder or *member checks* or peer review to increase the credibility and trustworthiness of data. Connect these introductory points to details covered in the methodology chapter.

*Verbatim quotes* are common in qualitative research and must be thick and rich enough to allow the voices of participants to be heard

and felt. These are especially important when pointing out *emic* themes, which occur when a quote is coded based on the actual words used by the participant. These are considered to be insider perspectives written from the perspective of the participant.

The candidate must find the right balance of not saying too much without being too brief. Short quotes can be a problem because they are often out of context and lack the richness required to hear, see, and feel participants' experiences. On the other hand, lengthy quotes rely too much on participants' telling their story rather than the researcher interpreting the data. Limit direct quotes to no more than three to four items in each category or theme. Choose them wisely for the write-up. Be sure they are good representations of the theory or existing literature, and that they connect to the research questions.

It is also necessary for candidates to describe the development of *etic* themes. Etic analysis includes the researcher's perspective on the meaning and interpretation of qualitative data. These are considered outsider perspectives. The emic-etic continuum has merged over time and is now thought of as an essential balance required in most qualitative writing. The emphasis on the researcher's interpretation of perspectives may correlate with first-person writing, which is considered acceptable practice in many professional practice disciplines (although not by all committee members).

*Metaphors* and analogies are common in the write-up of qualitative research, but must be clearly connected and rooted in the data. Candidates should work to allow the reader to see and feel the data coming off the pages of the manuscript. Good writing skills and the ability to tell a coherent story helps in this chapter. The actual process of writing leads to an ability to put empirical information to words as the candidate fulfills the role of "researcher-as-writer" (Padgett 1998).

Candidates must develop a writing stance that reflects findings in a way that is both reachable and critical. Remember that the qualitative dissertation manuscript is written for an academic audience and is a piece of scholarly research. It must include transparent analysis techniques, critical decision-making skills related to data, and a high level of abstraction based on the existing literature, theoretical framework of the study, and the research questions. Being a good storyteller is not enough. All findings must be grounded in the data.

*Visual displays* are helpful in presenting qualitative ideas and could be incorporated appropriately into the chapter. Miles and Huberman (1994) are a good source for how to use data displays such as diagrams, graphs, matrices, sociograms, genograms, concept maps, and other tools used in the analysis of qualitative data.

Merriam (2009, p. 253–254) offers excellent recommendations for how to integrate visual displays into one’s writing:

- Keep the display simple, including only the information that is necessary to understanding the presentation.
- Keep the number of displays to a minimum; using just a few figures to represent important ideas will draw attention to those ideas.
- Mention the display in the text, placing the display as close to its discussion as possible.
- “Walk” the reader through the display, illustrating how to read or interpret the display.

Due to the diversity of qualitative approaches, there remains little consistency in the write-up of the qualitative findings chapter—and that’s OK. Munhall and Chenail (2008) propose additional guidelines that may be useful to structure one’s thinking about how to organize components of the chapter. As long as the findings are “readable and rigorous,” (Padgett 1998, p. 116) the candidate should feel comfortable in his or her approach, regardless of the choice of how to organize the chapter.

## **MIXED-METHODS DATA ANALYSIS TECHNIQUES**

Onwuegbuzie and Combs (2011, p. 2) report that analyzing data in a mixed research study “is the most complex step because the researcher involved has to be adept at analyzing both the quantitative and qualitative data that have been collected, as well as integrating the results that stem from both the quantitative and qualitative analysis in a coherent and meaningful way.”

Mixed-methods research designs require additional decision making regarding how to “mix” data in the analysis and in the discussion

of results. Program evaluation, action research, and traditional mixed-method design approaches may all utilize mixed sources of data that must be handled with great care and purpose.

The mixed-method analysis techniques used to analyze data should mirror the type of design used and the nature of the mixed-method research questions. Candidates who selected mixed methods of data or who are planning a mixed-method analysis will find that much of the material covered in the previous sections will apply quite nicely. This is especially true for candidates who are analyzing qualitative and quantitative data separately with a sequential mixed-method data analysis plan.

*Sequential data analysis* allows the researcher to use the information gathered from the first set of data to inform the next. The aim of this approach is to complement findings by elaborating, enhancing, illustrating, and clarifying from the results of one method with those of the other (Creswell and Plano Clark 2007). For example, qualitative data can be used as a follow-up to explain quantitative results in an explanatory sequential design. Or qualitative data could be analyzed to develop an instrument for the quantitative data collection phase of an exploratory study. These approaches increase the validity of the study's findings based on the use of mixed data.

One way to handle mixed data is to transform one type of data to the other and then compare the two datasets. The term *quantitizing* refers to the process of transforming coded qualitative data into quantitative data. Quantitizing the data may involve converting qualitative data to numerical form, as in a traditional content analysis. Descriptive statistics may be used to summarize the findings. *Qualitizing* is a term used to describe the process of converting quantitative data to qualitative data. Qualitizing the data may involve the creation of normative profiles or a cross-case analysis (Tashakkori and Teddlie 1998).

Candidates who wish to analyze data *concurrently* will be faced with additional challenges. The simultaneous analysis of qualitative and quantitative data, also called parallel analysis or triangulation, is a more common approach to mixed-methods research. This analysis process needs to be clearly delineated in Chapter 4. Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2006) offer clear recommendations of steps to take to analyze and interpret mixed-method data, as shown in Figure 4.5.



Stage	Tasks	
1. Data reduction	<u>Qualitative Data</u> - Exploring thematic analysis - Memoing	<u>Quantitative Data</u> - Descriptive statistics - Factor analysis
2. Data display	<u>Qualitative Data</u> - Networks - Lists - Venn diagram	<u>Quantitative Data</u> - Tables - Graphs
3. Data transformation	- Quantification of qualitative data - Quantitative data is 'qualitized' to narrative data	
4. Data consolidation	- Combine qualitative and quantitative data to create new variable(s) or data sets	
5. Data comparison	- Compare and/or correlate data from the qualitative and quantitative sources	
6. Data integration	- Integrate qualitative and quantitative data into one 'whole' - Integrate two separate sets of coherent whole (i.e. qualitative and quantitative)	

**Figure 4.5. How to Analyze and Present Mixed Method Data (adapted and reprinted with permission from Onwuegbuzie and Leech 2006)**

Mixed-method analysis first involves the *reduction of data*. This may involve descriptive statistical analysis or exploratory data analysis of quantitative data, and coding, memoing, and thematic analysis of qualitative data.

Create *data displays* for mixed-method analysis to show the committee the work that has been completed. Include tables and graphs for quantitative data, and matrices, networks, or Venn diagrams for qualitative data.

The next phase of mixed-method analysis will likely involve *data transformation*. The researcher who can demonstrate how to qualitize quantitative data or to quantitize qualitative data will be able to develop meta-themes at a higher level of abstraction than the original emergent themes in the earlier stages of analysis.

Following data transformation, some researchers will be able to use *data correlation* techniques to integrate findings into a coherent whole. It may be possible at this stage to correlate quantitative data with quantitized (qualitative) data if the data sources are from the same sample. Alternately candidates should plan to demonstrate how they have completed *data consolidation* of quantitative and qualitative data. The creation of new consolidated variables or a new dataset are encouraged (see Caracelli and Greene, 1993, for more details).

Next the candidate should determine the relationship between quantitative and qualitative data within a mixed-method framework. *Data comparison* requires the candidate to compare data from different sources. A common strategy is to use a matrix to organize both sets of data into one table. For example, the candidate can create columns for each piece of data to display how the findings compare to one another (i.e., descriptive statistics of each case, verbatim quotes from each case, thematic analysis of the interview, and scores on an instrument).

Finally the candidate must demonstrate *data integration* in the results section of the manuscript. How do the merged results answer the mixed-methods research questions? Are questions answered as one whole (i.e., concurrent explanation) or separately (i.e., sequential explanations)? Explain this by relisting the research questions and then provide findings that highlight and support answers.

## REPORTING MIXED-METHODS RESULTS

The results section of the mixed-method study will vary dramatically based on the type of design used. The design choice will serve as the organizing factor for the write-up. Be sure to match the results chapter with the study's methodology. If the study used exploratory sequential data collection techniques during two cycles of action research, the presentation of results should match the approach. A study that relied on concurrent triangulation of data collection tools during a program evaluation should reflect those methods in the results section.

Explain the type of mixing that took place, and which of the steps outlined by Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2006) have been followed. Do not forget to describe how each source of data were used in the analysis.

Present results in accordance with the quantitative and qualitative descriptions noted earlier in this chapter, and then include coherent data displays and descriptions of the data integration process.

Describe the *weight* or priority of the data. Is there greater emphasis on the quantitative or qualitative data sources? Or are they equally weighted? Explain why. This decision should be reflected in the depth of coverage of each data source and the amount of space dedicated to writing about each in Chapter 4.

Candidates are encouraged to organize the results section in synch with the *time sequence* in which data were collected. Ordering the discussion of data with the way they were collected makes it easier for the committee to follow the chain of research activities.

Do not present the same data more than once in this chapter. Use narratives and data displays to complement one another, rather than to explain. Present results in a way that is consistent with the research design, and be sure to make it clear how data are connected, merged, or embedded (Creswell 2010) from one type to the other. Expect this section to take a long time to write.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE RESULTS CHAPTER

Regardless of the researcher's methodological choice, *the American Association of University Professors* has outlined universal objectives (adapted from the work of Lovitts 2005) for Chapter 4:

The analysis

- is appropriate
- aligns with the questions and hypotheses raised
- shows sophistication
- is iterative

In addition, the amount and quality of data or information is

- sufficient
- well presented
- intelligently interpreted

**Table 4.2. Tips to Improve Chapter 4**

CHAPTER 4	COMMON MISTAKES	HELPFUL HINTS
Overview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Repeats material from previous chapters</li><li>• Introductory summary for Chapter 4 is missing</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Avoid redundancy.</li><li>• Provide a brief summary of the organization of Chapter 4.</li></ul>
Data analysis plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Data analysis plan is vague</li><li>• Data analysis techniques are not aligned with research design</li><li>• Incomplete or missing description of data analysis plan</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Be specific about the data analysis techniques used for each source of data.</li><li>• Provide research citations to support decision-making for data analysis plans.</li><li>• Align data analysis plan with research design.</li><li>• Align data analysis plan with research questions or hypotheses.</li><li>• Provide a detailed explanation of all aspects of the data analysis plan, including post hoc tests and peer reviews.</li></ul>
Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use of overly technical language</li><li>• Chapter reports but does not explain results in narrative form.</li><li>• Incorrect statistical tests selected</li><li>• Overly dependent on the words of participants</li><li>• Mixing of results is unclear</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use proficient and accurate research terminology.</li><li>• Report statistical findings according to style manual requirements. Include a sentence to explain results.</li><li>• Consult statistical decision-making tree or Figure 4.2 matrix to confirm appropriate choice.</li><li>• Choose direct quotes wisely.</li><li>• Specify mixed-method analysis procedures outlined by Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2006)</li></ul>
Data displays	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Data displays repeat information included in narrative</li><li>• Labels and titles missing</li><li>• Raw data included</li><li>• Difficult to read</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Keep it simple.</li><li>• Choose the appropriate data display.</li><li>• Include style-manual-specific labels for all figures and tables.</li><li>• Omit output from chapter.</li><li>• Avoid use of shading, color, or small fonts.</li></ul>
Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Subjective</li><li>• Includes interpretations of findings</li><li>• Does not follow discipline-specific style manual for writing up results</li><li>• Overemphasis on small findings that may appear significant</li><li>• Disorganized</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Maintain objectivity in writing.</li><li>• Do not include interpretation of findings in this chapter.</li><li>• Consult style manual for guidance on how to write up results.</li><li>• Provide a balanced approach when writing up results.</li><li>• Create a reverse outline to reevaluate the presentation of results. Go back through the chapter and extract topic sentences from each paragraph. Reorganize, expand, or refocus the writing as needed.</li></ul>

The author also cogently expresses

- the insights gained from the study
- the study's limitations

Additional tips for how candidates can improve this chapter are included in Table 4.2.

## THE DISCUSSION

Sweat is pouring off the candidate by the time the results are analyzed. Candidates are often stretched beyond any capacity they thought they had in terms of statistical knowledge and making sense of the data. The previous chapter, in many ways, is the bulk of the miles in the marathon. But for many, the discussion chapter is the point in the dissertation when the candidate needs to give his or her all when it may feel like there is nothing left to give.

A psychological hurdle often appears at this stage in one's writing, and it's an important one to overcome. *Impostor syndrome* is a phenomenon that occurs when a person doubts and discredits his or her abilities and achievements. This can lead people to believe they are a fraud.

Imposter syndrome originated from the work of Harry Stack Sullivan (1953), who first wrote about “*as if*” performances of children who acted as if they were adults while concealing childlike behaviors.

The discussion section of the dissertation (and, to a certain extent, the final defense presentation itself) is one of the first forays for the doctoral candidate to begin to demonstrate “*as if*” they are a doctoral scholar. These misconceptions are found with greater prevalence in academia (Kastberg 1998). It's possible that writing the discussion section may evoke these beliefs.

Let's nip this one in the bud right away. Most people have felt insecure about their work at some point in their academic career, but the discussion section is not the time to show it. In truth, it is very important for candidates to be aware of all that they know, and all that they “are” when setting out to write the discussion chapter. Candidates are not pretending or faking their knowledge—this is it for real.

Candidates know their data from the inside out after crafting or carefully selecting each instrument, and collecting enough data to organize and write an entire dissertation. They know the existing literature, how their data answers their research questions, and how their findings fit within the body of knowledge in their field. They have conquered the data and added a new brick in the wall of knowledge related to their topic. He or she is no impostor. He or she is rightfully about to earn the title of “doctor.” That is, as long as he or she can muster up the stamina to pull together a scholarly discussion of the study.

The purpose of the discussion chapter is multifaceted. The candidate needs to find a way to tie together and synthesize the findings of the study and to derive meaning from the results. It should be organized with a beginning, middle, and ending. Typical subheadings and elements in Chapter 5 might include:

- Summary of results or findings
- Interpretations
- Implications for policy and practice
- Limitations of the study
- Recommendations for future research

These subheadings are closely aligned with the AAUP objectives of the concluding chapter, which are:

- Summarizes the findings
- Provides perspective on results
- Refers back to the introduction
- Ties everything together
- Discusses the study’s strengths and weaknesses
- Discusses implications and applications for the discipline
- Discusses future directions for research

The *beginning* of the discussion chapter will restate the purpose of the study. Restate the purpose of the study, the research question, and provide a synopsis of the main points of evidence. Next the candidate will need to briefly summarize the findings. This process should highlight the results rather than repeat them. Describe the patterns and

relationships associated with each major finding or result and put them in perspective. Discuss how the findings contribute, refute, or elevate what is known about the topic and what has been learned.

During the *middle* portion of the discussion chapter, it is an expectation that candidates will make *interpretations* from the results that answer the research questions. How do the results support these answers? What does “it” all mean? The meanings constructed from the data help give the reader (and, of course, the committee) ideas about how to understand the results in a particular way. Now is the time to offer plausible, clinical, or theoretical explanations and opinions of the analysis. Candidates need to find an assertive voice in their writing and “speak” with authority and expertise. No one knows these results like they do.

The *conclusions* of a dissertation should be like the final chord of a song. It should make the listener feel that the piece is complete and well played. The same is true for research. State the most salient, the most important, and the most significant findings at the start of the chapter rather than leading the reader to a faded out middle place in the chapter.

The candidate should write a conclusion that allows the reader to immediately acknowledge and understand the basis for the interpretations based on the results. Aim for an original, creative, and accurate concluding summary of the study. A well-written conclusion will demonstrate the validity and trustworthiness of the interpretive claims made by the candidate.

Address ambiguity and uncertainty of the analysis and results. Discuss and evaluate conflicting explanations of the results or any unexpected findings. Why might these have occurred? The best discussions are the ones that can explain and defend why certain answers are obvious and others are less clear. Offer potential explanations and try to support them with the data, literature, theory, or practice. This will naturally progress to a discussion of the limitations of the study.

The discussion should place the work in *context* in terms of the existing literature, theoretical framework, or professional practice. It should offer a clear connection to the field and be relevant. Findings inevitably inspire new questions that lead to further research, and they may have broader impact and applications on society, the profession, or a specific population. Address the importance of the problem and how this research fits with the larger context.

The logical flow of the chapter will next lead the reader to the *ending* portion of the discussion. Discuss the *implications* of the findings in regard to policy, theory, and practice. How can these results be used to advance knowledge in the profession? What difference does this research make? Answer the “so what” question that germinates in the minds of every researcher and committee member. Describe the strengths of this study and the value it offers.

Candidates will likely offer *recommendations for future research* in the final paragraphs of this chapter. This short section is an opportunity for the candidate to point out a couple of suggestions for research that could further advance the next cycle of data collection. He or she may want to offer an alternative view or approach to the topic that was conceptualized during data analysis. These recommendations may be for the candidate’s research (i.e., a future research agenda) or for the field in general.

There are a few potential cautions to watch for in Chapter 5 of the dissertation. One common mistake is to reach conclusions that go beyond the evidence. Candidates must be very careful not to embellish results. Both significant and non-significant results are often reported in relation to key research questions. It would be unethical to omit results that do not support a hypothesis or to focus on small findings that are outside the primary scope and purpose of the study. Be realistic and pragmatic in making conclusions based on the data.

Another problem candidates may make is to confuse a lack of evidence with no evidence. If a result is inconclusive, it would be incorrect to claim, for example, that an intervention did not have an effect. It is safer to report the data (with a confidence interval) as being compatible with either a decrease or an increase in the desired outcome. This is especially important in professional practice fields where a positive but statistically non-significant trend may be of value or *practical significance*. It would be appropriate to describe these results as “promising.”

Watch for wishful thinking. That is, do not wish for better results “if only” there had been a larger sample, more time, fewer variables, or better data, etc. These are the realities of a professional practice doctorate. Yet these limitations or delimitations do not mean that results would be different under alternative circumstances. Only report what is known from the available data versus future hypotheses for what could have been known.



Finally remember to end the conclusion with a concluding paragraph. The dissertation needs an ending to close the manuscript. Keep the paragraph in your own words (instead of a quote) and precise. Strum that last chord nice and clear. This is the final opportunity for the candidate to showcase his or her strengths as a doctoral scholar.

In most disciplines, the discussion is considered the heart and soul of the paper and usually requires writing several drafts. Candidates may be tired or have limited confidence in their abilities to discuss the results. Thus it is very common for draft copies of Chapter 5 to be returned to the candidate by the committee with a repeated request for expansion of the dialog. Keep the research questions front and center and be sure to develop interpretations, conclusions, and implications of the results

**Table 4.3. Tips to Improve Chapter 5 (Assan n.d.)**

<i>Chapter 5</i>	<i>Common Mistakes</i>	<i>Helpful Tips</i>
Beginning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lacks introduction to the chapter</li> <li>• Missing connection to research questions or hypotheses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce the purpose of the chapter.</li> <li>• Restate the purpose of the study and the research questions and hypotheses. (A paraphrase or summary of these items is acceptable here.)</li> </ul>
Middle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offers vague generalizations</li> <li>• Summarizes each chapter of the dissertation</li> <li>• Includes data</li> <li>• Introduces new ideas</li> <li>• Embellished or heavy focus on certain results</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be specific and precise with descriptions.</li> <li>• Clearly connect interpretations to the findings/results. Offer a convincing, synthesized summary of the study's results.</li> <li>• Do not include specific statistical results or qualitative findings.</li> <li>• Do not introduce new information.</li> <li>• Present a balanced discussion of evidence to support interpretations.</li> </ul>
Ending	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Begins with trite phrase such as "in conclusion" or "in summary"</li> <li>• Is emotional</li> <li>• Has no clearly marked ending</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uses scholarly transitions and openings.</li> <li>• Write in a scholarly, professional manner based on findings instead of researcher's feelings.</li> <li>• Include a strong closing written in your own words.</li> </ul>

based on the questions that were asked. With some supportive spectators on the sidelines of the racecourse, the finish line has arrived.

## LAST BUT NOT LEAST: THE APPENDICES

The *appendices* have already been collected, so this section will not take much to organize, but it can be quite tricky to assemble in Word. Dissertation manuscripts submitted to committee members (and eventually library and online databases) must have all appendices attached to the end of the dissertation—usually after the references. No one wants to receive one document with the manuscript and then eight separate attachments of appendices. Candidates will need to figure out not only what to include in the appendices, but how to include these important documents within the body of the final manuscript.

All items included in the appendix must have an *in-text reference* in previous chapters of the final document. For example, if a candidate is using a survey instrument designed by another researcher, Chapter 3 may read: “*The survey contained 15 items from the Authentic Leadership Questionnaire related to self-awareness (see Appendix A).*” It is important to double check the manuscript to be sure in-text references to the appendices are labeled correctly.

Items that traditionally belong in the appendices include sample informed consent documents, survey cover letters, data collection tools and instruments that are not copyrighted, permission letters for the researcher to use copyrighted instruments, recruitment fliers, raw data such as statistical outputs or calculations, transcripts (if requested by the chairperson), and data displays not included in the body of the dissertation such as pictures, tables, and graphs. Think of the appendix as a place to provide justification for the results presented in Chapter 4. This is where additional evidence can be included if the committee would like to verify findings.

Appendices must be labeled on each document (i.e., Appendix A, B, C) and clearly referenced in the table of contents in accordance with the form and style manual for the discipline. Follow directions for pagination in accordance with the form and style manual. Some disciplines

do not include the appendices as part of the total page count of the manuscript.

## SUMMARY

Candidates preparing the final manuscript may hit ‘the wall’ and get stuck trying to determine what elements must be included in order to pass the final defense.

Remind one’s self that almost anyone running a marathon can hit the wall at some point in the race—often in Chapters 4 and 5. Runners prepare for this in their training, and must learn to cope with the physical agony of a marathon in order to cross the finish line. A few suggestions are offered for how to push through common roadblocks, just as a runner would push through those last miles, to finish writing the final manuscript. Pace yourself and don’t overdo it. You’ll do fine.

## EXERCISES AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What do researchers need to know before choosing the appropriate statistical test?
2. How do researchers demonstrate credibility and trustworthiness of qualitative findings?
3. Reflect on the potential theoretical, practical, and statistical significance of your work. How can this help advance your research agenda?
4. Identify the strengths and weaknesses of your study. Which of these could be incorporated into Chapter 5 and which of these should be excluded?
5. Look back through what you have written for Chapter 4. Check for interpretive statements of material that were included as findings that should be moved to Chapter 5. Cut and paste from the previous chapter as needed.
6. Locate a dissertation manuscript that could serve as a template or model for your study.

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## 5

# USING CLOUD-BASED VIRTUAL COMMUNITIES IN THE DISSERTATION PROCESS

## OBJECTIVES

**A**t the conclusion of this chapter you will be able to:

1. Understand the challenges of dissertation management.
2. Understand a cloud-based virtual community.
3. Know how to build a cloud-based resource database.
4. Utilize learning management platforms for online dissertation management and support.

## THE CHALLENGE OF DISSERTATION MANAGEMENT

Thus far, this book has focused on the dissertation candidate and the tremendous amount of work, sacrifice, and persistence that is needed to complete a doctoral program. While it is true that the dissertation candidate is ultimately responsible for completing the dissertation, the dissertation committee and the academic institution share some of that responsibility.

Research consistently demonstrates the need for doctoral candidates to have psychological, social, financial, and academic support in order to

finish the dissertation. In this chapter let's turn attention away from the candidate just for a bit, and offer concrete suggestions for how academic institutions can help professional practice doctorates get organized, receive clear information, and manage their dissertations.

Faculty assigned to supervise and mentor doctoral candidates often have knowledge of diverse research methods and content subject matter, yet may have difficulty explaining all the nuances required to successfully complete and defend the dissertation. In institutional settings that emphasize teaching and service, faculty may have limited experience writing and presenting research other than their own dissertations and theses (National Council of Professors of Educational Administration 2007). Despite this, faculty are presumed to hold the skills, knowledge, and resources to serve as dissertation advisors with limited to no support from the institution.

Coupled with this lack of experience by faculty called to serve on dissertation committees, there is no dispute that there has been rapid growth of enrollment in online doctoral programs as well as an increase in professional practice doctoral degrees awarded in the United States. But getting admitted to a program, or having large numbers of students enrolled in a doctoral degree, does not equate program completion.

Many of these programs, and certainly most ground-based programs, are accredited by the *Higher Learning Commission*. In the United States accreditation is a voluntary, non-governmental process of review. An accredited institution agrees to uphold the quality standards set by the accreditation organization. The accredited institution also agrees to periodically submit to accreditation renewal review.

In a similar vein the federal government has questioned the ability of these programs to support candidates through graduation. Most professional practice doctoral candidates take out federally subsidized student loans (and often private loans as well). Thus both federal and private lenders are scrutinizing loan candidates closely with an eye on program completion. Program completers are less likely to default on their loans.

Many professional practice candidates get stuck in ABD-land and linger without moving toward degree completion. Candidates experience difficulty conducting independent research and often look to the institution or the dissertation committee for guidance only to be sent away to figure things out for themselves. There is great value in this challenging

experience, as it stretches candidates to develop problem-solving and decision-making skills required as an independent scholar.

Unfortunately the challenge faced by candidates may run parallel to the isolation faced by faculty supervising the growing pool of doctoral-degree-seeking candidates. Junior faculty may experience feelings of inadequacy in the supervision and mentoring of doctoral candidates, whereas grant-funded or tenured faculty may have little energy or patience for the candidate who is overly dependent on the dissertation committee for guidance. It is imperative that a balance is found that offers both clear guidance and support, while also promoting independence and creativity. This balance of support and autonomy applies to both the dissertation committee and the doctoral candidate.

It is the individual candidate's responsibility to manage the dissertation experience from start to finish. Call it a need to develop project management skills, organizational leadership, or data management—any way to define the reality that the candidate is in charge of his or her own dissertation. But institutions can provide support structures to make this dissertation management process slightly easier for the candidate.

One way to address these challenges is to create a collaborative virtual space where candidates and faculty can receive assistance on both general and specific topics related to resources and knowledge required to conduct and complete dissertation research. The use of a *cloud-computing model* for resource management and communication offers an opportunity to link a collection of materials, processes, and resources that can be beneficial to both faculty and candidates (Mell and Grance 2011).

Many programs are behind the curve on technology initiatives to support doctoral candidates. One practical idea is for doctoral program leadership teams and faculty to create and implement a *cloud-based virtual resource* within the institution's existing learning management system to support doctoral candidates and faculty working with dissertation committees. This idea is consistent with empirically based recommendations from Di Pierro (2007) on the importance of the need for institutions to provide clear directions and resources for the dissertation experience.



A cloud-based virtual resource that is accessible to all registered doctoral candidates and faculty who teach and supervise doctoral candidates can offer a comprehensive, clear guide to support all who are connected with the dissertation experience. These resources can be designed to be an on-demand self-service pool of web-based resources gathered by university faculty that can be accessed through an online learning management platform. Using a cloud-based virtual community offers a model of efficiency, collaboration, and support that can readily be replicated.

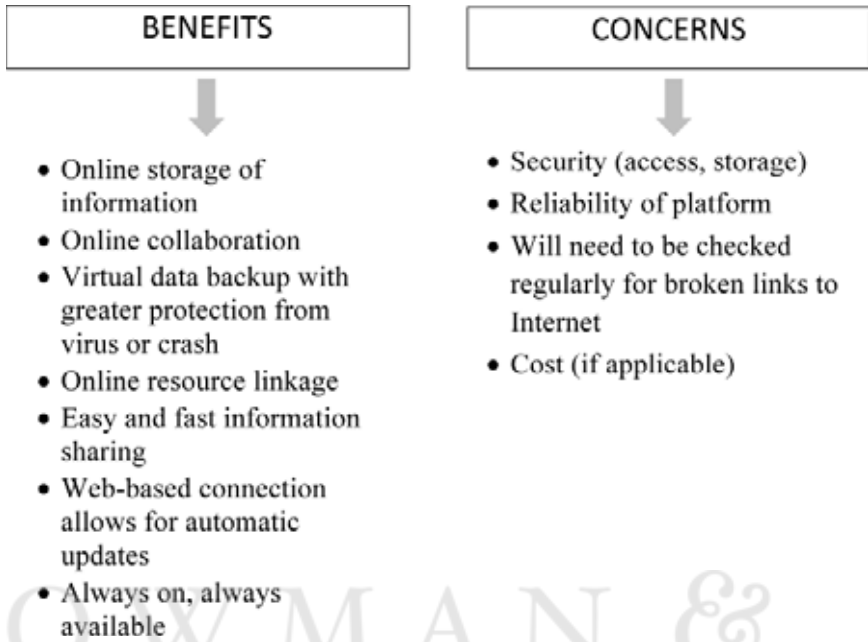
## WHAT IS A CLOUD?

A *cloud* is a metaphor used in information technology to refer to the virtual connection and delivery of information through the World Wide Web. Clouds can be private or internal (when they are password protected, such as intranet-based university portals) or public and external (such as a general public access website for a university).

*Cloud computing* is a term used to describe a package of Internet-based services that can provide different capabilities to users. Most institutions already provide cloud computing as a way to offer services to candidates via the Internet rather than installing programs on individual computers. For example, a university may deliver information via cloud computing by providing access to class schedules, financial aid information, e-mail, tutorials, portals for submission and retrieval of university documents, online course work, and more. In today's digital world, these virtual services have become part of the fabric of higher education in America.

A *cloud-based virtual community* refers to a social network of people who are connected through the World Wide Web. Blogs, wikis, Google drive, and sites such as Facebook and Pinterest are all examples of cloud-based virtual communities.

The use of cloud-based services for information exchange and communication is growing exponentially. Cloud services are changing the way the Internet is used by making resources and access to information available “anywhere, anytime”—a wonderful benefit to everyone in higher education. Additionally, since most cloud-based resources are



**Figure 5.1. Benefits and Concerns of Cloud-Computing**

culled from the web, a large amount of data can be included without impacting the institution's server, storage, or user capacity.

Institutions increase their operational efficiency through virtualization. The consolidation of information in one place creates a process for doctoral candidates to be able to get necessary, consistent resources related to the dissertation in an easy manner. But servers can crash and websites may not be accessible from one's work computer. Technology maintenance and security concerns may be an institutional concern. Figure 5.1 lists benefits and concerns associated with cloud computing.

Cloud-computing virtual technologies are becoming more readily available at little to no start-up cost. Cloud-service providers include well-known platforms such as Google Apps for Education, Apple, and Microsoft. Additionally, *learning management systems* (LMS) such as Blackboard, Moodle, Sakai, Desire2Learn, and eCollege are now standard provisions in higher education. As of 2009, 91% of American universities have adopted an LMS to enable the delivery of course material to candidates (Smith, Salaway, and Borreson Caruso 2009). Blackboard

LMS is the leading commercial provider of online learning and has been available since 1997.

The LMS is the conduit by which course information is distributed to candidates taking online classes, but it is more frequently being used with ground-based students as well. The use of Internet-based education support systems are one of the most substantial innovative systems for teaching and learning in the current century. Figure 5.2 shows the home page of industry leaders in LMS.

## **PRIVATE, INSTITUTION-SPECIFIC CLOUD COMMUNITIES**

*Babson Survey Research Group* reported that the number of candidates taking at least one online course is over 6 million—a number equivalent to almost one-third of all candidates in higher education (2011). Enrollment trends in online programming continue to grow.

The *Campus Computing Project* manages and reports data from the largest continuing study of the role of computing, eLearning, and information technology in American higher education ([www.campus-computing.net](http://www.campus-computing.net)). Campus Computing reported in 2011 that the forces driving the growth of online education include the economic viability of the practice, an increase in infrastructure and instructional technology supports, and evidence of the similarities in educational outcomes of face-to-face and online candidates.

There are a fewer proportion of professional practice doctoral candidates following an apprentice model in which they are fully funded to pursue their doctoral education and working closely with a dissertation advisor. In today's world, many professional practice degree programs are fully paid for by the candidate.

On a related note, more candidates are seeking full-time employment when they reach ABD status (that is, assuming they were not already employed full-time while completing their doctoral course work), necessitating a shift in the relationship and type of communication with their chairperson. As a result of these changes in the realities of dissertation management, it is common practice for the dissertation committee and the candidate to have primary interaction through *e-mail*.



**Figure 5.2. Screenshots of Leading LMS Platforms**

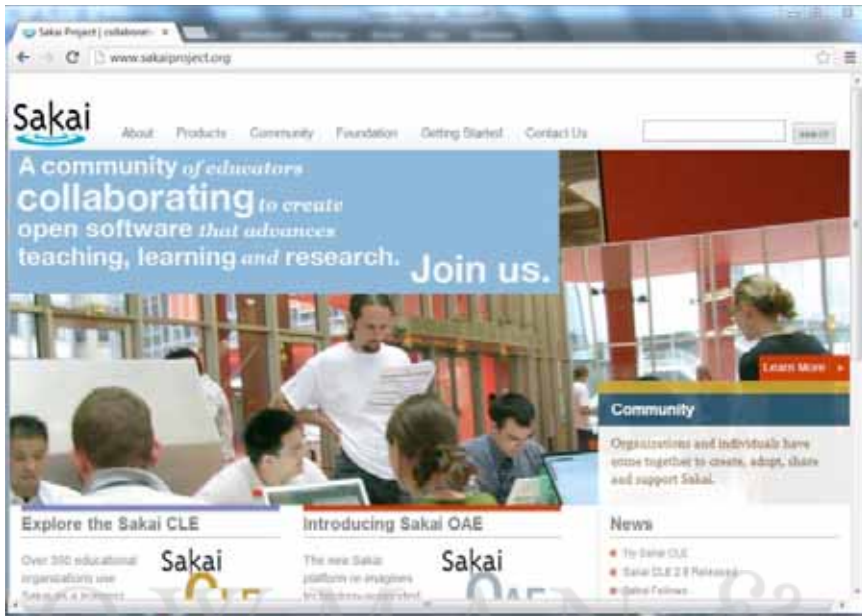


Figure 5.2. (Continued)

The Carnegie Foundation reported, “New technologies are altering and accelerating the way knowledge is shared and developed” (Walker et al. 2007, p. 3). Consistent with the advancement of technologies, there has been a growth in the number of fully *online doctoral programs* over the past decade. Institutions are now better able to deliver effective academic programs and meet student demand using the Internet. In the most recent report available, Allen and Seaman (2007) determined that the annual growth rate of doctoral candidates taking an online course was 21.7% during the period from 2002 to 2006. One can expect that this figure is even higher in the present day.

Yet even for candidates attending and faculty teaching in face-to-face settings, the use of e-mail exchanges dominate candidate-to-chairperson communication and review of work. While it is true that some faculty may enjoy using a red-ink pen to make handwritten notes on paper copies of drafts of the dissertation that have been hand delivered to the committee, this is a dying practice in the age of e-mail delivery of documents, the prolific use of track changes in Word, and the generational shift to faculty raised in a digital world.

The practice of implementing cloud-based virtual communities is another step to support this change in the cultural landscape of graduate education in America. This is an example of an innovation that demonstrates how technologies can aid doctoral education.

The establishment of a *private, institutionally created* virtual community offers a way for institutions to develop a warehouse of web-based resources available only to those who are part of a defined group. Unlike a publicly available website or blog, virtual cloud communities based in a learning management system allow the institution to define community membership and access.

For example, leadership for a doctoral program may opt to create one virtual community composed of doctoral students who have not yet reached ABD candidacy status, and a second community for doctoral candidates who are working on their dissertations. Using a learning management system that is password protected, the institution may post internal documents and resources that are meant only to be available to candidates who are registered for a specific program. In this way faculty can offer trustworthy, institution-tailored guidance to their candidate population.

### **IMPLEMENTATION OF A PRIVATE CLOUD COMMUNITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

There are more than 5,000 research doctorate programs (including the conventional PhD and its equivalent titles) in 62 fields at 212 universities in the United States (Ostriker et al. 2010). Currently, there are over 250 accredited online U.S.-based doctoral programs, a number that is expected to continue to grow in the future.

In each of these programs there is a need to establish a consistent, real-time information center and resource database to aid candidates (and committee members) in the successful design, management, and completion of the dissertation. This need may be especially great at teaching universities where there may be faculty who have had limited experience supervising dissertations or conducting independent research. The conceptualization of a cloud-based virtual resource tool available to engage, guide, and support candidates and faculty is one approach to meet the needs of doctoral programs.

Let's refer to this idea as a "*Doctoral Cloud*." A Doctoral Cloud could serve as a model to provide consistent research guidance to faculty and candidates on topics such as writing the literature review, formatting the research report, research strategies for various methodological approaches, processes involved with research approvals, and other areas that help doctoral candidates complete their dissertation research.

The use of webinars, content links, RSS feeds, document repositories, university forums, and how to psychologically support candidates could all be included in a Doctoral Cloud. This offers a mechanism for administrators to use cloud-based virtual resources to manage the dissertation.

The development of this cloud community should take a fairly short amount of time to collect a pool of appropriate web-based resources identified by the faculty and leadership team for a doctoral program. A Doctoral Cloud could conceivably go "live" to candidates and faculty less than 60 days from the initial planning meeting. Additional resources, webinars, and links can be added on a regular basis once the cloud community is active.

Virtual communities may increase access and involvement of a broad range of faculty at an institution. Similarly faculty may report a more cohesive experience working with doctoral candidates, feel greater support from the leadership team regarding their roles and responsibilities, and have an extensive pool of resources available to them from which to guide their candidates. It's a win-win for everyone to establish this type of resource for a doctoral program.

Despite the web-based nature of this resource, its use should not be limited to online doctoral programs. Ground and distance candidates may both benefit from a greater personal connection to faculty, their department of study, and the institution because of the supports, guidance, and community engagement provided on the cloud community.

Candidates will likely describe decreased anxiety associated with knowing where to go for clear and concise information regarding their research endeavors rather than relying on small scraps of information obtained from their chairperson. Concordantly there may be a decrease in the need for program administrators to guide faculty due to the clarification of expectations in the doctoral program, which can be clearly outlined on a Doctoral Cloud.

## **BUILDING A CLOUD COMMUNITY FOR DOCTORAL CANDIDATES AND FACULTY**

According to the *Educause Center for Applied Research*, students expect their instructors to use technology in the learning process and believe technology is “critical to academic success” (Dahlstrom 2012, p. 19). Understanding technologies that are most effective for doctoral candidates can lead to strategic pedagogical investments by institutions of higher education. However, the time, resources, and energy required for these basic supports are limited. Institutions must be strategic about whether and how they deliver information to candidates.

Private cloud communities are a fundamental aspect of learning management systems. The LMS houses the development and delivery of a cloud community for doctoral candidates and is the starting point for building this resource.

In an effort to shift some of the responsibility of dissertation management from the candidate to the institution, here are some suggested steps for how administration can build a private virtual cloud community for a doctoral program.

### **Step One: Identify Technological Supports Available from the Institution**

Each LMS requires a *systems administrator* to be the lead developer, designer, and supervisor of the system. In most cases the systems administrator will be the point of contact and gatekeeper for building a cloud community. Therefore it is imperative to establish a relationship with this person prior to moving forward with discussions at the institutional level.

A systems administrator is responsible for providing technical leadership and operational support for the learning management system, including system configuration, content migration and end-user support. The administrator interfaces directly with the learning management system parent company (i.e., Blackboard, Sakai, Moodle) and campus stakeholders to define and ensure successful technical implementation and delivery of information to candidates and faculty. This person is a technical resource who is responsible for developing strategies for



evaluating, integrating, and supporting web technologies such as a cloud community.

To begin the exploration of this process, the doctoral program leadership team might first meet with the LMS systems administrator to discuss the idea of how to deploy academic content to degree-seeking candidates attending classes both online and face-to-face. Due to the prevalence of LMS use, using the existing platform that is already in place for 91% of institutions in America is an obvious starting point. However, it is possible to build publicly accessible virtual communities in other settings, such as Google Drive, or a wiki.

The systems administrator can meet with faculty to brainstorm preliminary ideas regarding what one hopes to accomplish pedagogically using technology. In the beginning stages of planning, the phrase “cloud computing” may be a foreign concept to the team, which will likely be comprised of faculty who are unfamiliar with instructional technology. However, the systems administrator should have a good grasp on how to disseminate information using technology resources with the campus.

### **Step Two: Identify Costs (if any) to Establish a Virtual Cloud Community within the LMS**

There is a fair amount of diversity in the availability, performance, and reliability of course and learning management systems used in higher education. Yet regardless of the system selected for use at a particular institution, LMS platforms are universally flexible, customizable to the needs of the institution, and affordable.

Learning management systems operate using a secure password-protected Internet connection. In most cases candidates must log in through the institution’s website to access their account. A private cloud can be designed specifically within an institution that is only available to designated users. Since information is stored in “the cloud,” there are no hardware or server maintenance costs, making the service a sound, strategic pedagogical investment for institutions to adopt.

Learning management systems are reported to be easy to manage and require less overhead expense to administer—many do not charge fees on a per user basis (Harrison 2012), making it affordable to both large and small doctoral programs. In some cases, the LMS may charge for

the addition of add-on packages, such as synchronous, recordable video chats. While these features are highly beneficial, they require a more advanced, time-consuming level of interactivity and should only be considered as a secondary option if funds are available.

For institutions that already have an LMS in place, there is usually no additional overhead cost related to the use of the existing platform given that most of the major vendors already have this option built into the LMS package used by the institution. Thus a project such as this is likely to be administratively approved due to the lack of additional operating expenses.

However, if an institution must invest in purchasing add-on capabilities to create a virtual community in an existing LMS, or if human resources (i.e., the systems administrator) must be devoted to build the community, a cost-benefit analysis of the development of the cloud-based community would be helpful to make a case for adding this feature.

**Table 5.1. Cost-Benefit Analysis of a Private Cloud-Based Community**

	<i>Costs</i>	<i>Benefits</i>
<i>Direct tangible</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Equipment (hardware, software)</li> <li>2. Communication to candidates and faculty</li> <li>3. Project development                             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Internal staff</li> <li>b) Consultants</li> <li>c) Expenses for data entry</li> </ol> </li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Reduced costs of leadership time</li> <li>2. Better coordination of dissertation experience</li> <li>3. Reduced operating costs (e.g., decreased time spent by administrative offices providing forms and explaining procedures)</li> <li>4. Expanded pedagogical coverage</li> </ol>
<i>Indirect tangible</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Anxiety related to use of information technology</li> <li>2. Faculty time spent providing resources to build cloud community</li> <li>3. Necessary updates to cloud-based resource database</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Improved institutional identity</li> <li>2. Greater clarity for candidates and faculty regarding the dissertation process</li> <li>3. Increased communication across institutions</li> <li>4. Nurture relationships</li> <li>5. Expand development of independent scholar</li> <li>6. Universal dissemination of information to all candidates and faculty</li> </ol>

### Step Three: Develop the Homepage for the Doctoral Cloud

Once administrative approval has been granted to develop the cloud, faculty and candidates should now think through key content that will be included on the cloud community. First and foremost, focus on the homepage to ground the audience, set the tone and identity for the doctoral community at the institution.

A *video* welcome is strongly recommended to bring to life the web-based connection to leadership within the doctoral programs or graduate school. The video clip should be short and offer an introduction to the key faculty within the doctoral program and to orient the viewer to the cloud community. The institution may have audiovisual services available on campus to assist, or faculty can record brief, professional introductory clips using programs such as Windows Live Movie Maker or iMovie. Most smartphones allow for the creation of videos that can be uploaded to YouTube and then inserted on the homepage.

Alternately, consider posting faculty profiles and *photographs* of key people involved with doctoral candidates. The ability to “see” program and departmental faculty and administration is an easy way to help nurture relationships through web technology.

*Contact information* is also a necessity and can be placed in a column on the home page. Candidates and faculty should know exactly where to call, where to click, and where to go for administrative issues such as program advising, financial aid, and registration. Some LMS platforms will connect directly to registration and e-mail systems so that users can more readily access these services from the cloud.

If *real-time chat* is available through the LMS, consider posting a link to “chat live” with program advisors or faculty during certain business or office hours. Faculty do not need to be tethered to their computer screens during this time, but can have notifications sent to their smartphones or instant-message alerts to let them know someone would like to connect with them. In most cases these chat sessions can be recorded and archived for future candidate use. These connections offer personalized support to doctoral candidates.

Documents containing *frequently asked questions* (FAQs) are helpful to post on the home page. For example, the development of FAQ information sheets for hot topics such as the comprehensive exam, forming

a dissertation committee, and the dissertation proposal could be posted. Other topics might include the IRB submission process, applying for graduation, or how to publish the dissertation. Commonly asked questions of the leadership team are a good fit for these FAQ documents.

*Announcements* are another logical category to place on the home page for the cloud. The nature of cloud-based computing is that text, documents, RSS feeds, and other media sources can easily and regularly be updated or replaced. Announcements could contain real-time news regarding candidates who have successfully defended their dissertation, published, received grants, secured employment, or fellowships. Cloud communities that are housed through the institution's LMS are password protected and offer a greater level of security and privacy than social media outlets. Thus the Doctoral Cloud is an excellent place to promote accomplishments of doctoral candidates while they are still connected to the institution.

Similarly, *newsletters*, *bulletins*, or *blogs* related to a doctoral program or graduate school would be other appropriate documents or links to post on the home page. Of added benefit, the very nature of using web-based links on a cloud-based virtual community is that any time public websites are updated (i.e., a departmental blog or website), the link within the cloud will automatically update as well.

#### **Step Four: Develop an Organizational Plan for the Cloud**

The home page serves as a landing page for basic information and contacts related to the doctoral program of study. Begin to think about categories of information to include in the cloud-based community. In most LMS platforms, these categories will serve as a table of contents or navigation page for the user.

Sample categorical tabs for the Doctoral Cloud might include:

- Doctoral Home Page
- IRB Resources
- Writing Resources
- Program Forms
- Research Help
- Dissertation Support

Alternately it may be appropriate to differentiate categories associated with each of the chapters in the dissertation, as well as policies and procedures for the dissertation defense, such as:

- Chapter 1: Introduction
- Chapter 2: The Literature Review
- Chapter 3: Methodology
- Chapter 4: Results
- Chapter 5: Discussion
- Dissertation Proposal Policies, Procedures, and Expectations
- Final Defense Policies, Procedures, and Expectations
- Institutional Guidelines for the Dissertation

Additional tabs can be added or rearranged by the systems administrator or the instructional designer of an institutionally based cloud community.

The choice of categories of information should be collaboratively determined with input from candidates and faculty working with doctoral candidates. Experienced faculty members know all too well the repeated questions and confusion experienced by candidates writing a dissertation. The importance of developing a strong organizational plan of information to be included on the cloud is intended to decrease the burden placed on faculty advisors so that a large amount of reliable, useful information can be disseminated and shared with others.

### **Step Five: Gather Materials for the Cloud**

One of the great benefits of developing a virtual cloud community for a doctoral program is the ability to filter relevant, timely, and useful information that can be shared amongst faculty and candidates in one collegial place. An extensive, rich pool of information exists on the web that is waiting to be found. Yet doctoral candidates are often unaware of these resources and need assistance in determining their reliability and relevance. Faculty who provide materials for the cloud can guide candidates toward scholarly resources relevant to the design, analysis, and writing of the dissertation.

***Who Can Help Build a Cloud Community?*** It would be best if one faculty member (preferably a program coordinator or department chair) is designated as the *resource collector* for the assembly of materials to be placed on the cloud. This person should be the point of contact for gathering materials, evaluating their appropriateness in relation to the doctoral program, weeding out duplicate submissions from various faculty members, and serving as a point of contact for future requests to add resources.

Using the organizational plan developed in Step Four, think through who would be a good source for sharing information regarding each of the tabs to be included in the cloud database. Doctoral program leaders may want to send out a group e-mail to current faculty, staff, and current candidates with an explanation of the purpose of a private virtual cloud community for the doctoral program, and a list of the main categories. This e-mail should include a request to share web-based links that may be useful for others to access or other personal materials they are willing to share.

The e-mail request to *faculty* should include the organizational plan of categories that will be used to create the cloud. Request for best practices, seminal articles or references, helpful websites, video tutorials, or databases are recommended. Faculty hold valuable expertise that can be used and shared by others to aid in the successful completion and defense of the dissertation.

*Staff* involved with writing assistance available at the institution, statistical tutoring, or programmatic issues are excellent sources of information and should be solicited for input as well. For example, the library may have templates available to aid with writing issues; a tutoring center on campus may have decision trees available for choosing statistical tests. Either of these institutionally based resources can be disseminated to a much broader candidate base for use if they are posted on the cloud. Since the cloud is private within the LMS, the authors do not need to be concerned about the distribution of institution-specific materials to non-registered students.

*Current doctoral candidates* are an excellent source for sharing timely resources and materials that have been useful for their own journey—some of which may be unexpected and could possibly expand the predetermined categories. In one such case, candidates recommended

sites for reference management software such as Mendeley, EndNote, and Zotero that the leadership team had not previously thought to include.

***What to Include in a Doctoral Cloud Community*** The database of information to be placed on the virtual cloud community will encompass a compendium of resources gathered by faculty, staff, and doctoral candidates—most of which will be directly linked to the resource itself that is available fully online to avoid copyright infringement. Information to be included typically falls into three categories: program-specific forms, institution-based resources, and web-based publicly available materials.

*Program specific forms* are ideal materials to place on the cloud. Documents of this nature may include forms for faculty and doctoral candidates relevant to the doctoral program such as dissertation committee paperwork, contact or intake forms for the committee and the candidate, defense ballots, graduation forms, program sheets, and other administrative documents specific to the institution. If these forms are available on an institution's main portal, the systems administration may be able to link the cloud to the portal so that any updates to the forms will automatically update on the cloud.

Using the cloud community to store program documents can reduce the amount of administrative time devoted to sending notices and paperwork to candidates and faculty. It also ensures that faculty and candidates will have access to the most current and necessary forms whenever they are needed.

*Institution-based resources* are unique to each institution of higher education and to each department offering a doctoral degree. They are also some of the most valuable resources available to doctoral candidates preparing their dissertation. Resources should be provided to candidates regarding the institution's *content and structure guide* for the dissertation manuscript, and a *form and style guide* specific to writing within a discipline. If these resources do not yet exist, dissertation guides and publication manual links available online should be reviewed and selected as exemplars to provide direction for the candidate.

Content and structure guides are publicly available online and can be added to a cloud-computing database of resources. Some guides are gen-

eralizable and can be applied across disciplines. A web search for “guidelines for writing dissertation” yields many options available as a PDF.

Some universities have templates for a dissertation committee expectation contract with the candidate, or faculty documents on how to evaluate a dissertation. These documents may be especially useful for committee members who have limited experience in these roles.

Instructor-created resources and handouts that are typically distributed in person may be shared with a much broader audience in the cloud community. Think of the resources held by individual faculty members who work with their dissertation candidates: one faculty member may have a useful outline for how to incorporate a theoretical framework into data analysis strategies; another may have a backwards timeline chart to help the candidate plan for graduation.

Candidates who receive advising from an experienced faculty member value these personalized resources. However, there is an opportunity to share these materials with others by making the documents publicly accessible in the cloud. Handwritten, tattered, and cherished resources can be scanned and placed online while still maintaining the integrity of the original author and affiliation with the institution.

Another valuable and necessary institution-based resource will be the policies and procedures related to the *Institutional Review Board* (IRB). Although these resources will already have been accessed by candidates who are close to finishing and defending their dissertation, it is strongly recommended that web-based IRB manuals, templates, and sample consent documents be provided to future doctoral candidates who will access the cloud community.

A final recommended institutional and discipline-specific resource for the Doctoral Cloud will be *sample dissertations* and *final defenses* of recent program completers. Although dissertation manuscripts can be retrieved through *Open Thesis* and *Proquest Dissertations and Theses*, it is extremely helpful for doctoral candidates to see examples of distinctive dissertations completed by candidates who have recently graduated from the same program of study.

Doctoral program directors or dissertation chairpersons may want to select a handful of exemplary dissertations that can serve as a model for other candidates. There is much benefit to candidates (and new faculty)



in being able to review a completed dissertation in its entirety specifically from the institution.

Standard practice at most institutions is to have a public defense of the dissertation. Universities that record dissertation defenses using web conference sharing programs can post web-based links to the defenses on the virtual cloud community to make them available for viewing at a later date. Sharing a link on an internal, password-protected site expands access to these events. This will introduce future candidates to the defense process and gain a better understanding of what to expect.

Depending on the source material gathered for inclusion in the cloud, additional subheadings will naturally evolve to be listed under each categorical tab. Table 5.2 reflects a possible expansion of the initial categories listed above.

## **HOW TO MAKE THE CLOUD “LIVE” FOR DOCTORAL CANDIDATES AND FACULTY**

Once resources have been gathered, organized, and cataloged, the resource collector will need to reestablish contact with the institution’s systems administrator so that the technological aspect of building a cloud may begin. In most cases the system administrator will be responsible for the technology and structural framework of the cloud, while the individual responsible for the content will need access and training to maintain the information available on the virtual community. It is strongly encouraged at this point that the task of developing a cloud-based community of resources and collaboration be turned over to the system administrator due to the skills required to establish and create a cloud.

Depending on the LMS it may be possible for the resource collector to upload web links and documents directly based on the materials shared by others involved in contributing to the virtual cloud community. Alternately, the resource collector may need to send all files and links to the system administrator to build the community. It is imperative for there to be collaboration between the two parties in order to ensure that the desired pedagogical and academic purpose of the cloud

**Table 5.2. Expanded Doctoral Cloud Categories**

<i>Doc Home</i>	<i>IRB Resources</i>	<i>Writing Resources</i>
Welcome	Institutional IRB Resources	Writing Tools and Tips
Introductory Video	Sample Consent Forms	Institutional Form and Style Guide
Doctoral Program Newsletter	IRB Training	Writing Manuals
Dissertation FAQ		Literature Review
Comprehensive Exam FAQ		Citation Resources
Department Website		Writing up Results
<i>Forms</i>	<i>Research Help</i>	<i>Dissertation Support</i>
Dissertation Committee Forms	Qualitative Inquiry	Dissertation Guides
Dissertation Proposal Form	Qualitative Analysis	Recommended Books
Dissertation Defense Form	Quantitative Inquiry	Consultant Database
Drop/Add Form	Quantitative Analysis	Dissertation Support Group
Admission to Candidacy Form	Mixed Methods	Publishing Your Dissertation
<i>Other Resources</i>	Sampling in Research	The Proposal Defense
Doctoral Humor	Survey Research Tools	The Final Defense
Institutional Social Media	Action Research Guidelines	
The Chronicle for Higher Education	Program Evaluation Materials	
Tomorrow's Professor		

community aligns with the availability of technology in the learning management platform.

Checks and balances to make the cloud “live” to doctoral candidates and faculty include:

- Are directions available for how to access the virtual cloud community for the institution?
- Is the tab or the link in the LMS for the virtual cloud community accessible through all web browsers?
- Are all web links functional?
- Do all documents and PDFs open correctly?
- Does the home page set the intended tone of the virtual cloud community?
- Are categories efficiently organized?
- Should there be consolidation of categories or expansion of topics and headers?
- Is there a variety of media on the virtual cloud community to make it appealing to users? (e.g., videos, tutorials, RSS feeds, Word/PDF documents, photos)

Once these items are verified, it is time to make the community available to intended users within the institution's LMS. As previously mentioned, administration will need to determine the audience for who should have access to the community. Since virtual cloud communities are typically built into the institution's LMS, and since all faculty and candidates have access to the LMS, administration will need to make decisions about who will be allowed to access the community.

For example if the cloud community has been created strictly for faculty and candidates working on the dissertation, this group of eligible faculty and candidates will need to be granted access. If the intention of the community is to communicate information to all registered doctoral candidates and all faculty engaged in the doctoral program, then all parties would need to have access.

Some institutions may choose to limit access to certain groups, such as full-time faculty or registered doctoral candidates. These decisions need to be made at the administrative level and clearly communicated to the system administrator who will likely have the capability to control access to the cloud community.

Administrators involved in doctoral programs may want to send out a brief e-mail explanation of the cloud to eligible doctoral candidates and a separate e-mail announcement to eligible faculty. A well-written announcement might include a screen shot of how to access the virtual cloud community if it is embedded in the LMS or a hyperlink to the community itself (if applicable).

The creation and use of a virtual cloud community to support doctoral candidates and faculty working with candidates cannot be underestimated. The infusion of available technology to support candidates provides an easy-access, cost-efficient, helpful portal into the world of the doctoral experience.

## **MAINTAINING THE COMMUNITY**

The initial implementation process includes the collection and culling of appropriate web-based resources and documents. But in fact this becomes an ongoing activity as the community expands and contracts predicated upon the needs at the time, updating of the links and webi-

nars, as well as a periodic “cleaning” of the existing cloud framework. New, up-to-date, useful resources should be added to the cloud.

The resource collector should be mindful of the need to continually add and update materials to the cloud community. In some cases faculty who did not previously contribute to the development of the cloud may be active users and have excellent suggestions for items and web links to be added to the cloud community.

Candidate users may also offer suggestions or make requests to meet their needs. In one case there was a small group of doctoral candidates at a college who were preparing for their final defense. The group was uncertain of what to expect or how to prepare for the defense. To meet their needs, the doctoral program director began posting a feed of recorded Adobe Connect sessions of prior candidates’ final defenses, and created an FAQ document to offer a model for future defense candidates. These internal resources decreased candidates’ anxiety and offered a marked path for them to follow in the process.

Given the web-based nature of a virtual cloud community, one can anticipate that web links provided by those who helped build the cloud may change or result in an error message. It is pivotal to the success and sustainability of the community that someone at the institution regularly verifies all sources to be sure links are functional. A cloud with broken, non-functional links will result in decreased usage by those who need it the most. Preventative measures need to be in place to continually monitor and update content on any web-based resource such as the Doctoral Cloud.

Once the managed institutional networks and resources on the cloud are in place, there should be a series of live or virtual sessions with faculty to acquaint them with the cloud community and its content. It is imperative for faculty to “buy in” to the usefulness and importance of the Doctoral Cloud in order for the utility of the resource to be passed on to doctoral candidates.

Faculty need to know how to access the community within the LMS, how to contribute, and how the community can be used in the management of dissertation work. Similar applications through detailed instructions and announcements to the doctoral student population are a must in infusing the positive attributes of the Doctoral Cloud and its essential components for academic research.

With the identification and use of appropriate resources and institutional supports, the virtual cloud community will function with little maintenance and low overhead costs, and be of great benefit to faculty and candidates in a doctoral program. Ongoing assessment of its usage or non-usage, and specific academic content should be shared across the interested academic partners (faculty, candidates, the resource collector, and system administrator) for ease of accessibility, content improvement and validity, and to ascertain whether or not it has made a difference in the academic lives of doctoral candidates.

## **SUMMARY**

Virtual cloud-based communities are one way for institutions to consolidate and standardize information provided to doctoral candidates to help them manage their dissertation and receive support. The virtualization of resources may help reduce the confusion and uncertainty of doctoral candidates and faculty negotiating the dissertation experience.

The ability for institutions to offer clear information to doctoral candidates all in one place may contribute to improved quality assurance of the doctoral experience. Most importantly the virtual cloud community offers a chance for candidates to receive much needed academic support to complete their dissertations.

## **EXERCISES AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (FOR FACULTY)**

1. Conduct a feasibility assessment of creating a virtual cloud community for your department. Include a brief outline of the needs of the department with background information on the present practices in place for dissertation management.
2. Develop an FAQ document to explain the purpose of a virtual cloud community.
3. Brainstorm general categories that would be useful to doctoral candidates within your department or institution.
4. List several subcategories under each general category.

5. List potential sources of information for who could provide resources in each subcategory.

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## 6

# PREPARING FOR THE FINAL DEFENSE PRESENTATION

## OBJECTIVES

**A**t the conclusion of this chapter you will be able to:

1. Identify psychosocial predictors of dissertation completion.
2. Understand how to create a backwards timeline.
3. Plan the dissertation defense using presentation software.
4. Present quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method findings.

## COUNTDOWN TO THE DISSERTATION DEFENSE

Some readers may have picked up this book seeking guidance to successfully pass the final defense. Dissertation committee members may be reading to gain insight into the process. Others may be reading to get organized and motivated to finish the dissertation so that a defense date can be scheduled. Regardless of where one is in the dissertation process or the role in working with a doctoral candidate, it is important to focus one's thinking and actions with the end goal in mind—a successful dissertation defense.



The dissertation defense is a time of much anxiety and relief for the doctoral candidate. It is an opportunity to celebrate all the sweat, tears, and accomplishments associated with becoming an independent scholar. The defense marks the final achievement of completion of the doctoral program. Congratulations are in order for the candidate, the chairperson, and the dissertation committee. But before one can celebrate (and in order to “pass” the final defense), many steps must be accomplished to prepare for a successful final defense presentation and to avoid failure.

Evidence consistently shows that the biggest challenges to completing the dissertation across all disciplines are the mental acuity and perseverance required (Lovitts 2005). Unbeknownst to those who have not been through the doctoral experience, it is not the smartest candidates with the highest IQ who earn doctoral degrees. Literature suggests that psychosocial characteristics such as persistence and the ability to work independently are the best predictors of dissertation completion (Green 1997). Dissertation self-efficacy, a belief in one’s ability to get the dissertation done, is a key factor correlated to dissertation completion (Varney 2010). Having confidence in one’s ability to succeed in the dissertation experience is a known factor that directly links to a candidate’s progress.

On the other hand, perfectionism, the inability to plan ahead, and procrastination are correlated with lower completion rates and longer time to completion of the doctorate. Figure 6.1 displays variables that significantly predict successful or failed completion of the dissertation.

<u>Successful Completers</u>	<u>Failure to Complete</u>
• Internal locus of control	• High dependency needs
• Self-efficacy	• Low frustration tolerance
• Time management skills	• Task avoidance
• Tolerance for ambiguity	• Perfectionism
• Self-confidence	• Fear of failure
• Organizational skills	• Lack of structure

**Figure 6.1. Psychosocial Characteristics of Dissertation Completers and Non-Completers (Green 1997)**

Most defenses are not scheduled until the chairperson believes that the candidate is ready to defend his or her work. While the objective is to pass the defense, this is not guaranteed. Candidates must plan and carefully prepare for this event many weeks or months in advance. A very good way to organize the steps that must be taken prior to the dissertation final defense is to use a *backwards timeline*.

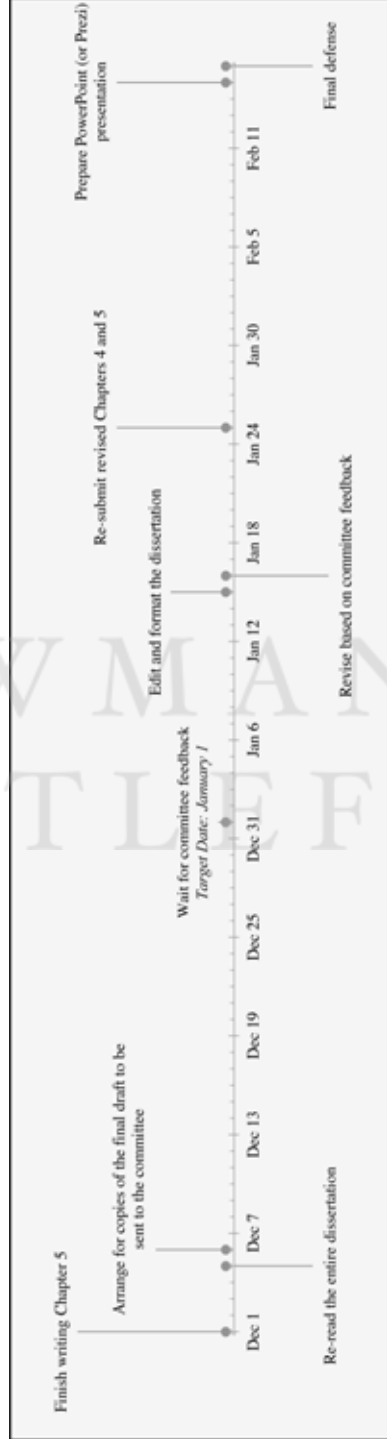
A backwards timeline is a guide that will serve as a tool to ensure all details and tasks are completed in order to make the event successful. The use of a backwards timeline to “train the brain” and provide structure for tasks to be completed during the dissertation marathon is one approach that may offset psychosocial challenges.

Coincidentally, backwards timelines are commonly used to schedule training and prepare an individual for running a marathon. Rick Morris of Running Planet wrote in *Marathon Countdown* (2008) that racers must:

- Choose a goal race to run. A specific date will be needed in order to determine an appropriate training schedule.
- Develop a training schedule that is challenging but not so difficult that it cannot realistically be accomplished.
- Carefully determine your training timeline. Count backwards from the goal race date to determine the amount of time required to train.

Like training for a marathon, Figure 6.2 illustrates a sample *backwards timeline* leading up to the final dissertation defense. These can be as detailed or basic as desired. Some may opt to use a smartphone app such as *Countdown +++* for Apple operating systems, or *Countdown Widget* for Android platforms, or just a piece of paper and pen. The point here is to get things down in writing to guide the process and to hold one’s self accountable to due dates.

The use of a backwards timeline prior to the final defense will allow the candidate to set goals with specific deadlines to meet prior to the defense, regardless of where one is in the dissertation process. Knowing the required achievements to reach the dissertation defense will give candidates a mental and strategic advantage. Candidates can anticipate activities that will be difficult (i.e., interpreting large amounts of qualitative



**Figure 6.2. Dissertation Backwards Timeline**

data, running advanced statistical tests) and plan accordingly on the timeline.

Begin with the end in mind—the day of the dissertation defense (week zero)—and work backwards to identify specifically what needs to take place in the weeks and months prior to the defense to ensure that all steps are accomplished. Be specific in setting a schedule of tasks. Be realistic about other obligations that will impact the completion of each task. Ironically the marathon training literature calls for racers to know and be aware of one’s “strengths, weaknesses, habits and temperament” (Morris 2008, p. 337). The same advice applies to the dissertation.

If a candidate can anticipate a struggle with technically complex material, additional time may be needed for writing up results. If a candidate knows he or she will have an emotional reaction every time feedback is received from a committee member, time must be allotted for this psychological setback. Writing the dissertation is not just an academic activity. Mental, psychological, and emotional management are equally important requirements in order to achieve success.

Review the timeline with the dissertation chairperson to be sure nothing is missing that is specific to the institution. Consult the institution’s guidelines or residency requirements for deadlines. If dates are not posted on the institution’s website, inquire with the graduate school or the registrar’s office for clarification. Accurate dates are necessary in order for the timeline to work.

It goes without saying that candidates must finish collecting data, analyzing results, and writing all chapters of the dissertation prior to the defense. A dissertation chairperson should not (and typically does not) schedule a defense until a final draft of the dissertation manuscript has been completed by the candidate.

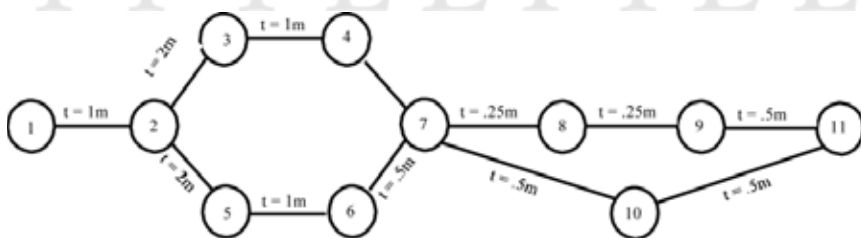
Thus it is imperative that candidates finish writing all elements of the dissertation prior to the defense presentation. Candidates are encouraged not to send sections or chapter pieces and parts of a “final” manuscript, but to have all materials bundled and ready for review at one time. Writing a single document that connects all aspects of the inquiry into cohesive chapters of the dissertation is a task that requires a significant amount of new skills and expertise.

Unlike the proposal, prospectus, or a comprehensive/qualifying exam, the final dissertation manuscript requires a more extensive application

of original research and the creation of new knowledge. Candidates must demonstrate mastery of their specific area of inquiry as a way to represent their capability to work as an independent scholar. This can be an ambiguous process for doctoral candidates writing a once-in-a-lifetime dissertation. The use of a backwards timeline provides achievable goals, measurable outcomes, and structured steps to dissertation completion to clarify the required elements leading to the dissertation defense.

### Elements of the Backwards Timeline

It can be reassuring to set a clear deadline for when the candidate will have all chapters of the dissertation completed. Deadlines can motivate an individual through periods of stagnation. A backwards timeline is also of benefit to the dissertation committee members who can project when drafts will arrive for their review. The candidate may want to consider using project management programs such as Basecamp or Microsoft Project, or prepare a PERT or Gantt chart to provide a graphic representation of the dissertation completion schedule. A sample piece of a



- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1. Approve statistical design               | 7. Begin write-up of data analysis        |
| 2. Prepare final copy of instrument         | 8. Run descriptive statistics on data     |
| 3. Collect data                             | 9. Begin write-up of data analysis        |
| 4. Assemble all statistical data            | 10. Write up final results                |
| 5. Continue updating literature review      | 11. Review final results with chairperson |
| 6. Finish final update of literature review |   |

t = time    m = month

**Figure 6.3. Sample Piece of a Backwards Timeline Using a PERT Chart**

backwards timeline for dissertation completion using a PERT chart is included here.

The use of a backwards timeline allows the required tasks to complete the dissertation to be broken into manageable “chunks” that include reasonable and attainable goals. This may help a candidate overcome personal obstacles to productivity such as an inability to plan ahead, task avoidance, or the uncertainty of how to structure one’s time in preparing for the dissertation defense. The identification of self-imposed due dates for concrete tasks carefully plotted and planned on the backwards timeline offer the candidate a clear training schedule to succeed.

The additional benefits of a backwards timeline are that it provides an organized sequence of tasks to be completed, and the critical path of tasks that must be finished by a specific date in order for the project to meet its completion deadline (e.g., graduation). A candidate can use the timeline to monitor progress toward dissertation completion, and recognize when he or she is falling behind on benchmarks. Sticking to the timeline requires intellectual and personal negotiation of choices to be made to complete a task. If deadlines are missed, dissertation completion will be delayed.

The structure of most (although not all) dissertations follow a five-chapter model consisting of the introduction, the literature review, the methodology, the results, and a discussion. Assuming that the reader has already had a proposal defense (if required), collected and analyzed data, and written the final draft of the dissertation in its entirety, the following elements are suggested for inclusion in a timeline leading up to the dissertation defense.

***Re-read the entire dissertation manuscript.*** Prior to sending the final draft of the dissertation to the committee, and in preparation for the final defense, read the manuscript aloud in its entirety to better capture grammatical and organizational errors. Pause to take notes while rereading the document from front to back. Identify areas of weakness, unclear explanations of results, gaps in coverage, and ambiguous conclusions. If possible enlist the help of a doctoral colleague who is familiar with the topic and/or the dissertation process to take these notes on your behalf. Having a *critical friend* (Carr and Kemmis 1986) with a fresh pair of eyes and ears available to review a final draft of the dissertation can be a tremendous help. These notes will allow the doctoral candidate

to recognize potential issues to be discussed during the defense, and will better prepare the candidate for editing and formatting issues that need attention prior to sending the document to committee members.

***Edit and format the dissertation.*** Clean up all formatting to ensure compliance with institutional guidelines and/or publication manuals specific to the discipline. Using the notes from rereading the dissertation in the previous task, edit the document to best approximate its final form. This may also be a very good time to send the final draft to an editor that the candidate may have hired or to a writing center within the institution (if one is available) to review the near-final product. These combined tasks should take approximately one to two weeks of diligent editing.

***Arrange for a complete copy of the dissertation to be sent to the chairperson and all committee members.*** Arrangements for distributing the final draft of the dissertation document will likely follow prior protocols determined by the chairperson. Some institutions have deadlines and allotted time periods for completion of the dissertation prior to holding the final defense. For example, candidates at one university may be required to submit the final dissertation to the committee at least a month in advance of the defense. If the candidate does not make the deadline, the final defense will likely be rescheduled.

Other institutions rely on the dissertation chairperson to set deadlines for receipt of the final document. This deadline can be especially germane to candidates hoping to defend over the summer, at the end of a semester, or during holiday breaks. Some institutions have blackout dates when defenses are not held and faculty are not expected to respond to student e-mails. Candidates are strongly encouraged to determine their institutional requirements in regard to these timelines.

Be prepared to distribute both hard copies and/or electronic files depending on the preferences of committee members. If a hard copy needs to be mailed to a committee member via the postal service, be sure to include tracking and delivery confirmation. Factor in delivery and return time through the mail system when constructing a backwards timeline.

Although certainly faster than the U.S. Postal Service, candidates should keep in mind that e-mail servers for both the sender and the message recipient usually have a restriction on the size of attachments

that they will allow. For better or for worse, many dissertations exceed the file size maximum for standard e-mail servers. This can present a last-minute frustrating challenge for doctoral candidates. If the dissertation file is too large to send as an attachment through the typical e-mail server because it exceeds the MB size, there are two options for how to send the file electronically: compress the document to a “.ZIP file” or use an online file-sharing service.

.ZIP is a common data compression and archive format for text-based documents. Files that have been zipped have a “.ZIP” extension. This can be done manually with a free zipping tool available on all operating systems. Compressing the file will allow the sender to shrink the size of the document so that it will not exceed the maximum allowance. Users can also send multiple files in one ZIP folder.

To compress a file on a PC:

1. Right click on the Word file to be zipped.
2. Press and hold *CTRL* to select multiple files to zip into one folder.
3. Select *Send To*.
4. Select *Compressed (zipped) file folder*.

This process allows users to compress the size of documents in a way that can be e-mailed to committee members. The file will automatically be labeled the same as the original file in the same location on the computer, but the icon will change to a folder with a zipper.

Mac users should navigate to the file to be compressed and follow these steps:

1. Press and hold the *Command* key to select file(s) to zip.
2. Right or control-click on the file(s) to be compressed.
3. Select *Compress X items* (X is the number of files selected to compress, such as “*Compress 4 items*” if four files have been selected).
4. Click on *Archive.zip*.
5. Hit *Enter* to name the file.
6. Select *Enter* again to save the new file.

If it is not possible to zip a file, candidates may need to consider the use of an *online file-sharing service*. Several websites provide online file



storage and mail proxy to allow users to send files of any size to designated recipients. Users can upload a file to these sites and enable other people to download the document. Rather than sending a file attached to a message, using a mail proxy website allows users to send a message that includes a link to the file, which the recipient can download from the file-sharing service at their convenience.

As with any Internet-based service, candidates should carefully read the terms, conditions, copyright laws, and privacy statements of the file-sharing service before using it to send the dissertation. Some sites to consider may be Dropbox.com or SendThisFile.com.

Regardless of how an e-mail file is delivered to the committee, the candidate should always mark the e-mail or document with a return receipt notification so that the sender will know that the file was successfully delivered if the e-mail server or the file service proxy provider allows this feature. If possible, it would be best for candidates to request a “read receipt” to know that the document was opened by the recipient.

Finally, candidates are advised to save a record of e-mails sent to committee members by copying themselves on all e-mail communication. Candidates may then want to create a file folder of saved e-mails to and from committee members at this critical juncture in the final stages of the dissertation so that documents and communications are not lost. For example, Microsoft Outlook allows users to click “Save As” on an open e-mail to capture Outlook messages, which can be saved to the computer instead of on the server.

***Allow time for the committee to review the final draft.*** Once the candidate has sent a final draft of the complete dissertation to all committee members, he or she must now wait patiently for final feedback. Candidates are encouraged to inquire at the time the document is submitted to faculty as to when they can expect to receive feedback.

The amount of time committee members need to review a final draft varies greatly, and may be longer than the typical amount of time taken to review previous iterations of the document. If the candidate has had regular contact with committee members throughout the dissertation, one can expect that the final draft of the dissertation will not require too much review or revision. However, if a candidate has not had ongoing communication with committee members regarding the findings, one can anticipate that additional time will be needed by faculty prior to

providing feedback. Knowing the difference between 14 days and “next semester” is imperative information for the candidate to accurately project a backwards timeline.

***Respond to committee feedback.*** What a candidate believes to be a “final” draft of the dissertation may turn out to be only a first draft of Chapter 5. Hence candidates should be prepared for committee feedback necessitating some revision of their final dissertation manuscript even before the defense presentation is scheduled. If the committee has already read each chapter, revisions on the document as a whole should be minimal. However if the committee is reading Chapters 4 and 5 for the first time, candidates can expect fairly extensive narrative feedback and suggestions, revisions, or enhancement to the document.

Response to feedback on the final draft will likely follow prior protocols determined by the chairperson. Candidates should know ahead of time whether they are to work through comments with the chairperson or with individual committee members. Candidates should confer with their chairperson to ask whether responses should be provided in writing, in a one-to-one meeting, in a group interaction with the committee as a whole prior to the dissertation defense, or if dialog should be held for discussion during the dissertation defense. Candidates should also determine from the chairperson whether the feedback from the committee substantiates a change in date for the dissertation defense. The backwards timeline must be adjusted accordingly to accommodate these issues.

Waste no time responding to final feedback. Develop a reputation for being highly responsive to the committee. In order for deadlines to be met for a defense that may have already been scheduled, it is pivotal for candidates to make necessary revisions quickly and thoroughly. Work closely with the dissertation chairperson to clarify which items need to be addressed prior to the final defense presentation and which may be edited after the defense. If there are errors in the analysis according to the committee, prioritize those items first so that a ripple effect may take place with corrections. Grammatical, formatting, and citation issues can usually be addressed later.

Repeat the steps of submitting revisions to the committee as needed, and allow time for the final document to be cleared for defense by the chairperson. It is important for the candidate to have confidence in his

or her work and knowledge that the document is ready for defense. Once this blessing has been bestowed by the committee, the candidate may confidently and proudly enter the defense knowing that the dissertation product has essentially already been approved.

## PREPARING FOR THE DISSERTATION DEFENSE

In a small number of institutions, there is no final defense of the dissertation. For candidates in these programs, one can expect that the dissertation committee will hold a meeting or conference to discuss the final dissertation. With little fanfare and some congratulatory remarks, the candidate is “approved” for graduation.

Yet most programs in the United States require a final dissertation defense to “defend” one’s work. Dissertation defenses may be open to the *public*, in which case students, professors, family, friends, and even Grandpa may attend the presentation alongside the dissertation committee. These presentations may be broadcast over the Internet or conducted face-to-face. Public attendees and the doctoral candidate can expect to be asked to wait outside or log off an Internet connection while the dissertation committee deliberates in private to discuss the outcome of the defense and announce the decision. In other settings, defenses are *private* or closed and attended only to the dissertation committee.

The purpose of a dissertation defense is to allow the committee an opportunity to collectively assess the impact and depth of a candidate’s work. Defenses usually last between one and two hours, which is a fairly short amount of time during which the candidate must summarize the dissertation. The candidate will need to present enough information to the dissertation committee (and anyone else in attendance if the defense is public) so that the audience will have a good understanding of what was done, why the research was completed, the findings, implication of the findings, and suggestions for future research.

While some disciplines may focus on oral discourse and dialog during the defense of the dissertation, many fields of study rely on a visual presentation of the dissertation research to organize and guide the defense. Without a doubt technology is intersecting with higher education in virtually all aspects of academia. The dissertation defense is no exception.

## What's the Use of the Defense Presentation?

Each of the major elements of the dissertation study must be addressed in the final defense. As previously mentioned, this will include a presentation of the problem of study, the significance or purpose of the dissertation inquiry, how the dissertation was carried out, and findings. However, the exact nature, depth, and breadth of content to be discussed during the dissertation defense is highly specific to a candidate's study, and varies widely based on the discipline of inquiry.

If possible, it is highly recommended that a doctoral candidate attend a public dissertation defense of a classmate in the same department (preferably with the same chairperson) to understand the structure and content of the defense, interpersonal dynamics, and the level of questioning to expect from the committee. If defenses are private, candidates are encouraged to seek out recent program graduates for insight. Knowing the road that lies ahead allows for fewer surprises or unexpected turns in the final leg of the marathon.

Candidates may want to consider determining the intended use of the dissertation research findings and defense presentation. Knowing one's audience and expectations to successfully defend and finish the dissertation will allow the candidate to plan accordingly ahead of time. There is no one universal approach or method to present the dissertation. In truth, the purpose of the defense may be quite different across disciplines. Thus it is important for the candidate to negotiate a shared understanding of the intended use of the defense.

There are four types of use distinguished in the literature that can easily be applied to dissertation findings: instrumental, conceptual, symbolic (Leviton and Hughes 1981) and process use (Patton 2008). *Instrumental use* refers to findings that are reported to answer or solve a problem. The findings then may lead to a recommended action and results become the instrument of action. One example of this would be a psychology dissertation research study to explore a human resources problem of workplace bullying and the use of a relationship-building workshop. Based on the findings, employers may use those results to implement the workshop if results have found that it is a helpful method to address the problem.

*Conceptual use* occurs when findings are used to better understand a situation or topic. Findings contribute to greater insights about the topic

and may lead to “enlightenment” (Weiss 2004) by the doctoral candidate as a way to evoke new ideas. When findings are used conceptually, the purpose of the results may be a desire to think about something in a new way, perhaps to offer ideas for the future. Humanities or qualitative dissertations may focus on this type of use of data as a means to gather and present information to expand understanding of a topic of interest in one’s field of study.

*Symbolic use* refers to “token or rhetorical support” (Patton 2008, p. 104) of dissertation findings. This type of use is also called *imposed use* (Weiss et al. 2005) that occurs when a person in a position of power (i.e., the dissertation chairperson) dictates the way findings of a research study will be presented. This can occur when findings are used to support a political issue or when results were already known prior to the study. At worst, the chairperson dictating symbolic use of findings may ask the candidate to gather and present selective evidence to support the chairperson’s agenda. Without a doubt this can present a serious ethical dilemma for the doctoral candidate.

*Process use* is another type of use that is ideal to include in the presentation of dissertation findings, as the focus is not only on the actual findings but also on the dissertation experience itself within a specific context. This type of use of data allows the candidate to discuss not only what he or she found, but the thinking process involved in analyzing the data and completing the dissertation.

An emphasis on process use of findings may be especially helpful for candidates in practitioner-based degree programs. A candidate can present all that was done and why, and then discuss individual growth as a result of completing the dissertation and how the process has resulted in his or her development of an independent scholar. The candidate focused on process use will contextualize knowledge gained with the doctoral program and find ways to make their findings useful to the profession.

Knowing how to effectively and systematically communicate findings are important elements required to successfully present and defend the dissertation. The candidate should determine ahead of time which type of use is most valued within his or her department, discipline of study, and with the dissertation committee. Some suggested directions for overall use of the presentation are included below in Figure 6.4, which is adapted from recommendations by Patton (2008).

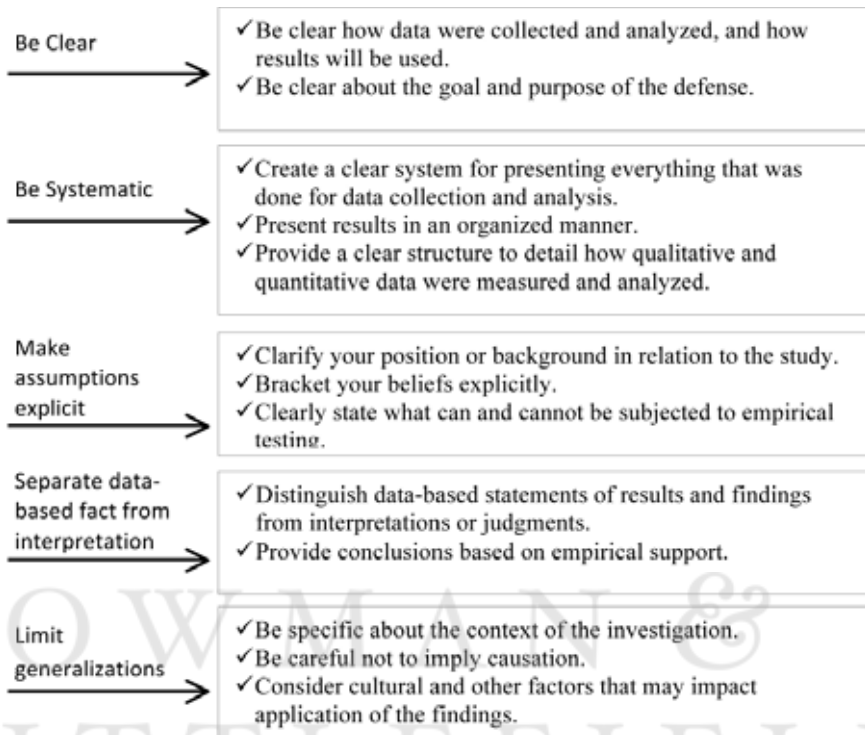


Figure 6.4. How to Use Findings for the Dissertation Defense Presentation

## PREPARING FOR THE DISSERTATION DEFENSE PRESENTATION

Cognitively speaking, it can be an organizational nightmare for doctoral candidates to succinctly reduce years of work to a handful of bullet-pointed slides to be explained in a short time period. Many of the challenges candidates experience with data analysis are due to anxiety, confusion, and overload from dealing with new research skills, complex underlying theories, and too many choices. Nevertheless the ability to concisely and coherently summarize and present one’s work is a crucial component of any scholarly activity.

The use of presentation software forces a candidate to organize his or her thinking ahead of time, to identify the salient content to be discussed, and to practice presenting the dissertation. Plan on no more

than 30 slides for the entire defense. More than this increases the risk of lulling attendees to sleep or annoying the committee due to the candidate's inability to summarize his or her research.

By far the most commonly used presentation and slide software is Microsoft Office PowerPoint. *PowerPoint* allows Mac or PC users to create individual pages (called *slides*) of information to organize and structure a presentation. Users can select a template background for the presentation, add animation and transitions to slides to generate a dynamic flow of the presentation, create charts and graphics to organize ideas and display data, and import clip art (i.e., university logos), videos, and photographs to include in the presentation.

*Prezi* is a cloud-based presentation software tool that allows users to create a visual story by connecting words and images together to present an idea. *Prezi* utilizes a three-dimensional virtual canvas where users construct a story arc to present complex thoughts, narratives, or other visual information. Users click on a word to “zoom” or expand discussion points embedded within an idea.

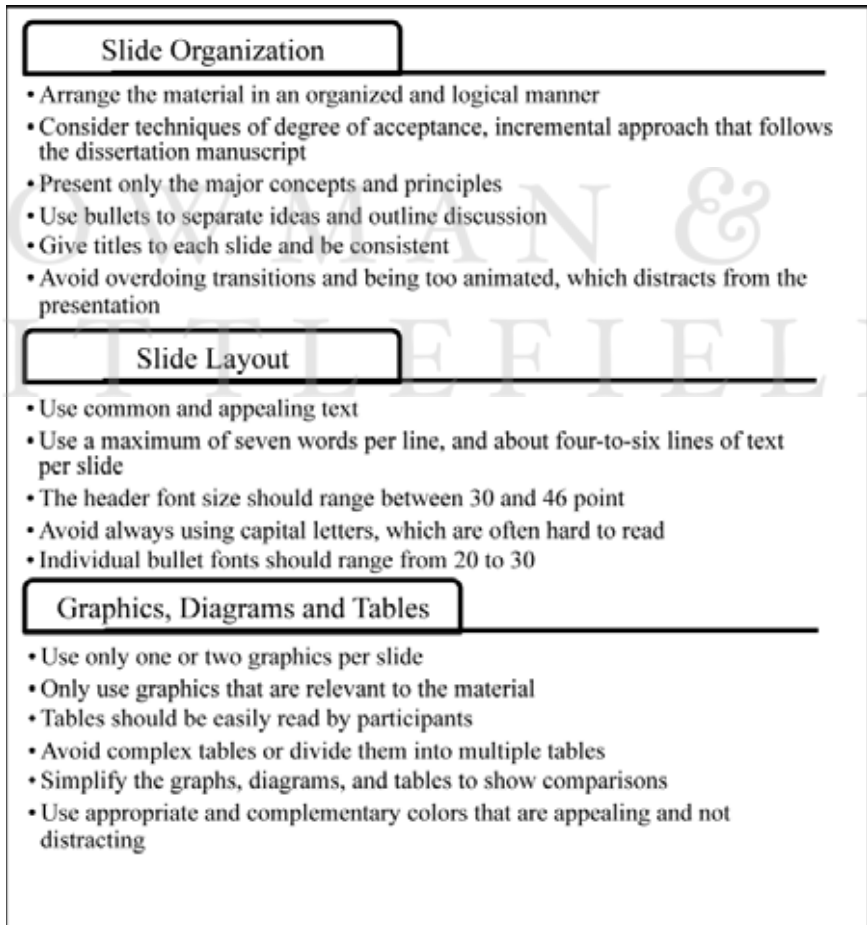
Differences exist in the emphasis and organization of *Prezi* and PowerPoint presentations. *Prezi* software focuses on the display of pictures and visual ideas, and allows for the organization of material in a non-linear fashion. PowerPoint has a greater emphasis on text-based material, and organizes material for presentation in a highly linear manner. Doctoral candidates are encouraged to choose presentation software that is suitable for their discipline and consistent with the planned approach to deliver information during the defense. An ethnographic dissertation candidate, for example, may fit *Prezi*'s ability to zoom in on central ideas and move from image to image an effective tool, whereas an economics dissertation with statistical charts to display may be a better fit for a linear presentation format such as PowerPoint.

There are many bad ways to prepare a PowerPoint or *Prezi* presentation for a scholarly audience. The use of small fonts, excessive text, distracting colors, unnecessary animation, poorly organized data displays, a lack of organization of material, and even spelling errors will decrease the credibility of the presenter (IASTD n.d). The worst offense of a bad presentation is when the presenter reads directly from the slides or the canvas.

All of these pitfalls can be avoided with proper preparation, practice, and poise (see Chapter 7 for further discussion). For an excellent, com-

monly used source of what *not* to do in a PowerPoint presentation, the *International Association for Science and Technology for Development* has a well-written, humorous resource available at: [www.iasted.org/conferences/formatting/presentations-tips.ppt](http://www.iasted.org/conferences/formatting/presentations-tips.ppt). Additional suggested guidelines for how to present material using PowerPoint or Prezi are included below in Figure 6.5.

Following the selection of a presentation software program, the candidate must next determine what to include and what to exclude in the final defense presentation. This is an incredible task. What follows



**Figure 6.5. Principles for Effective PowerPoint Slide Presentations**



here are general recommendations for content that could be covered in the final defense presentation. Candidates are cautioned to review the outline in Table 6.1 with their dissertation committee chair to modify

**Table 6.1. Suggested Organizational Content of Slides for the Defense Presentation**

Title slide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Title is consistent with form and style manual</li> <li>List your degree program and institution</li> <li>Name of candidate and committee members</li> </ul>
Background	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sets the context for the study</li> <li>Include your personal interest in the topic</li> <li>Practice-based and qualitative methods should identify the role of the researcher</li> </ul>
Statement of the problem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Concise overview of the problem</li> <li>Clearly demonstrates rationale for the study</li> <li>May include key sources of knowledge or data regarding the problem</li> </ul>
Overview of literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Summary of themes in literature centered around variables of inquiry</li> <li>Consider displaying concept map of literature</li> <li>Mention key authors, theorists, and researchers</li> </ul>
Theoretical framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clearly identified</li> <li>Describe how theory fits with your study</li> <li>Identify key concepts from the theory</li> </ul>
Research questions and/or hypothesis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All are included</li> <li>Central and subquestions listed</li> <li>Follows recommendation by chairperson (e.g., directional, alternative, null)</li> </ul>
Methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Describe the overarching approach and specific design; include why design was selected</li> <li>Sampling strategy and final sample</li> <li>Data collection tools/instruments with sample items</li> <li>Summary of procedural steps (including reliability, validity, trustworthiness issues)</li> </ul>
Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Data analysis plan identified and explained</li> <li>Organized presentation of results</li> <li>Use of visual displays to show data</li> </ul>
Discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Offers critical reflection of results</li> <li>Answer "So What?" question</li> <li>Include practical, theoretical, political implications</li> <li>Acknowledge limitations and delimitations</li> <li>Offer specific suggestions for future research</li> </ul>
Acknowledgments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Check standard practice for department</li> <li>Thank chairperson first</li> <li>Limit personal notations</li> </ul>

the presentation to fit their discipline, institutional and departmental expectations, and committee requirements.

## **Title**

All presentations begin with an opening *title* slide. Whether a candidate is presenting the defense in PowerPoint, Prezi, or another format, always begin with an information page to identify the title of the dissertation, the candidate's name, degree program, specialization (if applicable), name or logo of the degree-granting institution, and the date of the defense. Some candidates may also choose to list a commonly used line: "*In partial fulfillment of the \_\_\_\_\_ degree*", along with the name of the chairperson and/or committee members.

## **Background**

The candidate should set the *background* or context for the dissertation inquiry by describing how his or her interest in the topic developed. Interests may arise from academic, personal, cultural, societal, or other influences. A few points on the slide may be used to depict one's educational background, prior research or thesis topic, mentoring influences, awards, published works related to the dissertation, or personal anecdotes that specifically relate to one's interest in the subject matter. This background offers an overview of the candidate's own personal course and why he or she has chosen this path.

## **Statement of the Problem**

The *statement of the problem* slide offers an opportunity to identify the problem and describe background of the topic that was studied. What was the problem studied? Why is it important to the field? Plan to provide a brief verbal overview of the problem.

This slide provides a description of the purpose of and rationale for the study. It also provides a broad overview of background information to place the study in a context. If this slide becomes too cumbersome candidates may want to include a separate slide to detail the significance of the study in relation to the profession and/or the pursuit of original, scholarly knowledge on the topic.

## Overview of the Literature

Candidates often struggle with narrowing down the *literature* to present during the dissertation defense. Although the written document will offer a thorough synthesis and analysis of literature related to the study, the scope of literature discussed during the defense presentation should be limited to an overview of themes, trends, and gaps in the existing literature. It is important to ensure that seminal works related to the topic are mentioned in relation to how the candidate has framed the inquiry.

Do not include direct quotations or a lengthy, small-sized font list of sources. The candidate should provide an overview of the literature as if he or she is presenting the material to someone outside of the discipline.

## Theoretical Framework

More and more disciplines are requiring the use of a *theoretical framework* in dissertations. According to evaluation criteria for dissertations, American Association of University Professors recommends that the use of theory in the dissertation must be appropriate, logically interpreted, well understood, and align with the question at hand (Lovitts 2005). The theoretical framework should be explained early in the presentation so that attendees have a foundational understanding of how the candidate conceptualized, theorized, and approached all aspects of the research process.

## Research Questions or Hypotheses

This slide will be the easiest to write. Simply list the study's research questions and/or hypotheses in the format that is required for the dissertation document within the discipline. List all subquestions and null hypotheses. Use more than one slide, if necessary, so that the text is no smaller than 20-point font.

## Methodology

Candidates who prepared a proposal defense presentation may be able to draw from prior notes or slides regarding their study's *methodology*. However be sure to present a detailed description of what was

done versus what was planned. These are important pieces of information that describe how, why, and what methods were used to address the problem based on existing literature and the theoretical framework; to answer the research questions or test hypotheses; and to make an original, creative contribution to the field.

The first slide in the methodology section should identify the overall research approach to the inquiry. Is this a qualitative, quantitative, mixed-method, program evaluation, or action research dissertation? During the presentation the candidate may plan to discuss the reasons why he or she selected a particular approach, but this explanation does not need to be written on the slide.

Some institutions also require the candidate to address the *research paradigm*. Depending on the program of study, a short amount of time may be needed to define and discuss one's philosophy of research in regard to positivism, postpositivism, constructivism, or critical theories.

In addition to the overall approach, the methodology slide should also identify the specific design used for the inquiry (refer to Table 3.5 in a previous chapter for clarification). A diagram or flow chart of the research design may help the audience.

### **Sample**

Most dissertations will require a brief mention of the *sample* or site(s) for the study. However, the site is of particular importance for dissertations involving program evaluation or action research inquiry, which warrant a more in-depth description. A rich portrayal of the setting for the study, perhaps with photographs or an organizational logo, would be appropriate to establish a clear context for the study and relevant stakeholders.

Describe the population or sampling frame from which the sample was drawn and the type of sampling method used (i.e., probability or non-probability) to recruit or locate subjects, participants, or data sources. Specify who or what the sample included in relation to relevant inclusion and exclusion criteria. It is typical to include descriptive statistics to describe the demographic characteristics of the sample regardless of the methodological approach used in the study. List the total sample size on the slide, but verbally mention any issues related to attrition or

differential dropout rates. When necessary, specify the response rate, sample distribution, sampling error, confidence interval, and/or power achieved. Be consistent in the use of sample terminology (e.g., participants, respondents, subjects, units).

If the dissertation study involved mixed methods of data, consider creating two slides to describe the sample: one for the qualitative sample(s) and a second for the quantitative sample(s). The separation of this material onto two slides may allow for greater clarity in the presentation. List the elements noted in the previous paragraph for each sample group in the study.

### **Data Source(s)**

Depending on the design and organization of the study, it may be best to first introduce a list of the various *data sources* used for the dissertation research, and then describe the data collection procedures. Well-constructed procedures establish credibility and trustworthiness of the research. Multiple sources of data offer the opportunity for triangulation, increased validity, and reliability. These details were determined long before the final dissertation defense—yet the defense is an excellent opportunity to highlight the steps completed to ensure a sound study.

A quantitative study can often be described best through a discussion of the instruments used to collect data. Specify the type of data (e.g., standardized measures, surveys, tests, observational protocols), psychometric information regarding the instrument's reliability and validity, pilot testing (if completed), and identify how each source of data related to the variables in the study and/or the hypotheses. Candidates should have handouts of all instruments readily available during the defense, but it will probably not be necessary to display them all on the presentation slide(s).

Qualitative data sources usually involve interview or observation protocols developed by the candidate. Documents are another form of qualitative data. A short explanation to describe the method used (e.g., a semi-structured face-to-face interview, a video-recorded focus group, participant observation, archival documents) and sample items from

each data collection tool are needed to display on a slide during the presentation.

In most instances candidates should verbally describe the selection of methods. How were interview questions developed? What elements were observed and why? Which documents were chosen? This practice allows the committee to appreciate a clear connection between the data collection strategies and the research questions.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

After the identification of all data sources, the candidate needs to prepare a short “story” of all *data collection procedures*. Many dissertation topics explore a problem or phenomenon based on theory and/or existing literature. Some dissertations test hypotheses or an intervention as a way to advance or create knowledge in one’s field of study. Regardless of the methodology used by the candidate, data collection procedures can be eloquently and pictorially described with a well-narrated story.

The candidate must demonstrate in the defense that the purpose, rationale, and methods used for the dissertation are as they were intended. While extensive details regarding the nuances of data collection procedures will be included in the written manuscript, this level of detail to allow for replicability is not required for the presentation. Focus on a basic overview and step-by-step process of collecting each piece of datum. Provide enough information that the committee has a good understanding of how data were collected and how long data collection lasted for each procedure. Be careful not to omit any data sources in this description.

Research has shown that it is very difficult to read and listen at the same time because people use the same channel of the brain for written and verbal communication (Harrington 2012). This is important information for the candidate to keep in mind when preparing for the defense presentation. Too much text on a slide will required the committee member to either read the slide or listen to the presenter. An effective method to allow high levels of understanding of presentation material is to provide visual information that mirrors what the candidate is saying.

Visual graphics with a chronological, sequential timeline of data collection are encouraged to “show and tell” the procedures. The use of a storyboard, graphic organizer, concept map, or flowchart will help organize the data collection procedures in a succinct manner. Both PowerPoint and Prezi have excellent, user-friendly features to help create useful graphics to organize thoughts and ideas for the defense. The details of how to design graphics in presentation software extends beyond the scope of this book. Excellent tutorials can be found on *YouTube* and on the support pages for either PowerPoint or Prezi.

## Results

Experienced dissertation committee members know “the curse of knowledge” that vexes many developing scholars. Because candidates know their dissertation so well by the time they reach the defense, they assume that the committee will understand what they say (and what they write) (Roediger 2007). Yet that is not always the case.

Committee members who bear witness to this curse know all too well when candidates fail to demonstrate the ability to disseminate and explain the results of their research in a meaningful way. In the worst-case scenario, a doctoral candidate will use the defense presentation to spew complex results by using effusive hyperbole, jargon, and statistical terms that no one else in the room can follow.

Now it is worth mentioning that committee members as a whole are a highly intellectual group who already hold earned doctorates. The committee has invested in the candidate’s work and promise, and would like to see the candidate successfully pass the defense. They expect most candidates to be nervous during the defense, and understand that emotions may cause some candidates to speak too quickly, too tangentially, or to leave out important details that need to be explained. These transgressions are usually understood and permissible.

But anxiety manifesting as overconfidence and arrogance during the final defense is not an excuse for presenting one’s self as a superior know-it-all. Nor are these characteristics a reason for disorganization or frenetic behavior when presenting findings.

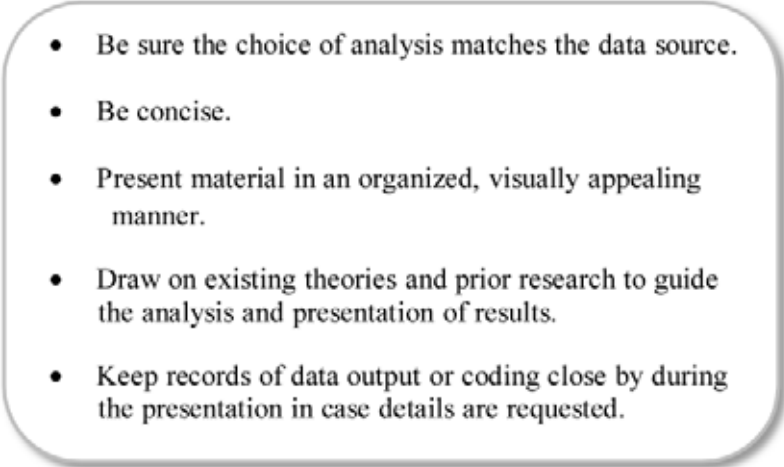
There can be great excitement and pride in the presentation of outcomes of dissertation research that reached statistical significance or

generated a new theory. Conversely, candidates with limited results may approach this portion of the defense presentation with fear and trepidation.

Keep in mind that most professional practice disciplines do not require that the results of a dissertation change the world, “prove” something, or confirm a research hypothesis. Findings are the culmination of countless hours of data collection and analysis. Candidates are encouraged to “stick to the facts” when reporting results, and to explain findings in ways that are clear, straightforward, honest, and accessible to the committee.

Prior to preparing to present results, it is very helpful to review materials from other dissertations, conference presentations, and journal articles to use as examples of how others within the discipline explain and present qualitative and quantitative findings. Additional tips to guide the doctoral candidate in the general process of presenting results in a way that avoids the “curse of knowledge” are displayed in Figure 6.6.

Summarize all relevant results, whether derived from qualitative or quantitative data, alongside a detailed explanation of the data analysis process. The choice of analysis techniques may require citations on the slide to illuminate the steps taken by the candidate to conduct the data analysis. Identify any software programs or technologies used to aid with

- 
- Be sure the choice of analysis matches the data source.
  - Be concise.
  - Present material in an organized, visually appealing manner.
  - Draw on existing theories and prior research to guide the analysis and presentation of results.
  - Keep records of data output or coding close by during the presentation in case details are requested.

**Figure 6.6. Tips for Presenting Results**

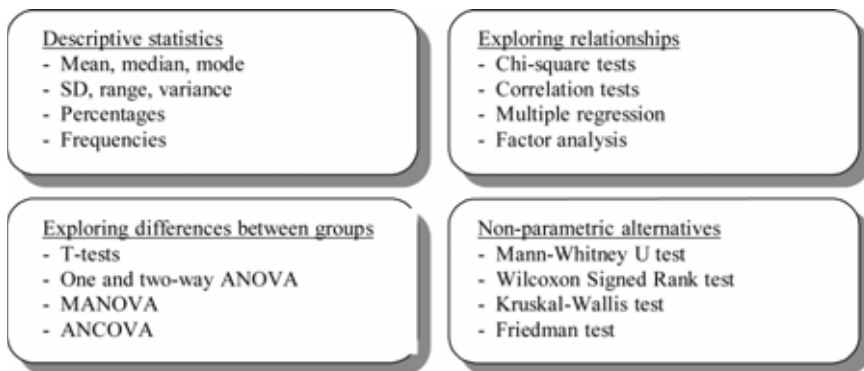


analysis or transcription. Explain reliability or manipulation checks, the use of a critical friend or peer reviewer, or other procedures used during data analysis. After providing clarification of these data analysis steps to the committee, it is now time to present the findings.

**Presenting quantitative findings.** Let's assume that prior to the preparation for the defense, candidates have successfully accomplished one of the more difficult parts of the research process—choosing the right statistical technique to analyze their data. *Quantitative* dissertation research will use many different approaches and various types of statistics to examine hypotheses based on the underlying assumptions, the independence (and number) of observations, and the levels of measurement of the variables. There may be both parametric tests and non-parametric alternatives; techniques to explore the relationships among variables, and techniques to describe differences between groups.

A sample of basic statistical techniques is enclosed in Figure 6.7. This list is by no means exhaustive and does not include many of the more statistically mature advanced techniques used at the doctoral level (e.g., structural equation modeling, latent growth curve models, survival analysis, Monte Carlo simulation). An in-depth discussion regarding ways one can learn from data and present specific results belongs with the statisticians.

Quantitative researchers must appropriately identify data analyses techniques used to answer each of the research questions and/or to test each hypothesis. In most cases the results displayed in the defense



**Figure 6.7. Some Basic Statistical Techniques**

presentation will begin with descriptive statistics, and then move to hypothesis testing using inferential statistics and any post hoc analyses or effect sizes. A clear explanation during the presentation to introduce the rationale for selecting key analysis techniques will facilitate the discussion about the findings. The challenge, of course, will be to organize the results to parallel the research questions and hypotheses.

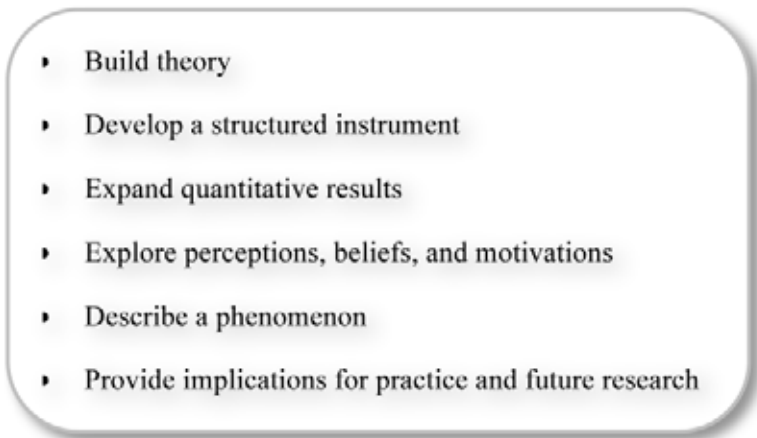
Candidates will need to create visually appealing tables and figures to display findings. Although statistical software packages such as SPSS, SAS, Stata, Minitab, and Excel will generate output tables and graphs, oftentimes these sources of information need to be displayed more concisely for presentation purposes. No one in attendance will want to get out a magnifying glass to read a table or legend. A better option is to transfer output into PowerPoint and Prezi graphics created by the candidate to present user-friendly data displays.

Draw attention to specific results that communicate what has been learned from the data. Use inferential statements to highlight hypothesis testing, and be sure to provide summary statements of the findings. Keep the slide presentation of quantitative results simple and poignant.

**Presenting qualitative findings.** The presentation of *qualitative data* has a different look, feel, and story than quantitative data. The purpose and organization for presenting results varies dramatically based on the research design. A clearly stated reminder of the purpose of the dissertation inquiry at the start of the discussion of qualitative findings is encouraged.

For example, the purpose of grounded theory is to build theory, whereas the purpose of a case study is to describe a situation or phenomenon. Some designs overlap in their purpose. Narrative inquiry may seek to expand quantitative findings, develop structured instruments, and capture perceptions and beliefs. Candidates need not be limited to the selection of just one purpose of the research inquiry. Figure 6.8 illustrates some of the guiding purposes of qualitative research.

The data analysis process must align with the qualitative design. The presentation of results should be structured in relation to the study's purpose. Candidates who have completed qualitative research may find guidance in terminology, analytic procedures, and presentation of data by locating other studies that used the same research approach selected for their dissertation.

- 
- Build theory
  - Develop a structured instrument
  - Expand quantitative results
  - Explore perceptions, beliefs, and motivations
  - Describe a phenomenon
  - Provide implications for practice and future research

**Figure 6.8. Key Purposes of Qualitative Research (Khafli and Howard 1984)**

For example, one social work doctoral candidate used interpretive phenomenology for his research design, but then struggled with how to efficiently present the findings. A quick search in *ProQuest Dissertations and Thesis* for key words associated with the method yielded a number of viable models to use as a guide for the candidate to organize and prepare qualitative results. There is great value in finding a well-written qualitative model of how to display results in a manner concordant with the design.

The overarching goal of presenting qualitative findings is to provide a “*thick, rich description*” of complex, multilayered phenomena. The candidate must show the committee how he or she better understands a situation or experience in the context of the data. Candidates should plan to provide an organizing, conceptual framework for the situation of concepts or categories of data in relation to the candidate’s overall conceptualization and analysis of the phenomenon of the investigation (Khafli and Howard 1984).

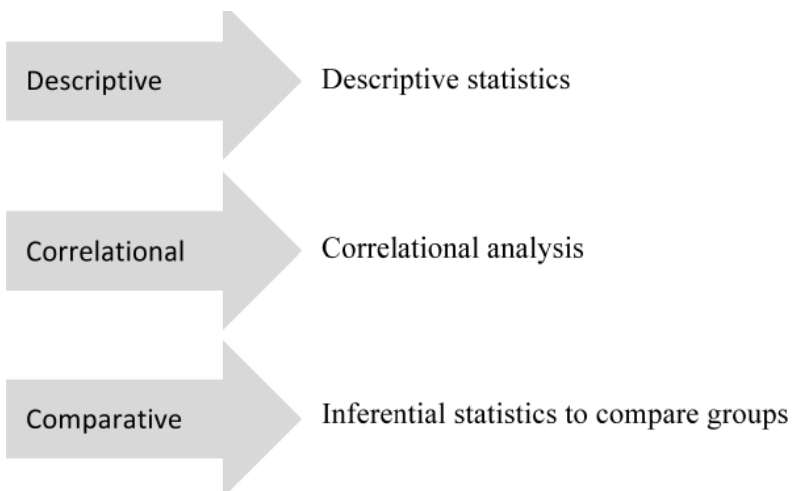
Explain the coding process and categorical organization of themes and subthemes so that the committee can “see” the candidate’s thinking. The committee will have a better understanding of what to expect and how data was used within the context of the purpose of the candidate’s research.

Those in attendance of the defense presentation need to be able to confirm that findings are grounded in the data (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Reporting styles will vary for presenting qualitative results. Some candidates will find the need to present raw data and direct quotes in order for the voices of participants to be heard. Exemplar quotes can and should be mentioned without dominating the presentation.

Others may use a descriptive model to summarize findings with the addition of illustrative quotes. Furthermore, some disciplines require the use of raw data, a descriptive summary, and interpretation. Ultimately candidates must find balance between explicitly telling the story of participants, summarizing, and interpreting the data.

**Presenting mixed-method data.** With the increased use of *mixed-method research* across many disciplines, more and more candidates are faced with the challenge of how to present multiple sources of data. A good understanding exists about the purposes of mapping out a researcher’s thinking process for mixing data during analysis. Newman et al.’s (2003) framework specifies the purposes of mixed-method findings: to predict, add to the knowledge base, measure change, understand complex phenomenon, test or generate new ideas, and examine the past.

A similar framework established by Green, Caracilli, and Graham (1989) calls for triangulation, complementarity, initiation, development,



**Figure 6.9. Linking Quantitative Research Questions to Data Analysis Techniques**

and expansion. Yet few resources exist to delineate steps in the process and procedures for presenting mixed-method results.

One notable exception in the literature on mixed-methods research is the work of Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2006), who provide one of the most comprehensive frameworks for analyzing qualitative and quantitative data. The authors stress the importance of presenting findings by linking research questions to mixed-method data analysis procedures.

Quantitative research questions are fairly easy on which to report findings, as noted in Figure 6.9.

However, candidates will struggle to find such a clear path for how to analyze and present qualitative questions, given that the inherent nature of qualitative research designs leads to the analysis of data in several ways to triangulate findings and interpretations. Qualitative questions may be analyzed using a multitude of techniques, such as cross-case analysis, thematic analysis, constant comparison methods, discourse analysis, or content analysis. Candidates who *separately* analyze qualitative data qualitatively and quantitative data quantitatively will find this information useful.

Yet for those who seek to present mixed-method data as an *integrated* whole, candidates are advised to follow directions adapted from the seminal work of Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2006). The presentation of mixed-methods data might include at least two of the following strategies (discussed in detail in Chapter 4): data reduction, data display, data transformation, data consolidation, data comparison, or data integration.

Leech (2012) describes non-traditional *rhetorical patterns* used by various scholars for how to present findings that offer an excellent guide for the candidate trying to make a choice for how to present mixed methods of data. Some of the more popular methods include using a *chronological order* to describe results from the beginning of data collection to the end. Another method would be to use a *narrator order approach* where the candidate describes the findings in terms of how he or she came to understand the phenomenon as a researcher.

A progressive, or *funnel approach*, offers an organized, logical approach for the defense presentation when findings can first be presented broadly, and then a more narrow, detailed view can be highlighted. Mixed-methods case study researchers may prefer to use a *day-in-the-life approach* to retell either one participant's story or a con-

glomeration of multiple participants' experiences. Finally, triangulation studies might be presented using a *Rashomon Effect approach* (Heider 1988, as cited in Leech 2012) where multiple accounts of an experience are presented from different perspectives.

The results chapter will vary in length across disciplines and methodologies. For example, if the design used an empirical survey for data collection, a concisely written results chapter will include many figures to display data. On the other hand, a qualitative narrative research approach will require a richer description of interview data, which will be a lengthier chapter. Regardless, candidates should be mindful that a significant portion of the defense presentation focuses on the results. Take special care to ensure these slides are accurate, thorough, and presented clearly.

## Discussion

In this final leg of the marathon, candidates may be worn out and have little left to give. Some may want the results to “speak for themselves.” There is a risk here that candidates will fail to actually *discuss* results. One of the key purposes of this part of the defense is to hear the researcher's voice. It is important to remember that the dissertation marathon is not over yet. The candidate must take the final steps to explain, apply, discuss, and interpret the findings to cross the finish line.

The discussion should be a reflection of the candidate's ability to publicly synthesize and describe the findings. This portion of the defense can be very challenging, as it takes on a different tone and purpose than previous sections. Results have already been presented; now is the time to discuss the meaning, significance, and implications of the findings.

Be careful not to simply rehash what was reported in the results section. The purpose of the discussion is for the candidate to critically reflect on the study's results as a way to determine how the findings address the research questions and/or test hypotheses. Additionally, theoretical transferability, practical, policy, and research implications of the study need to be explored.

Candidates should strategize with their chairperson how to organize and present the discussion. Some may opt to lead with the most important or meaningful results, whereas others may choose to discuss

the findings in the order the results were presented. In some cases, unusual or non-significant results may be an engaging starting point for the discussion. This approach demonstrates the candidate's awareness that all data have a purpose within the context of the dissertation experience and development of scholarly thinking, regardless of statistical significance.

A common theme of the discussion is a response to the question of "So what?" Candidates should frame their thinking about the discussion around this basic inquiry. What knowledge does this study contribute to the field? What are the practical implications and relevance of these results to those working in the field? How do the findings from this dissertation relate to existing literature on the topic? If a theoretical framework was used, how do the findings support, contradict, expand, or contribute to that theory? How can this study guide future researchers?

The discussion portion of the defense offers an opportunity for the doctoral candidate to shine by offering his or her expert knowledge gained throughout the dissertation experience. At this point in the journey, no one knows the topic better than the candidate. The candidate is in an ideal position to lead the committee in a rich discussion of the research. The discussion will not only tie the entire dissertation experience together, but it will also situate the work in context with the broader literature and the discipline.

Another aspect of the discussion needs to address *limitations* of the study. All research methods have elements the researcher cannot control. This fact is not a weakness, but a known reality, especially for doctoral candidates working on what is often their first independent research project. A candidate who can identify the methodological, theoretical, and analytical limitations of his or her study shows a deep understanding of the dissertation experience.

Similarly, the defense is a good time to address *delimitations*. Delimitations refer to elements the researcher can control. Describe surprises found in the results, as applicable. Recognize issues related to generalizability (or lack thereof) and transferability of findings. Although discussions of the limitations and delimitations of a study are always included in the defense presentation, try not to belabor the points made. Even

the best research does not answer all research questions or find statistical significance for all hypotheses.

Find a balance between an intellectual discussion of what the study did, and a realistic reflection of what the study could not or did not do. Connect these ends of the knowledge spectrum by pointing to future research, practice, and/or policy activities that will continue to contribute to an understanding of the topic. Candidates need to think ahead and anticipate how their study could have been improved.

Offer clear *suggestions for future* research. These suggestions might be for others within the field or cross-disciplinary researchers. When appropriate, a candidate may want to discuss the next planned cycle of research. Soon-to-be-graduates may also want to describe their future research agenda after graduation.

### **Acknowledgments**

It is common practice in some departments for the candidate to include acknowledgments to those who helped him or her complete the dissertation research. Check with the chairperson to see if this slide should be included. If so, always thank the chairperson first (you want to pass, right?), then the other committee members, and any organizations or affiliates involved in data collection procedures (i.e., study sample sites, sources of existing data).

Some candidates will also include a brief acknowledgment of gratitude to family, friends, and mentors who have made completion of the dissertation marathon possible. If this is included, keep the list brief and do not get emotional if mentioning these parties during the defense. No one wants a candidate to end a defense presentation in tears—not tears from failure or tears of joyful relief. Save those expressions for when you've left the room.

### **SUMMARY**

This chapter offers candidates guidelines for what to present and how to successfully present the dissertation for the final defense presentation



using presentation software. Having a template guide of slides to follow will help a candidate structure the organization of the presentation. It is also helpful to apply these defense presentation guidelines to writing the final chapters of the manuscript.

Remember to review these suggested slide headings with the chairperson, and modify coverage areas to fit with the individual dissertation topic, methodological approach, and standards within the department and discipline. With good planning, self-confidence, and comprehensive knowledge of one's dissertation research, each candidate should be ready for the day of the defense.

Task	Time Needed	Due Date

Figure 6.10. To-do Timeline Template

## EXERCISES AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Using the sample template in Figure 6.10 (or an online timeline template or a piece of paper), create a backwards timeline for the final defense presentation. Modify goals and time estimated to fit with your institution's dates and needs. Give yourself plenty of time for data analysis, which always takes longer than expected.
2. Identify the intended use of your dissertation research.
3. Locate a research study or dissertation that can serve as an appropriate model for your qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-method presentation of results.
4. Attend the dissertation defense of a candidate in your discipline.
5. Draw from your written manuscript to create discussion points for the defense presentation. What knowledge does this study contribute to the field? To practice? What are the surprises from the data? Think through answers to these questions in preparation for the day of the defense.
6. Congratulate yourself on being prepared for the defense presentation. You earned it!

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# 7

## DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION AND MOTIVATION SKILLS

### OBJECTIVES

**A**t the conclusion of this chapter you will be able to:

1. Understand and apply strategies of verbal communications when interfacing with committee members.
2. List and describe active listening techniques.
3. Utilize non-verbal communications techniques during the defense.
4. Utilize motivational strategies and techniques for self-motivation.
5. Describe and apply techniques for continuous improvement and building relationships with committee members.

### DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATIONS SKILLS

Effective communications is one of the most important skills needed to finish and pass a dissertation defense. Every candidate needs to communicate with the committee members, and the ability to demonstrate excellent writing, verbal, interpersonal, non-verbal, listening, and presentation skills can make a significant difference in the outcome (West

et al. 2011). They also need to be self-directed and take charge of the communications with committee members.

Fundamental to the communication process are *verbal and interpersonal communication* skills. The ability of a doctoral candidate to talk to the committee members and reach agreement so that all parties feel mutually satisfied is a common goal. Establishing a quality interpersonal relationship between the candidate and the committee members is important for achieving success. And, it is especially important to have a good relationship in preparing for the final defense.

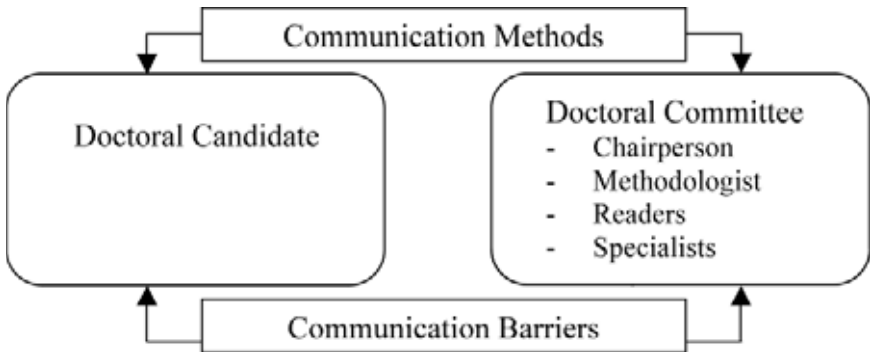
Basic to establishing a good interpersonal relationship between the committee members and candidate is *two-way communication*. When there is primarily only *one-way communication* from the committee members to the candidate a collaborative relationship is hard to achieve and the process is doomed for failure. Therefore providing two-way communication between both parties can create a healthy environment for collaboration, exchange of ideas, respect, creativity, and synergism, which all contribute to successful manuscript completion and defense outcome (Chang 2012).

Communication can be viewed as the process of formulating information, *encoding* the information, transmitting it to the receiver, *decoding* it, and then providing feedback to the transmitter. *Feedback* is important because it confirms understanding of the information, and improves the quality of communication. This process occurs almost instantaneously on a continuous basis among people (DeKay 2012).

Figure 7.1 illustrates a doctoral candidate and committee *communication process* model. In this model the doctoral candidate communicates with the committee members as a group and individually throughout the doctoral program. The committee generally comprises three to five members, consisting of the chairperson, methodologist, and one or more content specialists and readers.

The candidate needs to have the ability to effectively communicate to all the members as a group and individually. While candidates generally work through the chairperson as the main point of contact, it is sometimes necessary to work with the other committee members, depending on the protocol of the institution and nature of the dissertation.

As every good guitar player knows, it is one thing to be able to play guitar well, but it is another to be able to play in a band. Each musician



**Figure 7.1. Doctoral Candidate and Committee Communication Process Model**

needs to know when to turn down the sound, step up a riff, allow the drummer to fill in, or when to be silent. This ability to tune into the other players is what makes a great group. This same collaborative process exists with the doctoral committee. Each member needs to know when to take the lead, when to turn down the communications, and when to allow others to communicate.

### **Methods of Communicating**

There are several *methods of communicating* which are illustrated in Figure 7.2. The candidate needs to be able to select the best communication method, given the situation. Each of the methods has advantages and disadvantages. For example, a lot of correspondence occurs through e-mail. While e-mail offers a quick, retrievable, and reliable form of communicating, it is often impersonal and subject to misinterpretation. Since it is a quick method of communicating, the sender can transmit information in an overly direct and abrupt manner that could be interpreted as being too harsh.

Corresponding by e-mail may increase the chances of a negative tone, and the candidate needs to carefully review the information before clicking the send button. Moreover, e-mails have the disadvantage of not allowing a continuous two-way interpersonal communication process among several people. Most importantly, candidates need to be

Method	Description
E-mail correspondence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fast, but can be impersonal</li> </ul>
One-on-one meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal, but excludes others</li> </ul>
Informal group meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Informal, but lack formality</li> </ul>
Video conferencing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good, but technical glitches</li> </ul>
Telephone conferences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interactive, but not in person</li> </ul>
Chance encounters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quick, but may lack details</li> </ul>
United States mail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formal, but only one-way</li> </ul>

**Figure 7.2. Methods of Communicating with Committee Members**

patient in getting responses back from the committee members, who can sometimes take a long time to respond.

A hard copy letter, while not frequently used, is another form of communicating that is similar to e-mail. However, the use of letters is a more formal way of communicating and generally allows more time to proofread the information before sending it out.

The letter may be an ideal way to send a message if the intent is to transmit a formal and special message. A candidate may decide to send a thank you letter to a committee chairperson, which might be more impactful than merely sending an e-mail. Candidates must carefully select the best form of communicating, given the situation and intended goal of the message.

Other methods of communicating include one-on-one meetings, video conferencing, informal group meetings, and formal group meetings. These methods allow for two-way interpersonal interactions and require a different set of communication skills from one-way writing. There are several types of Internet video conferencing products available such as *Adobe Connect*, *Cisco WebEx Meeting Center*, *Citrix GoToMeeting*, *Skype*, *iMeet*, and *Blackboard Collaborate*.

In video conferencing, the dynamics of body language and verbal communications are different from those at live meetings. Candidates should avoid quick body movements or gestures since they are magnified in the Internet conference. A subtle yawn or sarcastic eye roll can be blatantly pronounced. Candidates should talk in an even, normal tone. Speaking too quickly may not transmit as easily and can disrupt the message. Remember that it may be difficult at times to know exactly who is speaking when you may not be able to see everyone in front of you.

While many cameras have auto-adjust to brightness features, it is good to check for the best balance, which can be done manually. If the lighting is too bright it may make the candidate look washed out. Make sure to eliminate any distracting posters, technology equipment, and unnecessary papers and materials in the room, all of which may distract from the presentation.

Some other interpersonal communications skills include the use of non-verbal communication, active listening, and negotiating. The candidate needs to be able to develop these interpersonal communication skills to be successful. In addition to these methods, the telephone can be an effective way to initiate communication among the parties without a formal meeting. It provides a quick way of having a discussion, but is dependent upon the availability of the receiver, and does not allow for interpersonal and non-verbal communications.

Lastly the use of *chance encounters* can be an effective way for candidates in a ground-based doctoral program to communicate with committee members. A chance encounter is a planned, or unplanned, meeting in a hallway or at an event, suitable for an informal exchange. This might be an effective strategy to obtain a quick answer from a committee member or simply to reinforce the relationship with a committee member.



## Barriers to Communication

There are several *barriers* that can impact the quality of communication. The time of day when a candidate decides to talk to a committee member (i.e., *timing of information*), the location in which the conversation takes place, the approach utilized, method (medium), selection of words (semantics), and content all play an important part in the process.

All teenagers know there is a certain way to ask a mom or dad to borrow a car. Likewise a candidate needs to ascertain the best time to talk to a committee member. If a committee member appears harried or in a hurry to teach a class it is probably not a good time to approach him or her. Candidates need to use good judgment in selecting the best time to communicate with committee members. Timing can impact many decisions in life and this is true for the dissertation process as well.

The *environment* plays an important part in the communication process. If a committee member requests to discuss an issue with a candidate in a formal office, a higher degree of stress and sense of importance will be established than in a more neutral location such as a lounge or cafeteria. If a committee member wishes to address an issue on a more informal basis, it may be more effective to select a more neutral location. Online programs are common and the dynamics will change based upon whether the communications are done via e-mail, phone, or video conferencing.

The *medium* that is used (i.e., mode of communication), such as a letter, one-on-one verbal discussion, telephone, Internet video conferencing, or e-mail, affects the communication outcome. All these considerations should be taken into account by a candidate and committee member in deciding upon the best communication approach to use in communicating with each other

## Active Listening

*Active listening* is another component of the communication process. Without active listening on the part of both the candidate and committee members, the effective communication process will be hindered. This is similar to the marathon runners' quality and type of shoes they wear. Their performance is highly dependent upon their selection of shoes, much like the candidates' selection of listening strategies.

Active listening is especially important for the candidate. The ability to accept criticism and feedback is essential and helps to build the candidate's character, interpersonal communication skills, and patience. Candidates essentially need to develop a thick skin and a cast-iron stomach. Chapter 8 goes into more detail on handling stress and pressure during the dissertation process.

Most people speak around 150 words per minute, although they are able to listen to between 400 and 600 words per minute. Listeners often simultaneously tune in and out and have competing thoughts while listening. If a person is not actively listening, vital information can be missed and the result is miscommunication. Therefore, it is important that both parties pay close attention to each other and concentrate on the message (Peterson 2012; Weger, Castle, and Emmett 2010).

Another factor that can impact active listening is *negative listening habits* which can distract both the speaker and the listener. Some typical negative listening habits are listed in Table 7.1.

Good listeners avoid negative listening habits, look for areas of mutual agreement, keep an open mind, concentrate on the message, and use effective communication techniques (Vance and Leonard 2010). People need to also avoid making preconceptions and assumptions about what the other person is saying. For example, when committee members are communicating with candidates, it might be easy for them to make preconceived notions about the candidates; especially if there have been problems before.

A committee member might prejudge the candidate based upon these past experiences. The member may not be open to genuinely listening to the candidate's point of view. The committee member may also have a tendency to abuse his or her authority. While at times it is

**Table 7.1. Typical Negative Listening Habits**

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• Interrupting the person	• Taking too many notes
• Not looking at the person	• Showing a lack of interest
• Pacing back and forth	• Sitting too close to person
• Changing the message	• Intimidating the person
• Fidgeting with things	• Offending the person
• Finishing a person's statement	• Postponing answering questions
• Answering a question with a question	• Not paying attention and needing to repeat comments

---

necessary to communicate in a directive manner to a candidate, in most cases, two-way discussion is preferred. Therefore the ability to discern when to use one-way versus two-way communication is a prerequisite for all parties in the communication process (Tomal 2007).

### **Effective Non-verbal Communications**

The use of *non-verbal communication* is another factor that impacts communications. Some elements of non-verbal communication include proxemics, kinesics, and body language (Campbell 2011). *Proxemics* includes the use of space and distance between people. Some of the elements that affect proxemics include the arrangement of furniture, physical distance between a committee member and candidate, size and shape of a room, and physical appearance.

For example, the distance between a committee member and a candidate can influence interpersonal relations. A distance of more than four feet between people tends to create an impersonal environment, two to four feet is more personal, and less than two feet often creates an intimidating or uncomfortable feeling of invading one's personal space. Both a committee member and candidate need to consider these general principles of proxemics. If video conferencing is being used, remember to focus the camera on the people so that it is most natural: not too far or too close.

The use of *kinesics* involves the study of body movements—postures, facial expressions, and gestures. Committee members who exhibit power may use more stern gestures and direct eye contact. A more collaborative approach includes a relaxed posture, positive facial expressions, and open body gestures. While some committee members may adopt a style of exhibiting an intimidating body language, this may have a negative impact on a candidate's confidence and performance.

All parties also need to be aware of exhibiting defensive *body language* signals such as darting or glancing side to side, crossing one's arms in a rigid manner, or tensing body motions, which can distract a person. These gestures can be even more pronounced and distracting with a webcam. Some non-verbal behaviors that should be avoided can be seen in Table 7.2.

**Table 7.2. Non-Verbal Behaviors to Avoid**

- 
- Crossing the arms in a defensive manner
  - Tensing the body
  - Standing too close to a person
  - Giving poor eye contact
  - Touching a person
  - Clasping hands
  - Pointing a finger at a person
  - Steepling the hands in a power position
- 

There are several verbal communication techniques that can be utilized by committee members and the candidate that can be helpful in promoting effective dialog. Some of them include:

- Paraphrasing
- Restatement
- Silence
- Open-ended questions
- Closed-ended questions
- Reduce/eliminate distractions
- Expanders

The first technique, *paraphrasing*, is defined as repeating back to a person, in one's own words, what the other person said. This helps to reinforce that the person is listening, and ensures that the message is being understood. It also encourages the speaker to continue talking.

The use of *restatement* is a common communication technique. Restatement means that a person repeats verbatim the other person's statement in an effort to encourage the person to continue talking. This technique is also good to use by either a committee member or candidate to clarify information and ensure mutual understanding.

People can use the techniques of *open-ended* and *closed-ended questions* when communicating with others. Open-ended questions cannot be answered by a simple yes or no and encourage the person to continue talking. Open-ended questions usually involve words such as who, what, where, when, and how. The use of open-ended questions encourages the seeking of additional facts and information.

Closed-ended questions can be effectively used when the person simply wants to obtain a yes or no answer or brief response. A simple

phrase can often yield a great bit of information and expedite the discussion. However, be careful not to force responses to closed-ended questions that really should be discussed using open-ended questions. An open-ended question such as, “How is the chapter one coming along?” maybe more appropriate than a closed-ended question of, “Chapter one is finished, right?”

Another technique is to *reduce or eliminate distractions* while communicating. This may seem simpler than it is. Often communication takes place in noisy or high-stimulus areas which can lead to miscommunications. Both the committee member and candidate should be aware of undesirable environments and strive to obtain a supportive communication environment when possible.

*Silence* can be an effective technique when talking to someone. Often when faced with silence, people will talk. Using moments of silence in a skillful manner can encourage discussion and elicit information. Silence can demonstrate that both committee member and candidate are genuinely willing to listen to each other. It is not uncommon for a candidate, due to nervousness, to be quick to defend him or herself or quickly respond to a question. Maintaining a relaxed composure and exhibiting silence can sometimes be a more effective way to listen and show respect and maturity.

The use of *expanders* is a technique of inserting short comments into the conversation such as “Go on,” “I understand,” and “I see.” Expanders encourage the other person to continue talking and have a reinforcing effect for dialog. They also show the speaker that the listener is engaged in the conversation and is actively listening.

## **ADAPTING YOUR COMMUNICATION STYLE TO THE COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

The dominant communication style of a person is a key factor in dialog. It is important to know your dominant style, which can help prevent miscommunication and conflict, and improve the communication process. Miscommunication often occurs when there is a difference in the communication styles between people. The basis of communication styles were formulated by Carl Jung, a renowned psychoanalyst and stu-

dent of Sigmund Freud. As an outgrowth of Jung's work, four primary communication styles can be identified: the *intuitor*, *feeler*, *thinker*, and *doer*.

While each of us have and use all four styles, we tend to have one dominant style. The *intuitor* talks from a conceptual viewpoint and tends to communicate in the future time frame. This person places an emphasis on creativity and originality. At their worst, intuitors can be seen as wordy, rambling in their thoughts, unrealistic, and dogmatic. They look for unique and novel approaches to solve problems, but tend to be unrealistic. When placed in stressful situations, they can sometimes be egocentric, condescending, and unorganized.

The *feeler* communication style is one that values the feelings of other people. Feelers are generally good listeners and observers. To them, the feelings of people can often be more important than the message. They tend to be perceptive, patient, warm, and empathetic. Although they are people oriented, at times, they can be seen as being impulsive, moody, overdramatic, and overly emotional. They also tend to operate out of the past time frame.

While the communication style of a feeler has many positive attributes, feelers can be overemotional. If a committee member has a predominant feeler style, he or she may be overly concerned with the candidate's interpersonal skills. Likewise a candidate who has a feeling style may more easily become frustrated and overwhelmed with a committee member who is more abrasive and direct.

The *thinker* communication style is objective, rational, and analytical. Thinkers can be effective in organizing thoughts and presenting them in a clear and logical manner. They can, however, be overcautious, rigid, and controlling. They tend to be indecisive in solving problems and would prefer to ponder information rather than make a quick decision. Thinkers view things in all three time frames: past, present, and future. They may come across as being too rigid, structured, and overly analytical. Therefore, if a committee member or candidate is a thinker, he or she may be criticized as being too detailed, verbose, and controlling.

The *doer* communication style is pragmatic and results oriented. Doers act in the present. They are hard driving and assertive. They often have a short-term orientation in their thinking and may lack long-term perspectives. The doer tends to be more concerned with the bottom

line and communicates in a fashion that is brief and to the point. They are less likely to engage in personal and collaborative discussions with students and are probably more concerned with expressing their opinions than actively listening to others. They also may be seen as being combative, hasty, and impulsive.

Problems in communication can arise when dealing with committee members who have a different style from the candidate. For instance, if a committee member has a predominant style of a doer and he or she is talking to a candidate who is predominantly a feeler, the committee member may appear to the candidate as being overly assertive and lacking sensitivity. This situation can be overwhelming for the candidate, and he or she may have a hard time listening, responding, and maintaining composure. The candidate may also feel the committee member is intentionally belittling him or her.

On the other hand, if the committee member has a thinker communication style, and the candidate has a doer style, conflict may arise. The committee member may be viewed as too controlling, nitpicky, and impersonal. The candidate may become frustrated and impatient and may simply want to get the dissertation manuscript or defense completed without lengthy and frequent, detailed discussions. Also, in this case, the committee member may be viewed as one who is too structured, overly cautious, and conservative.

The key to communicating effectively with a committee member begins by identifying the candidate's own dominant style, then the style of each committee member. This does not mean that the candidate must permanently change but rather adapt his or her approach for each member. For example, if the candidate is working with a committee member who is a dominant feeler, the candidate should take extra time to personalize the discussions and be concerned with the member's feelings and emotions (Tomal 2007).

When approaching a committee member who is an intuitor, the candidate should try to be dynamic and offer creative and thought-provoking ideas. When dealing with a thinker, the candidate should structure the discussions in an organized, step-by-step way. The thinker may also need more time to contemplate and process the discussion as compared to the doer who may be more inclined to quickly assess situations and focus on the bottom line. Candidates should get to the point with doers.

However, at the same time, it may be necessary to make sure the doer understands the details of the discussion when necessary.

Communication styles can have a dramatic impact on the candidate's ability to maneuver through the entire doctoral process and defense meeting. Likewise, marathon runners know the value of the nuances and positioning of the other runners and getting a competitive edge. Recognizing and utilizing communication styles as a means to improving communications can significantly strengthen the candidate's chances of finishing dissertation and passing the defense (Hartman and McCambridge 2011).

The implications of communication styles are significant for conversations among committee members as well as conversations among candidates and committee members. People with similar styles tend to communicate more effectively with each other. They tend to "talk the language" of the other party. Likewise if both parties overuse their own style, conflict can arise. Therefore *the greatest weakness of people in communicating is often the overuse of their strength* (i.e., their dominant communication style). Textbox 7.1 describes communication styles, strengths and weaknesses of each style, and approaches to use when communicating with people who have a dominant style.

## **KEEPING YOURSELF MOTIVATED**

"You can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink" is a familiar saying that many people can relate to. *Motivation* can be a difficult term to define. Essentially it is the willingness of a person to undertake an endeavor in order to satisfy a need. Human beings have an innate desire to satisfy basic physiological and psychological needs. The ability to influence people, or oneself, to be motivated to have a desire to achieve a goal, is an overall objective of a candidate in finishing and passing the defense.

While there are many different educational theories on motivation, most of them have a common underlying theme regarding the *human needs* of people (Webb 2007). Peoples' attitudes and behaviors can often be traced to these human needs. Developing an understanding of human needs can be valuable in motivating committee members and candidates.



Style	Strengths	Weaknesses	Approach
INTUITOR	Original Imaginative Creative Idealistic Charismatic	Unrealistic Hard to pin down Out-of-touch Evasive Impractical	Be enthusiastic Use stimulating ideas Be creative Allow flexibility Give them space
THINKER	Objective Prudent Rational Analytical Alternatives	Original Overly cautious Unemotional Controlling Over-analyzes	Be logical Give alternatives Be quantitative Be analytical Give facts and data
FEELER	Personal Spontaneous Introspective Loyal Empathetic	Impulsive Over-personalizes Guilt-ridden Too emotional Too sensitive	Be personal Focus on feelings Be empathetic Be collaborative Show past merits
DOER	Practical Pragmatic Results-based Skillful Assertive	Shortsighted Impulsive Impatient Aggressive Insensitive	Get to the point Be practical Be spirited State bottom line Be goal-oriented

**Textbox 7.1. Communication Styles, Characteristics, and Approach**

## Motivation and Human Needs

Abraham Maslow (1943) articulated one of the first theories on human needs by classifying them into five different levels. The lower order needs (first two levels) consist of basic physiological needs including safety and security. The higher-order needs (upper three levels) consist of belonging and social needs, esteem and status, and self-actualization (Maslow 1943; Alderfer 1969).

Maslow's sociological-needs theory can help doctoral candidates in understanding the personal motivations and behaviors in obtaining a doctoral degree. The doctoral candidate can be motivated to obtain an advanced degree because of the need for a better job which can help satisfy the lower sociological drives. On the other hand, the candidate may be driven by *social* and *self-esteem* reasons much like the marathon runner. The desire to fulfill the *self-esteem* need to feel proud and have

a sense of personal accomplishment from peers, friends, and family may be a strong driving motivator.

*Self-actualization* is the highest level of need on Maslow's hierarchy. Fulfilling this need by candidates suggests that they are receiving academic experiences that allow them to learn and develop their skills and talents to their fullest. Given that higher level needs are vaguer than primary needs, the use of intrinsic motivational factors is probably more effective in motivating doctoral candidates.

The expression "find a job you love and you'll never have to work the rest of your life" is apropos. This statement infers that when people achieve the highest level of the needs hierarchy they are maximizing their enjoyment in life. In other words, the candidate's love for learning may be the reward all in itself. Some candidates may love the continuous learning process in the doctoral program, especially if the material is directly related to their career and profession.

### **Applying Theories of Motivation**

The *two-factor motivation theory* proposed by Fredrick Herzberg (1966) is one of the more prominent theories of human motivation. While Herzberg worked primarily with industrial organizations, his theories can also be applied to the academic setting. Herzberg's model is similar to Maslow's hierarchy and provides a basis for understanding human motivation. Herzberg concluded that people experience good or bad feelings based upon different types of environments. He theorized that different factors will influence motivation based on a person's views of these environmental factors.

Herzberg named two motivational categories: maintenance factors and motivational factors. *Maintenance factors* would be construed as relationships with committee members, doctoral colleagues, and program requirements and policies. The maintenance factors are also called *extrinsic factors*. Extrinsic motivators can be viewed as external types of rewards that can reinforce performance but are not found within learning itself. For example, a candidate may be motivated to complete a doctoral degree to obtain the tangible, extrinsic reward of the diploma and use of the doctoral credential (e.g., PhD). This extrinsic factor, in essence, is the motivator for the candidate to accomplish the goal.

*Motivational factors* consist of increased growth and advancement, responsibility, status within the profession, recognition, and achievement. Motivational factors can be considered as *intrinsic factors*. Intrinsic factors are significantly different from extrinsic factors in that the rewards are intangible. Intrinsic rewards are often obtained as a result of the work itself. For example the candidate may undertake a dissertation study because of the love of doing research. Therefore a candidate who has a love of research will be more likely to be motivated to do a thorough job than a person who does not.

Much like workers in a company, committee members and candidates need to strive to ensure that both extrinsic and intrinsic motivational factors exist within the doctoral program. This will help contribute to a higher completion rate and more enjoyable program. Providing motivational opportunities such as praise, peer recognition, awards, news updates, and good supervision and resources can help achieve this objective.

### **Creating Self-Fulfilling Prophecies**

The concepts of the *self-fulfilling prophecy* and motivation are directly interconnected. A definition of the self-fulfilling prophecy is *the belief in an event or expectation can actually cause it to happen*. If marathon runners believe a new technology in running shoes will help improve their race time, they will be motivated to purchase them. Likewise, in education, if a committee member's expectation for a candidate is very high, chances are the candidate will be more likely to be motivated to meet those expectations. In essence, *beliefs become reality*.

However, expectations need to be realistic. Placing unrealistic or too high expectations for a candidate, or on oneself, can contribute to a candidate's failure. Establishing an expectation that stretches the candidate and is obtainable is the ideal aspiration level of committee members. The establishment of expectations can be compared to developing SMART goals. Good, meaningful goals should be written using SMART criteria, which are: specific, manageable, attainable, realistic, and timely.

The SMART criteria can be useful for candidates in establishing goals for themselves in completing the doctoral program. Committee mem-

bers can make use of these same criteria. Committee members might outline specific timetables and deliverables for the candidate. If the committee member doesn't propose the goals, then the candidate can suggest goals and ask the committee members for their approval. This goal setting is often part of the dissertation process and can be valuable in helping the candidate complete the program in a timely manner.

Figure 7.3 illustrates six strategies for establishing expectations and creating *self-fulfilling prophecies*. The first strategy involves establishing a *positive relationship* between the committee and the candidate that sets a good foundation. Without a good relationship a candidate may become demotivated and may not desire to excel to his or her fullest potential. The second strategy involves *building trust* between the committee members and the candidate. Trust is a factor that is established through time in working with all members.

The third strategy involves giving *clear expectations* using the SMART-goal criteria. Without clear communications the candidate may not understand the expectations in the first place. Another strategy consists of being clear and consistent in communicating among all committee members and the candidate. If committee members are inconsistent in the treatment of candidates, they will undoubtedly talk among themselves and feel undermined and discouraged.

1. Establish a positive relationship with committee members.
2. Build trust between you and the committee members.
3. Be clear in your expectations and do what you say.
4. Be reliable and consistent with the committee members.
5. Give positive feedback and reinforcement.
6. Provide responsive follow-up.

**Figure 7.3. Strategies for Doctoral Candidates in Applying Self-Fulfilling Prophecy**

The fifth strategy involves *giving positive feedback* and reinforcement. This includes extending appreciation by the committee members to the candidates and from the candidate to the committee member. The last strategy involves providing good communications and follow-up with all people—committee members, candidates, administrative staff, and the general institutional body at large. This follow-up communication may include sending intranet announcements, a letter of appreciation, or recognition at department and college meetings.

Incorporating the self-fulfilling prophecy within the framework of the dissertation program can offer all parties another tool in their arsenal for achieving success. While candidates are individuals, unique unto themselves, this theory has a wide range of applicability for completion of the dissertation process.

## **TAKING ACTION FOR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT AND BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS**

Staying motivated requires an understanding of the basic sociological factors of human beings. Accomplishing one's goals can be intrinsically enriching for people. The motivation to achieve is similar to the Japanese term *Kaizen*. This term reflects the widespread belief that the Japanese constantly strive to improve. The term can be compared to Americans' drive for success and instinct to take personal responsibility for actions and outcomes. Given that many candidates desire to be successful, the process of continuous learning in itself can be rewarding. Candidates can also provide motivators by establishing high but attainable expectations for themselves.

Learning to take action in building relationships with committee members is useful for all candidates. Likewise, committee members should set up circumstances whereby candidates can excel. Providing engaging research, literature reviews, intrinsic and extrinsic rewards are just some of the factors that can help. Keeping the lines of communication open among committee members and candidates will help foster healthy relationships. Candidates need to feel that they are respected and are able to talk freely with committee members without fear and humiliation. Otherwise the result can be lack of motivation, resentment, and failure.

If a candidate is feeling frustrated with his or her progress, scheduling a meeting with the committee chairperson may be the first step. During this meeting it may be necessary for the parties to personalize the relationship and draw out the deeper reasons for the lack of progress rather than making general comments. The goal of this problem-solving approach is to identify the root cause and to agree upon actions for improvement. By confronting the situation, the parties are more likely to resolve the issue(s) and keep the candidate on a successful track for completion.

The committee members and candidate can also consider the dissertation experience as an *interactive process* which involves two parties desiring something from each other. The process should be a collaborative one, with mutual respect. One way to establish and build this collaborative process is by developing a strong relationship among the committee members and the candidate (Varney 2010). Described below are some strategies to help build relationships with the members.

- Participate in webinars.
- Attend professional conference with members.
- Attend internal university events.
- Collaborate with the faculty members.
- Conduct special workshops.
- Teach a course in the program.
- Maintain good communications and contact.
- Provide *soft touches*.

These strategies not only help to build relationships, but can help in enhancing the candidate's professional experience and career. For example, attending workshops and conferences can offer opportunities to interact with committee members and colleagues, and provide more exposure to people in the profession.

Likewise the use of *soft touches* can help foster the committee relationships. Soft touches are those subtle actions that allow the candidate to stay in contact on a personal and informal manner. They are non-obtrusive ways to maintain and build relationships and generally are not perceived as a formal event. Examples include: sending a personal interest story or news event, a personal congratulatory or thank you card, an article of interest, or prearranging a chance encounter in the hallway.

## SUMMARY

Developing good communication skills is the responsibility of both the candidate and the committee members. To achieve a successful outcome, candidates need to communicate with the committee members and demonstrate excellent writing, verbal, and interpersonal communications, non-verbal behaviors, and active listening. Basic to the communication process is interpersonal communication skills. The ability of a doctoral candidate to talk to the committee members to reach agreement so that both parties feel mutually satisfied should be a common goal.

Establishing quality interpersonal relationships between the candidate and the committee members is important for achieving effective results. Several ways of establishing and maintaining good relationships include collaborating with faculty, being responsive to committee members, maintaining a positive attitude, and attending conferences and webinars with committee members.

Self-motivation is also critical for all candidates to endure the years of work it takes to obtain the doctoral degree. Some typical strategies for self-motivation include practicing the self-fulfilling prophecy, using intrinsic and extrinsic motivators as outlined in the two-factor theory of motivation, and applying the theory of Maslow's hierarchy for personal motivation. The road to finishing the dissertation, passing the defense, and receiving the doctoral degree is a long and arduous one that requires good communication and self-motivation.

## EXERCISES AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Reflect upon your own verbal communications and describe several verbal communication strategies for improving your communicating skills. How can you improve your overall skills in working with committee members?
2. Reflect upon your use of body language. Review the different non-verbal communications techniques and identify which ones can help you develop your communications for both face-to-face interactions and video conferencing. Also, review various active

listening strategies that can help you improve relationships and communications with your committee members.

3. Describe examples of barriers to communication when using Internet video conferencing and what you can do to maximize your performance. Also describe how the use of technology can help or hinder you when giving a defense presentation.
4. Explain how the *styles of communication* can impact discussions among committee members and candidates. Identify your dominant communications style and the styles of your committee members. Think of ways to improve your communications with your committee members based upon these styles.

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ROWMAN &  
LITTLEFIELD

## THE DISSERTATION DEFENSE: THE DAY HAS ARRIVED

### OBJECTIVES

**A**t the conclusion of this chapter you will be able to:

1. Understand and apply core competencies needed by candidates to pass the defense.
2. Understand the components of the presentation on defense day.
3. Apply strategies for giving the defense presentation.
4. Identify psychological blind spots to success.
5. Understand and apply principles of emotional intelligence.
6. Understand and apply strategies related to intellectual conflict.
7. Recognize the importance of adaptive ego functioning.
8. Understand potential outcomes of the defense.

### PLANNING FOR THE DAY OF THE DISSERTATION DEFENSE

Race day has arrived. After months (or years) of training, coaching, and conditioning, today is the day to defend the dissertation. The dissertation chairperson has cleared the candidate for the defense—he or she is

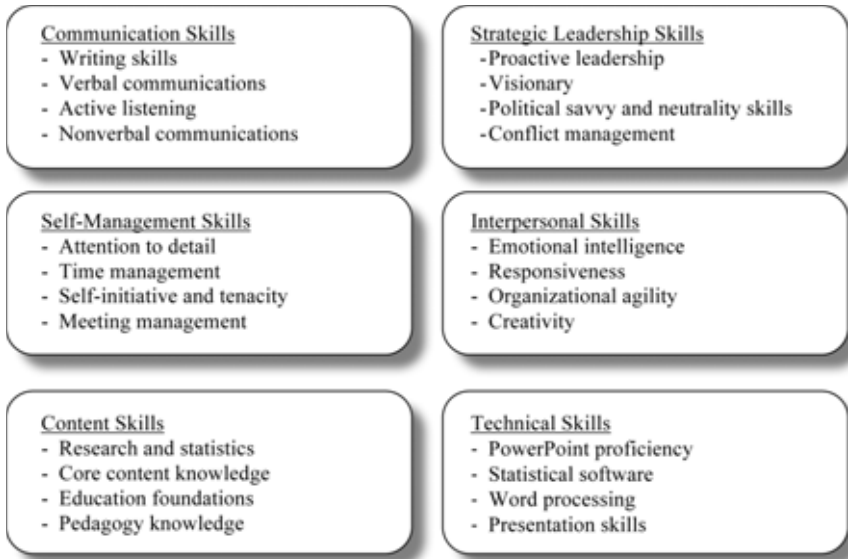
ready to run. The candidate is well prepared to answer questions after finalizing the dissertation manuscript. Psychological barriers to dissertation completion have been overcome. The committee has expressed general agreement and acceptance of the candidate's work, and the candidate is finishing in time to graduate. The dissertation marathon medal is within reach.

Candidates need to prepare for the dissertation defense day in order to achieve a successful outcome. There are many common planning expressions such as: "Those who fail to plan, plan to fail" and "garbage in, garbage out." These expressions are apropos to planning for the dissertation defense as well.

Some of the necessary planning activities may include completing the manuscript, preparing the presentation slides, making copies of the manuscript, planning the agenda and logistics, anticipating potential questions, and reviewing the institutional guidelines for conducting a defense. The candidate needs to work with the chairperson to ensure he or she has planned everything and is well prepared. It is also good to ask the chairperson if there are any *institutional rituals or nuances* that are common to the department. For example, it might be expected that the candidate bring donuts for the committee members or assemble all documents in a special folder. While this might seem trivial, it shows a sign of respect to the committee members and tradition of the institution.

There are a number of *core competencies* needed by doctoral candidates in preparing for the defense (see Figure 8.1). Candidates should assess their knowledge and skill level of these core competencies. The intellectual challenge is probably one of the most difficult core competencies needed. Candidates should avoid cramming the day before and get a good night's sleep so they can be refreshed and perform at their best. They should construct an organizational plan to prepare prior to the defense day (as described in Chapter 4) and prepare as much as possible for this important event.

Much like the marathon runners, they know the importance of a good running preparation program and avoiding any running the day before a race. They also know the importance of eating the right foods the night before and early morning hours before a race. Likewise, candidates should avoid excessive caffeine, alcohol, and heavy foods the day before



**Figure 8.1. Core Competencies Needed by Doctoral Candidates**

the defense and eat a well-balanced, light meal in anticipation of some nervousness during the defense.

The candidate's ability to listen and succinctly answer questions is another core competency needed. This is especially critical in maintaining good relationships and communications with the committee members. Nothing can be worse for committee members than for the candidate to embark on a long discourse and not clearly and concisely answer a question. Moreover, it is not uncommon for committee members to experience some conflict among themselves.

Candidates need to be politically savvy, but at the same time, remain neutral and diplomatic to avoid taking sides. Candidates need to remember that a passing decision usually requires a majority vote by the committee members. Candidates need to do their best to convince the committee members that they are worthy of an affirmative vote since any member could theoretically split the decision.

Another core competency is the candidate's ability to demonstrate professionalism and emotional control. A candidate needs to be somewhat reserved but confident in discussing the dissertation study with the

committee members. Often a candidate who is experiencing excessive stress may become defensive and abruptly answer questions posed by the committee members.

“Practice makes perfect,” and it is always advisable for the candidate to do one last rehearsal the day before the defense day and then take a break. Also, this final practice session can help build confidence for the candidate. Other qualities needed by the candidate include good leadership, self-initiative, tenacity, self-management, and responsiveness in order to adequately prepare and conduct the dissertation defense presentation.

## **CONDUCTING THE PRESENTATION ON DEFENSE DAY**

The *defense presentation* is similar to conducting a technical presentation. The four stages include *preparing*, *opening*, *delivering*, and *closing*. In other words, the candidate should think of the defense format as “Tell them what you’re going to tell them, tell them, and then tell them what you said.” Approaching the defense presentation is like conducting any technical presentation, which requires good organization and a logical sequence.

### **Preparing**

The first stage of the presentation is *preparing* and it begins with assessing the audience. Besides the committee members it is always helpful to know what other guests might be invited. Also most candidates will probably have a good working relationship with their dissertation chairperson but may not know the other committee members as well. Therefore candidates should never underestimate the experience of the committee members and never overestimate their need for information.

Candidates need to ascertain the committee members’ knowledge level, their familiarity with research and statistics as well as with the content of the topic, and their experience. This is a tricky part for candidates because they need to be able to communicate to the committee members in a professional, natural way, and at their level. However, at the same time, they must not assume that all the members have the

same working knowledge of the content, acronyms, and jargon that may be commonly used. Therefore, when in doubt, the use of acronyms and jargon should be used sparingly.

In assessing the audience, the candidates need to understand who the influential decision makers are in the group. While the chairperson may have a high degree of authority, some of the other committee members may have higher authority than the chairperson, and candidates need to be sensitive, respectful, and cognizant of these relationships.

Candidates should be ready to address questions that might be posed. Common themes of questions that may be asked by committee members during the defense are included here (see Figure 8.2).

#### Research and Analysis Questions

- What kind of study did you conduct?
- What sampling technique did you use?
- What test of significance did you use?
- Is this a parametric or nonparametric test?
- What does the p value of .05 mean?
- What were your limitations?

#### Content Questions

- What were the findings of the study?
- Give us a summary of literature
- What are your conclusions?
- Why is this study significant?
- What are your recommendations?
- How can you apply the results?
- How do you know you are done?
- If done over again, what would you do differently?
- How will this work impact the field?
- How much of this work can be generalized?

**Figure 8.2. Anticipating Potential Questions in the Doctoral Defense**

Depending upon the type of presentation format, the candidate should consult with the technician early on the defense day (or days before) to make sure everything is prepared and operational. Don't assume anything or rely upon a campus technician. Take responsibility.

Regardless of the type of presentation format, candidates should practice the presentation in the actual room where the defense will take place. Candidates should find out as much as they can about the structure of the room, equipment, potential invited guests, and time allocation for the defense. Nothing is more important than thoroughly rehearsing. Practice makes perfect.

It is also wise for candidates, when possible, to examine the room and facilities on the defense day to ensure that all the technology is available and operational, and that the technician is there. In addition candidates might try out the actual equipment such as the computer, PowerPoint software, projector, video, and station controls to be assured that it is working and to help the candidate feel comfortable with the surroundings, a term called *nesting*.

### **Opening**

The next stage of the presentation is the *opening*. Without a doubt the opening is the most difficult part of the entire defense meeting. One of the reasons for this is that presenters often don't understand what elements are supposed to be in an effective opening (Halder 2012). Figure 8.3 lists the elements that should always be included in an effective presentation opening. It should be noted that part of the opening might be done by the committee chairperson instead of the doctoral candidate. Therefore the candidate needs to be attentive and provide any of the opening elements that might have been omitted by the chairperson.

An effective opening must start with gaining the attention of the participants. Selecting the wrong opening statement can not only be disastrous in making a good first impression, but can also be embarrassing for the candidate. Therefore, to play it safe, candidates should avoid any jokes or cutesy stories that might offend a committee member.

Candidates need to provide a brief overview to the presentation which might include the time frame and format for the presentation.

1. Get attention.
2. Create curiosity.
3. Provide an overview and a review of the agenda.
4. State the objectives.
5. Create a receptive environment (goodwill).
6. Consider a transition statement.
7. Allow for introductions (optional).
8. Explain the ground rules (optional).
9. Provide background (optional).
10. Review respective roles (optional).

**Figure 8.3. Elements of an Effective Presentation Opening**

It is also important to establish a *receptive environment*. Simple statements such as, “I appreciate your participation on this committee and being involved in this defense for me this morning,” or “Thank you for helping me with this manuscript and being a member of the committee,” can be effective ways to show this appreciation to the committee members and establish “goodwill.”

If this is a second defense for the candidate or a follow-up to an informal meeting, the candidate might give some background, establish and review some of the roles of the committee members. Candidates may need to explain the basic ground rules for the presentation such as encouraging the committee members to ask questions at any point in the presentation, or preferring that they hold their questions until the end of each section. Incorporating these basic elements of an opening can help the candidate get off to a good start and engage the members in the presentation.

Another skill that is needed by all speakers is the ability to make *effective transitions*. A transition is the ability for the speaker to smoothly move from one topic to another in a logical manner that is easily



followed by the participants. Candidates who are nervous may forget some of these points. Some techniques for effective transitions include:

- Momentarily pause before moving to the next slide.
- Allow for questions and answers (in accordance with the ground rules established during the opening).
- Summarize the information before introducing the next segment.
- Explain how one topic relates to another.
- Tell the participants of the next topic.

## Delivering

The third area of a presentation is called *delivering* and comprises the main body of the session. In this stage the candidate undoubtedly will be using a combination of PowerPoint slides, handouts, and the manuscript itself. Candidates should have professional slides, as described in Chapter 6. The slides should be visually appealing, and contain standard font styles and sizes without too many graphics.

During the *delivering* stage of the presentation candidates need to understand and be skillful in using verbal, non-verbal, and listening techniques. Some verbal techniques include projecting one's voice, speaking enthusiastically and confidently, modulating the voice, and articulating the words. And candidates, especially under pressure, should avoid speaking too quickly and racing through the presentation.

When answering questions candidates need to utilize some common practices. For example always allow the committee member to finish his or her question without interrupting. This shows a sign of maturity and control. If necessary, a candidate might repeat the question and pause for a moment. This allows the participants to recognize that the candidate is thinking about the question and not being too hasty in responding to it.

By responding in a hasty, abrupt manner, the candidate may show disrespect to the committee members. The candidate should think of the ramification of questions and answer succinctly. If unclear about a question, the candidate may redirect the question back to the group or ask for clarification.

In addition to demonstrating effective verbal skills candidates need to utilize effective non-verbal techniques. Candidates should be open to the participants, use their hands to help illustrate ideas and thoughts, and have good eye contact with everyone. Moreover it is important to remain relaxed but a little animated. Candidates should not hide behind a podium or table, or talk to the slide screen.

Candidates should also be aware of any nervous non-verbal mannerisms that could be distracting to the participants such as fumbling with a pencil, pacing back and forth, having a “poker face,” being stoic, never smiling, fidgeting, or reading from the dissertation manuscript too much.

Like non-verbal distractions, the candidate needs to demonstrate good active listening. Candidates should stand up straight, speak distinctly and loud enough to be heard. They should never talk in a monotone fashion. They need to make eye contact with all the members and not favor one person over another. While listening, candidates should avoid interrupting the committee members, take notes only when practical, listen for ideas, and express compliments to committee members who offer good questions or comments. However, candidates need to avoid overly complimenting the committee members, which could come across as simply platitudes.

Another difficult aspect for candidates is the ability to remain in control of the presentation. This can be complicated because the candidates may not always have the power to control the presentation, given they are in a subordinate position. The committee members have the power and authority. Nevertheless, candidates can employ some strategies to help maintain control.

First, candidates can anticipate potential problem behaviors of those in attendance at the defense. For example the *side conversationalist* can be a problem. Two committee members may begin discussing things off to the side which disrupts the flow of the presentation. A candidate should make sure not to embarrass the participants but might use the technique of silence, or inject a brief pause, which may help regain their attention. Also a candidate might casually walk closer to the side conversationalists in a non-threatening manner which may alert them to the situation.

Candidates may also experience the *dominator* problem participant. This is a person who likes to control and dominate the discussion and often needs to respond to everything at the expense of others. To address the dominator, the candidate may try to paraphrase the dominator's comments and avoid reinforcing the behavior.

Perhaps the most difficult problem participant is the *hostile* committee member. This is the committee member who might become irate or angered at other committee members or the candidate. If a candidate encounters this rare, but unfortunate situation, it is important not to argue with the committee member or become agitated. The bottom line is that the candidate should not escalate or develop an adversarial relationship, but try to deescalate the hostility.

Another problem participant is the *know-it-all*. This is the person who thinks he or she knows everything and needs to make sure he or she comments on everything. The know-it-all is always a difficult participant for any candidate. One way to deal with this type of behavior is to know the facts, try and let the group deal with the committee member's behavior, and be well prepared. The candidate should always try to allow the know-it-all to save face, while at the same time remaining poised and confident.

## Closing

The last stage of the presentation is the *closing*. A closing should have a smooth ending that brings the participants' attention to the main purpose. The closing also generally solicits some call for action. There are several techniques candidates can use for an effective closing which include:

- Summarize the main points of the presentation.
- Restate the objective or purpose of the study.
- Confirm the results.
- Provide recommendations for future research.
- Try to end on the scheduled time.
- Open the defense to comments and questions.
- Express a thank you to the committee members and guests.

## GET OUT OF YOUR OWN WAY

The dissertation defense has a clearly marked finish line. You are running the marathon at full speed. Candidates need to feel confident with their presentation and be able to highlight their work effectively to an audience. This should be a good run. But some candidates “get in their own way” of dissertation completion. Understanding how a candidate might psychologically defeat him or herself in this event is important to allow for a successful defense.

There are five psychological blind spots described by Sills (2004) in regard to the personality characteristics, behavioral patterns, beliefs, and emotions that get in the way of life—specifically in relation to achieving success. Candidates may find themselves experiencing one or all of these barriers during the dissertation defense presentation, and will need to raise their self-awareness of these potential blind spots.

The first obstacle to success is *a need to be right*. Individuals who have a desire to be right are productive, perfectionist, purposeful, and have a passion to know everything. Unfortunately this same group of people may be controlling, fear shame and humiliation, be argumentative, and require clear, linear expectations to a non-linear task required to present an original piece of scholarly work.

A need to be right interferes with one’s ability to accept constructive criticism from the committee, or may lead a person to be immobilized in responding to edits and revisions. It is expected that a candidate will not be “right” all the time. Candidates should be willing to admit mistakes and accept feedback from the committee. Candidates must not be too hard on themselves and understand that the dissertation is an experience and an opportunity for intellectual growth.

Another barrier to success is the *feeling of superiority*. Candidates are at risk of presenting an aura of expertise and grandiosity that can be problematic during the defense. All dissertation research makes a unique, scholarly contribution. But unrealistically high expectations, underlying narcissism, and a sense of entitlement are not healthy in working relationships with the dissertation committee.

On the one hand, having confidence in one’s abilities, feeling empowered, and holding a strong belief in one’s accomplishments are very

positive traits for a doctoral candidate. The self-esteem that accompanies a sense of superiority fosters achievements. Getting approval and acknowledgment from one's committee is a highly validating experience. Yet candidates need to be open to criticism as well as demonstrate the ability to self-critique their work. Try not to compete with the committee's knowledge, or compare one's self to others in the doctoral program. Be realistic and honest about one's work. Stop thinking the dissertation is going to change the world; think of this as a brick in the wall of knowledge in one's discipline.

A *fear of rejection* is another problem that can debilitate a candidate during the defense. It is impossible for a candidate to avoid the possibility of rejection unless he or she avoids defending the dissertation all together. A person who lives his or her life in fear of rejection is often hesitant to take risks, fears being judged by the committee, and tends to be highly obedient and diligent in response to feedback on the dissertation manuscript. They are often dependent on the chairperson to guide them and may be especially nervous heading into the defense. They ask "what if" questions constantly and do not like to be pushed out of their comfort zone.

There is great cost to the doctoral candidate who is afraid to step away from the security of the dissertation committee and present one's self as an independent scholar. The defense is an ideal time to assert one's self, push past the emotional barrier of fear, and demonstrate one's autonomy. Try to control the feelings of doubt and worry by writing them down or answering "what if" questions with a rationale response. If the worst happens and you fail, develop a plan of action and don't be so afraid next time.

Some candidates *create drama* around the dissertation defense. Sills (2004) specifically refers to the *drama of the deadline* that adds excitement and anxiety to an experience. Candidates who experience strong emotions around the dissertation experience are often passionate about their work and are highly creative. But they may also catastrophize by making small events grand and dramatic. They may embellish results to find meanings. They may seek out conflict, even in small amounts, to generate heated discussions regarding superfluous details related to the dissertation.

Feelings cannot guide a person's responses to committee members during the defense. One must approach the defense with intelligence—not just emotions. Do not seek out the attention or interest of others by embellishing a situation or creating tension. Keep these emotions in check. Take time to think things through rather than reacting emotionally or impulsively. Focus on achieving goals independently, in a professional manner, without drama.

Candidates who *hold on to rage* display a different sort of blind spot that gets in the way of a successful defense. While a little bit of anger is healthy in response to the frustration and intellectual challenge of a defense, the emotion becomes problematic when a candidate regularly feels offended, vulnerable, and is unable to accept criticism. Underlying rage is often a mask for depression, resentment, guilt, or jealousy. Candidates may misinterpret committee comments, hold a grudge, feel they are being treated unfairly, and react as if they are under attack.

Rage often manifests as a fight for justice and can be a good quality. Candidates may hold a desire to right the wrongs of the world, for example, by advocating for one's subjects of study, or for one's own needs related to the dissertation. It is highly recommended that candidates who are holding on to rage find ways to forgive past experiences, and not lash out or direct this emotion at the committee. The ability to control anger and let go of feelings of rage can lead to acceptance of the complexities of life and one's growth as a scholar. This is the biggest blind spot and will require the most self-awareness by the candidate.

## **DOING YOUR BEST WITH EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE**

A characteristic that can be useful in helping candidates perform at their best during the defense is *emotional intelligence*. Effective candidates have qualities such as cognitive intelligence, interpersonal communications and persuasion, intuition, and emotional intelligence. Emotions play a significant part in resolving conflicts. People can be academically intelligent, but lack the emotional intelligence skills to deal with people. Goleman (1995) articulated five basic competencies necessary

for emotionally intelligent people: *self-awareness*, *self-regulation*, *self-motivation*, *empathy*, and *effective relationships*.

*Self-awareness* describes the degree to which a person understands his or her personal feelings (e.g., anger, anxiety, and avoidance) and how these feelings affect one's self during conflict resolution. If a person has a high degree of self-awareness he or she understands what triggers these emotions in him or herself. The first step in being emotionally intelligent is to understand what triggers one's emotions so that the person can be aware of these triggers during the defense. There are intellectually capable people who lack the ability to control their emotions. Emotions drive decision making and may produce poor results.

The competency of *self-regulation* describes a person's ability to monitor his or her emotional feelings and be able to regulate them. Once feelings are triggered, the person is then able to employ the skills necessary to control negative behaviors and regulate them in the most productive manner. This may be done through use of self-control. For example, during the defense meeting if a committee member triggers an emotional reaction, an effective candidate becomes aware of this trigger and is able to self-regulate this emotion so that he or she does not become upset or distracted.

*Self-motivation* is the third competency that describes a person's ability to direct his or her feelings toward a constructive purpose. When a person is able to recognize failures, be realistic, and grow and learn from these mistakes, it suggests competence. The candidate's ability to distinguish between important and unimportant issues can be critical at this stage, allowing him or her to focus on the most important ones.

The *empathy* competency describes a person's ability to not only recognize and regulate his or her emotions but also be able to understand how these emotions affect other people. The candidate should try to see other peoples' perspectives and be aware of their vulnerabilities. This can be helpful for the candidate to stay calm and not overreact to a committee member's comments.

The last competency of emotional intelligence is that of *effective relationships*. Effective candidates who are emotionally intelligent must be able to create a humanistic environment—one that makes everyone feel comfortable in the setting. Developing skills in each of these five

competencies can help a candidate become more successful during the defense process and complete the entire program.

## MANAGING STRESS DURING THE DISSERTATION DEFENSE

One of the most important factors in defending a dissertation is a candidate's ability to manage stress. Stress plays a role in everyone's lives and a candidate's ability to manage stress is directly related to his or her effectiveness in giving the defense. Stress can stimulate performance, raise a person's mental agility and awareness, and increase a candidate's ability to excel. At the same time, stress that is not managed well, especially in the defense, can have negative consequences (Sawatzky et al. 2012).

One common psychological struggle occurs when a candidate dwells on a stressful situation. When experiencing stress, obsessive *rumination* (the constant pondering of a situation) can be harmful. Candidates need to be mindful not to induce stress with anticipatory anxiety. Some people needlessly impose stress upon themselves. If a candidate creates unnecessary worry in anticipation of the defense, it will be counterproductive and lead to increased stress and poor performance.

Some *causes of stress*, related to Sills's previously mentioned blind spots, include the pressure to succeed, fear of failure, high demands by the committee members, lack of confidence in the dissertation topic, lack of clarity of findings, and poor interpersonal skills. Identifying the root cause of stress is the first step in learning to manage it. All doctoral candidates experience stress during the final defense; the candidate should seek ways to manage it.

Candidates should watch for *cognitive distortions* in their stress reactions during the defense. Avoid *all or nothing thinking*. This anxiety response can develop into a self-defeatist attitude and produce even more stress. Avoid *jumping to conclusions* or over-emotionalizing a situation so as to distinguish significant issues from unimportant ones. Remember, dissertations are not meant to save the world; getting worked up over every little thing is not productive.



Don't expect poor outcomes of the defense, or *catastrophize*. The likelihood of passing the defense is extremely high. Watch for *filtering* of the feedback provided by the committee. Pay attention to all aspects rather than focusing on the negative (or only hearing the positives). And most importantly, do not *personalize* the feedback too much. Candidates who are easily offended or who interpret constructive criticism as a personal affront instead of an academic challenge will see their ego defenses fail and will demonstrate a lack of emotional intelligence.

There are three ways to characterize the *symptoms* of stress: *emotional*, *physiological*, and *behavioral*. Typical *emotions* associated with stress include insecurity, depression, uncertainty, impatience, anxiety, and irritability. A candidate who is experiencing stress needs to recognize these common feelings and learn to manage the stress, which can, in turn, reduce or eliminate these negative feelings.

*Physiological symptoms* may include body aches and pains, indigestion, headache, changes in body temperature, sweating, soreness, rapid breathing, tension, muscle tightness, and rapid heart rate. It is typical for a person who is experiencing stress to develop stomach problems. With this in mind, understanding strategies of stress management can help to reduce these physiological symptoms.

The impact of stress results in change in *behaviors*. People under stress may exhibit unproductive or productive behaviors. Unproductive behaviors can include alcohol and medication abuse, poor sleeping, forgetfulness, procrastination, lack of productivity, distraction, nervous mannerisms, inattentiveness, defensiveness, temper tantrums, and argumentativeness. Productive behaviors include getting enough sleep, remaining calm, getting exercise, and employing stress management techniques. Learning to manage stress can help the candidate avoid unproductive behaviors and help turn these into productive behaviors. This can make a difference whether a defense is successful or not.

Let's face it, there is a lot at stake in the dissertation defense. There is a great investment of resources in the process and undoubtedly all candidates will experience stress. And, much of the stress, if not managed well, can produce a myriad of aches and pains: a term that can be called "doctoralitis." Once the candidate finishes the degree, the stress, along with the aches and pains, often goes away. Learning to manage the stress will help with productivity and efficiency.

Fortunately there are strategies that the candidate can do to help manage this stress. The first thing a candidate can do is to identify specific causes of stress and then apply one or more strategies to reduce or eliminate them. Some strategies are more effective than others for each individual and candidates need to select the one that gives them the best results. The best choice of stress management technique is often the one that has worked for that person in the past.

### **MANAGING INTELLECTUAL CONFLICT DURING THE DISSERTATION DEFENSE**

The word “defense” is somewhat of a misnomer. The history of the dissertation defense experience details the need to support or prove one’s work in the face of an argument or hostile criticism. But research and anecdotal experience points to evidence that the defense in current times is often a celebratory event to offer final recognition of the candidate’s hard work. Nonetheless one of the most important aspects in defending the dissertation is the candidate’s ability to manage intellectual conflict.

Scholarly dialog and conflict can be a desirable, enjoyable experience for the committee members and the candidate. However, the fact that the dissertation defense is intellectually challenging for the candidate, and sometimes for the committee members, can create an environment that produces conflict. Other causes of conflict can be poor communication, lack of clarity of committee member roles, territorial issues, goal incongruence, stress, unclear or inadequate procedures and policies, competition for power and control, and ineffective leadership from the committee chairperson (Posthuma 2012). Candidates should anticipate being intellectually challenged and need to learn to manage this situation.

Another source of conflict is that of miscommunication between the committee members and the candidate. Faculty members are often people who are used to being in a leadership position and having authority, and they generally have strong egos. Therefore if their leadership and authority become threatened, the result may be conflict. Likewise, miscommunication can take place among the committee members, and

the candidate may find him or herself caught in the middle. Therefore the candidate's ability to manage conflict can be a challenging one.

There are several techniques for resolving conflict that can be utilized by the candidate. The use of the *anticipation* approach is good when dealing with one-on-one conflict. In this situation, if a candidate anticipates that a committee member will have a negative reaction to a candidate's understanding of a theory during the defense, the candidate might begin by stating, "I know I have had difficulty with this theory in the past, but I think I've found a way to effectively present this theory as it is applied to my research." By using the anticipation strategy the candidate, in essence, anticipates the committee member's reaction and tries to defuse the negative feelings.

The use of *paraphrasing*, as described in Chapter 7, is a very common communication technique that can be used by the candidate in the defense. For example, if a committee member states that he or she is, "feeling uncomfortable with the parametric test of significance for the data set," the candidate might paraphrase the comments and respond, "Since you feel uncomfortable with the selection of statistics, I could consider using another type of test or nonparametric test of significance." In using this technique the candidate effectively paraphrases the committee member's statement which can help clarify intentions and reduce potential conflict.

Another technique is simply to use *silence*. Never underestimate the power of allowing the committee members to ventilate. The candidate needs to pick his or her battles carefully, and needs to know when not to talk. Also if a candidate is slow to speak, through use of silence, the candidate may be in a better position to analyze the situation and propose a resolution to the conflict.

An example of *limit-setting parameters* is a strategy when a candidate states, "I can do this, but I can't do that." This allows the candidate to negotiate with another person in resolving conflict by placing a limit upon the resolution of agreement. If during the defense the committee member wants a candidate to significantly expand the literature review, the candidate might state, "I am happy to add the additional sources, but I would like to limit them to some of the key sources you have mentioned today." Limit setting is a good technique in introducing one's position and initiating the start of negotiations in resolving conflict.

In attempting to resolve conflict a candidate should always keep in mind the concept of the *iceberg phenomena*. Much like a real iceberg, where only the tip of the frozen material can be seen and a majority of the ice is below the surface, problems may be symptomatic of underlying issues outside the candidate's control. Often the presence of conflict is indicative of underlying issues that may be personal, related to group dynamics, or philosophical. During the defense, two committee members may have conflict and avoid talking to each other. The candidate should not take it personally, given that the real issue between the two members may be long-standing and deep within.

There may be a need to use other principles in resolving conflict with another person during the defense, such as empathizing, searching for hidden meanings, separating the important issues from the unimportant ones, and approaching the conflict from a collaborative standpoint. The candidate can use active listening techniques to help deal with these situations. Statements that are encouraging, clarifying, empathizing, collaborating, supporting, and sensitive are often a good foundation for clarifying communication and resolving conflicts (Mach, Dolan, and Tzafirir 2010).

### **Conflict as a Negotiations Process**

It can be helpful to view the resolution of conflict during the defense as a *negotiation process*. In negotiations both parties want something. The candidate wants to pass the defense. The committee members want to ensure a quality product and that the candidate's performance is acceptable. Therefore there are several negotiation principles that can be used to help achieve a successful outcome, which include:

#### Before the Defense

- Recognize that concessions are often given at the last minute.
- Review other candidates' dissertations before conducting the defense.
- Talk to other candidates who have experienced the defense.
- Be aware of potential politics that might be used in the defense meeting.

- Seek the opinions of other committee members prior to the defense.
- Anticipate common questions to expect from the committee.

### During the Defense

- Demonstrate high emotional intelligence.
- Maintain control of emotions and remain calm.
- Don't take things personally.
- Allow yourself room to negotiate.
- Think of the negotiation process as a collaborative process.
- Respect all members and actively listen to their concerns.
- Take good notes without filtering out important information.
- Keep on the subject and don't get off on tangents.
- Be open-minded and non-judgmental.
- Use healthy ego functions to cope with the process.

## **EGO AND THE DISSERTATION DEFENSE**

It may be helpful for both candidates and committee members to have a solid grounding in the typical ego functions (i.e., how an individual psychologically adapts to the world) used in the final defense. Ego psychologists have long recognized the significance of an individual's adaptive capacity in relation to his or her social environment (Goldstein 1995). The application of ego defenses and ego adaptation can readily be applied to the personality strengths required to defend one's dissertation.

Anna Freud's 1936 *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense* offers a historical and theoretical understanding of not only how ego defenses protect an individual from conflict and anxiety, but the importance of ego-adaptive behaviors. An individual has unconscious, internal psychological defenses that protect him or herself from anxiety or from fear-inducing situations (Goldstein 1995).

Defenses can be adaptive (to protect the individual in a healthy way) or maladaptive (which also protect against anxiety, but in an unhealthy way). The history lesson in ego psychology is relevant here, as it is important for all candidates to understand the commonality of personality traits experienced during an event such as the dissertation defense. Some common defense mechanisms are illustrated in Table 8.1.

One common defense mechanism is called *denial*. People who use this defense mechanism will deny their own feelings about a situation, or the bad news itself. For example, if a candidate has just been told that he or she has failed the dissertation defense, the candidate may deny hearing the decision, or deny that the reason for failing was his or her own fault rather than face humiliation or embarrassment. This denial might be a form of “self-protectionism” for the candidate.

Another typical defense mechanism is called *projection*. This is a reaction by people whereby they subconsciously deny their own feelings and attribute them to other people. For example, if a candidate is told by a colleague that he or she is disorganized, the candidate may respond by saying, “I’m not disorganized, you are disorganized.” In this case, the candidate projects his or her feelings onto the colleague rather than accepting the blame. It is important to recognize these patterns in people, which can provide clues to their true feelings.

The use of *reaction formation* is a defense mechanism that can also be used by a candidate. In this situation a candidate states the total

**Table 8.1. Ego Defense Mechanisms That Can Be Maladaptive (Goldstein 1995)**

<i>Defense Mechanism</i>	<i>Goldstein’s Description</i>
Repression	Keeping unwanted thoughts and feelings out of awareness. May involve a lack of memory of events.
Reaction formation	Changing unwanted thoughts and feelings by replacing the feelings with the opposite. A form of “reversal.”
Regression	Returning to an earlier level of functioning to avoid the anxieties in the present.
Intellectualization	Protecting from uncomfortable feelings by thinking about them instead of experiencing them.
Rationalization	Justifying feelings or actions so as to avoid acknowledging the real motive.
Displacement	Transferring feelings or conflicts about one person to someone else.
Denial	Refusing to accept reality.
Projective identification	Projecting anger felt toward one person onto another person who is feared.
Omnipotent control and devaluation	Having highly inflated beliefs about one’s self and an overly negative view of others. Attempting to control others.

opposite of what he or she feels. For example, if a candidate has a money management problem, rather than accept this reality, the candidate may spend even more money. The defense mechanism allows the candidate to avoid facing the unpleasant feelings and acceptance of the situation.

The use of *displacement* is a defense mechanism whereby people take their negative feelings out on other people. A candidate may feel frustrated with recent criticism from a committee member and go home and displace these negative feelings onto family members or friends. People may use this technique to save face or as a way of expressing their frustration rather than taking ownership for their own behavior and dealing with their feelings in a productive manner. Other defense mechanisms and descriptions are presented in Figure 8.1.

In an ideal candidate-committee relationship, the committee (especially the dissertation chairperson) provides healthy development of the candidate's ego identity as a doctoral scholar. The candidate should have competency in his or her abilities, and a sense of mastery of the dissertation. The candidate should develop *ego resiliency* (the strength and capacity to maintain healthy ego functioning) which is needed to effectively handle the defense process. As a direct result of healthy ego adaptation and ego mastery, the candidate will be ready to make the role transition from student to scholar once he or she has passed the defense.

## **POTENTIAL OUTCOMES OF THE DISSERTATION DEFENSE**

After the closing of the presentation by the candidate, it is common that the chairperson will thank the candidate and then ask him or her to leave the room, or log off a web-based conference, while the committee members engage in discussion. This is often a nerve-wracking period of the defense for the candidate. Candidates, more than ever, need to use all the aforementioned adaptive ego defenses and stress management techniques to try to remain calm. During this time the committee members discuss the candidate's presentation and then make a decision on the outcome. At most institutions, the potential outcomes of the defense include:

1. Pass unconditionally
2. Pass with conditions
3. Fail
4. Defer (neither pass or fail the defense)

First of all, it is rare that a candidate *passes unconditionally* with no revisions needed to the dissertation. In almost all cases there will be a number of corrections, revisions, and edits that were either not found in previous reviews or determined through the defense discussion. At the end of the defense, the committee chairperson generally has a formal institutional form that is completed and signed by all the committee members.

If the candidate passes unconditionally then the committee members generally welcome the candidate back to the room and refer to him or her with the title of “Doctor.” This might also be done when the candidate passes conditionally. The chairperson may congratulate the candidate but indicate that there are certain conditions that need to be completed such as minor revisions or editing of the manuscript.

At this time the chairperson often summarizes the committee’s feelings regarding the overall manuscript and presentation as well as the expectations for making the revisions. Common revisions may include editorial and formatting changes, updating the literature review, correction of statistical errors, expansion of descriptions of qualitative findings, and presentation of data through additional tables. All revisions are generally coordinated through the chairperson, but the chairperson may decide during the defense that the candidate work directly with the methodologist or selected content specialist in making specific revisions.

If a candidate *fails* the defense the situation is often an awkward one for all parties. Candidates should get clues that they may not pass during the defense if they are unable to answer questions and comments by the committee members. When the committee fails a candidate, the chairperson generally outlines the reason why the candidate failed and then what is needed to be done to complete the next steps, which often include a second defense. The chairperson may also outline the institutional guidelines regarding failing a defense, which include timeframes and other formalities.



When candidates fail it is common that they react emotionally. These reactions might include crying, defensiveness, emotional or cognitive shut-down, denial, disillusionment, disappointment, and cynicism. Committee members should not be quick to adjourn the meeting and send the candidate off on his or her own. Sometimes spending some quiet time with the candidate can help resolve these feelings, and reassuring the candidate to retake the defense can help ameliorate these feelings. In the worst case, failing a defense can be so devastating that a candidate may need professional psychological help to avoid self-destructive behaviors. Committee members need to be sensitive to this possibility during and after the defense meeting.

A fourth option that has been used by some institutions, although may be rarer, is *deferring a decision*. This is when a committee decides that the candidate is simply not ready to pass but does not want to fail the candidate either. The committee may decide to wait to make a final decision and allow the candidate to meet again with the committee to correct the outlined deficiencies. In this case the candidate neither passes or fails the initial defense and is afforded the opportunity to try the defense again. The chairperson, in essence, holds the formal form and does not complete it.

The subsequent meeting after a deferred decision is generally held much sooner than if the candidate had failed. One can expect mixed emotions in response to a deferred decision. The candidate should be grateful that he or she did not fail, which allows him or her to save face. But, at the same time, the candidate still needs to cross the finish line. This can be an emotionally complex experience for the candidate and needs to be handled with care. However, the bottom line is that the candidate has not failed and generally in this situation it is probable that the candidate will be successful at the next defense meeting.

## SUMMARY

The dissertation defense is one of the most critical parts of the doctoral program. Successful candidates need to be skilled in many areas such as communications, giving presentations, conflict resolution, stress management, ego functioning, and interpersonal relations. The defense can

be viewed as an academic, intellectual, and emotional process where all parties desire a successful outcome. Learning and applying effective strategies and raising one's awareness of the psychological processes involved in becoming a scholar can improve the chances of a successful outcome, and the defense experience as a whole. Lastly, understanding and demonstrating high levels of emotional intelligence can improve the performance of candidates throughout the entire doctoral program.

## EXERCISES AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Review the core competencies described in this chapter and reflect upon which ones apply to you. Which ones do you feel competent in and which ones do you feel you could improve upon?
2. Review the components of a presentation (e.g., opening, delivering, and closing) and what areas you need to improve upon to further develop your skills in giving an effective dissertation presentation.
3. Reflect upon how you handle stress and conflict. Identify strategies you might use to improve your ability to cope and manage your emotions during the defense.

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## 9

# PASSING THE DEFENSE AND EDITING THE FINAL DISSERTATION MANUSCRIPT

## OBJECTIVES

**A**t the conclusion of this chapter you will be able to:

1. Understand how to revise and edit the final manuscript.
2. Recognize shared standards and expectations of the dissertation manuscript across disciplines and institutions.
3. Understand how to deal with the possibility of failing the defense.
4. Develop a self-reflection SWOT analysis plan.

## CELEBRATING THE VICTORY AND FINISHING THE MANUSCRIPT

Passing the defense, like finishing the marathon, can be a euphoric event. The feeling of being called “doctor” brings about not only personal satisfaction for the accomplishment, but often a feeling of relief that the candidate made it. Completing the defense is truly a time for celebration. Yet much like the marathon runner who heads for the refreshment tents for nourishment, completes stretching exercises, checks

the time standings, and celebrates with friends and family, the candidate still has work to do.

At the close of the defense, a summary of the needed revisions and final edits are given by the chairperson. It is rare that there are never any revisions or fine-tuning to the manuscript. The candidate needs to conduct one last thorough assessment of the final manuscript, and make the necessary revisions as requested by the committee members.

During this stage the candidate needs to have a clear understanding of the final editing process and if these final revisions are to be sent to only the committee chairperson or distributed to all of the committee members. Generally the candidate can expect to communicate everything through the chairperson, who will coordinate the revision process. However each committee has its own protocol and each candidate will have his or her own needs.

In some cases the necessary revisions may require the candidate to work solely with the research methodologist in order to make final statistical or data analysis corrections. In this case the edits may need to be completed to the satisfaction of the methodologist prior to sending the completed manuscript to the other committee members.

Regardless of the procedure, the candidate needs to know the process and be in agreement with the committee members so that everyone understands the expectations. Failure for everyone to understand the revision and editing procedures can cause conflict and wasted time in finalizing the manuscript.

### **Shared Standards for the Dissertation**

There is no debate that the dissertation committee is responsible for ensuring that academic standards are appropriate within the discipline and the degree program. The specificity of each discipline, as well as each university, varies from one to the next in terms of the expectations and evaluative criteria of the dissertation.

Yet despite the variety of forms of dissertation research that can be completed, there are shared standards in the academy that can be used as a guide. Concordantly and much to the surprise of some candidates, there is no secret to the characteristics of a high-quality professional

practice dissertation and what candidates need to do to have the final manuscript approved.

Lovitts (2005) developed empirically based guidelines for assessing a dissertation across four different quality levels—outstanding, very good, acceptable, and unacceptable. These guidelines moved academic standards from what previously seemed to be unknown to the known arena for doctoral candidates in a way that demystifies the evaluation process. A number of institutions use these recommendations in doctoral program guides and dissertation handbooks.

A brief article of Lovitts's original research on dissertation quality across disciplines and institutions was published in the November/December 2005 issue of *Academe* (published by the *American Association of University Professors*) under the title "How to Grade a Dissertation." The journal editors selected the title. She subsequently submitted an unpublished letter to the editor that the title to her article was "antithetical to the intention of my research" (Lovitts 2005). Dissertations are not graded. Instead the criteria listed in Table 9.1 provide explicit shared faculty *expectations* of the final dissertation.

## MAKING FINAL EDITS TO THE MANUSCRIPT

When completing the final manuscript review the candidate may want to use a dissertation checklist. Figure 9.1 provides an example of a checklist for evaluating a dissertation study. Please refer to Chapter 3 for other examples. The candidate should begin by reexamining the title page to ensure that it conforms to the standards of institutional doctoral dissertation guidelines. A title should be clear and succinct and typically includes the "who, what, and where" of the study. Titles are usually limited to 15 to 20 words and need to be concise, but descriptive.

Most dissertations will also have an abstract limited to about two pages, depending upon the university guidelines. It should be written succinctly stating the purpose, subjects, design, data analysis, actions, conclusions, and recommendations. The candidate should review the table of contents to ensure that the page numbers and titles are consistent with the chapters. The introduction should be reviewed to ensure that it

**Table 9.1. The Characteristics of Dissertation Quality (reprinted with permission from Barbara Lovitts 2005)**

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Outstanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Is original and significant, ambitious, brilliant, clear, clever, coherent, compelling, concise, creative, elegant, engaging, exciting, interesting, insightful, persuasive, sophisticated, surprising, and thoughtful</li><li>• Is very well written and organized</li><li>• Is well synthesized and interdisciplinary</li><li>• Connects components in a seamless way</li><li>• Exhibits mature, independent thinking</li><li>• Has a point of view and a strong, confident, independent, and authoritative voice</li><li>• Asks new questions or addresses an important question or problem</li><li>• Clearly states the problem and why it is important</li><li>• Displays a deep understanding of a massive amount of complicated literature</li><li>• Exhibits command and authority over the material</li><li>• Offers a focused, logical, rigorous, and sustained argument</li><li>• Is theoretically sophisticated and shows a deep understanding of theory</li><li>• Has a brilliant research design</li><li>• Uses or develops new tools, methods, approaches, or types of analyses</li><li>• Is thoroughly researched</li><li>• Has rich data from multiple sources</li><li>• Offers a comprehensive, complete, sophisticated, and convincing analysis</li><li>• Generates significant results</li><li>• Ties the whole thing together in its conclusion</li><li>• Is publishable in top-tier journals</li><li>• Is of interest to a larger community and changes the way people think</li><li>• Pushes the discipline's boundaries and opens new areas for research</li></ul>
Very Good	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Is solid</li><li>• Is well written and organized</li><li>• Has some original ideas, insights, and observations</li><li>• Addresses a good question or problem that tends to be small and traditional</li><li>• Is the next step in a research program (good normal science)</li><li>• Shows understanding and mastery of the subject matter</li><li>• Has a strong, comprehensive, and coherent argument</li><li>• Includes well-executed research</li><li>• Demonstrates technical competence</li><li>• Uses appropriate (standard) theory, methods, and techniques</li><li>• Obtains solid, expected results or answers</li><li>• Misses opportunities to completely explore interesting issues and connections</li><li>• Makes a modest contribution to the field following earlier work in the area</li></ul>

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Acceptable

- Is workmanlike
- Demonstrates technical competence
- Shows the ability to do research
- Is not very original or significant
- Is not interesting, exciting, or surprising
- Displays little creativity, imagination, or insight
- Is written in a pedestrian style
- Has a weak structure and organization
- Is narrow in scope
- Has a question or problem that is not exciting—is often highly derivative or an extension of the advisor's work
- Displays a narrow understanding of the field
- Reviews the literature adequately—knows the literature but is not critical of it or does not discuss what is important
- Can sustain an argument, but the argument is not imaginative, complex, or convincing
- Demonstrates an understanding of theory at a simple level, and theory is minimally to competently applied to the problem
- Uses standard methods
- Offers unsophisticated analysis—does not explore all possibilities and misses connections
- Has predictable results that are not exciting
- Makes a small contribution

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Unacceptable

- Offers a sloppy presentation and is poorly written
  - Contains spelling and grammatical errors
  - Contains methodological and other errors or mistakes
  - Plagiarizes or deliberately misreads or misuses sources
  - Does not understand basic concepts, processes, or conventions of the discipline
  - Lacks careful thought
  - Looks at a question or problem that is trivial, weak, unoriginal, or already solved
  - Does not understand or misses relevant literature
  - Has a weak, inconsistent, self-contradictory, unconvincing, or invalid argument
  - Does not handle theory well, or theory is missing or wrong
  - Relies on inappropriate or incorrect methods
  - Has data that are flawed, wrong, false, fudged, or misinterpreted
  - Has wrong, inappropriate, incoherent, or confused analysis
  - Includes results that are obvious, already known, unexplained, or misinterpreted
  - Offers an unsupported or exaggerated interpretation of the results
  - Does not make a contribution
-



Title Page	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Does it state the “who, what, and where” of the study?</li> <li>✓ Is the title limited to 15 to 20 words?</li> <li>✓ Is it clear, concise and comprehensive?</li> </ul>
Abstract	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Is it succinct and limited to two pages?</li> <li>✓ Does it state the purpose, subjects, design, data analysis, actions, conclusions, and recommendations?</li> </ul>
Introduction and Theoretical Framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Is the background or nature of the problem comprehensive?</li> <li>✓ Is there a clear statement of the problem and/or a hypothesis?</li> <li>✓ Is there a descriptive and comprehensive list of definition of terms?</li> <li>✓ Are the significance, rationale, context of the study clear?</li> <li>✓ Are other subtopics (e.g. organization of the study) clear?</li> </ul>
Literature Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Does it contain both supporting and non-supporting sources?</li> <li>✓ Are the sources current?</li> <li>✓ Are the sources relevant?</li> <li>✓ Is there a summary table at the end of the chapter?</li> <li>✓ Is the literature review comprehensive and well written?</li> </ul>
Research Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Are the population and subjects clearly defined?</li> <li>✓ Are the procedures descriptive and well defined?</li> <li>✓ Are the instrumentation and data clear?</li> <li>✓ Are the tables and figures clear and well presented?</li> </ul>
Analysis of Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Are the statistics selected appropriate for the study?</li> <li>✓ Are all data tables clear and accurate?</li> </ul>
Results/Findings of the Study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Do the findings address the statement of the problem or hypothesis?</li> <li>✓ Do the results provide meaningful outcomes?</li> <li>✓ Are limitations to the study presented?</li> <li>✓ Are the results substantiated by evidence?</li> </ul>
Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Are conclusions clearly presented?</li> <li>✓ Are the implications of the study described?</li> <li>✓ Are recommendations clearly presented?</li> <li>✓ Are follow-up studies suggested?</li> </ul>
References and Formatting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Are there sufficient references?</li> <li>✓ Do references follow appropriate style?</li> <li>✓ Is the manuscript formatted based on institutional guidelines?</li> </ul>

**Figure 9.1. Checklist for Evaluating Dissertation Studies**

is clear, the statement of the problem or hypothesis is well defined, and there is a clear significance, definition of terms, and other components typically found in this section.

The *literature review* is one of the more comprehensive parts of the dissertation. The review of literature has most likely already been accepted by the committee members prior to the dissertation defense stage. However, the candidate should reexamine it and ensure all sources are relevant and that there are no errors such as misquotes, wrong dates, or misinterpretations. Also if a significant amount of time has elapsed since the candidate wrote this section, more current literature research may need to be added.

The next section is the *research design* or methodology. It typically includes the population and subjects, study site, data collection procedures, instrumentation, and other components. The research design should have been agreed upon by all committee members prior to the final defense. However, members might have missed errors or want it to be revised. This section is typically written in past tense.

The *analysis of data* and *findings* of the study are sections that can be stumbling blocks for the candidate. These sections often contain a number of statistical tables or diagrams. Candidates may have difficulty interpreting the statistical analysis and may not clearly explain the data and results to the committee members during the defense. Moreover, candidates who complete a qualitative or mixed-methodology study most likely will have a number of descriptive charts, pictorial records, observational statements, and archival research information.

Typical questions to ask one's self might include: "Do the results address the hypothesis?" "Do findings provide meaningful outcomes?" "Are the limitations and threats to validity presented?" "What can be learned from the observations," and "Can the results be substantiated by the evidence presented in the study?" Again, this is often the tricky part for candidates, and their ability to thoroughly understand the data analysis, data interpretation, and other findings of the study are prerequisites in passing the defense.

The end of the dissertation manuscript includes the *conclusions*, *implications*, and *recommendations*. This section comprises topics such as the candidate's opinions on the application of the results, implications of the study, and recommendations for further research. This section is

valuable for gaining ideas for additional studies and can be helpful for practitioners in making research-based decisions in their professional field.

When making edits and corrections, candidates should take the time to carefully examine the entire manuscript before sending it to committee members or for publication. As a final point to the review, it is recommended that candidates run their dissertation manuscript through an anti-plagiarism program to check for accidental plagiarism. Popular, low-cost web-based programs include TurnItIn.com, Duplichecker.com, Plagiarisma.net, and Plagiarismdetect.com.

### **Formatting the Final Dissertation Manuscript**

Virtually all institutions have manuscript format guidelines that need to be followed. Formatting the final dissertation after passing the defense is akin to the marathon runner who completes 26.2 miles and now needs to walk another mile to the car—it can be a killer.

Candidates should prepare themselves for the aches and pains of formatting with patience and discipline. Form and style guides provide specific format requirements for the preparation and submission of the official dissertation. Style guides vary across institutions, and more importantly, across disciplines. Sometimes there is even variation across departments.

Candidates are encouraged to check with their institution to determine if regulations exist regarding a uniform style for the dissertation (e.g., margins, page numbering, line spacing, font, headers) as well as its component parts (e.g., proper title page, copyright insertions, list of illustrative materials, digitizing and cataloging procedures, appendices). Many institutions prepare their own form and style guides. Alternately excellent samples can readily be found online to use as a reference within one's discipline.

Once the candidate has reviewed all the sections of the manuscript, the challenge typically falls to formatting the front matter, the references, and the appendices. For example, page numbers for preliminary materials will use different numbering formats than the rest of the manuscript. Candidates may be required to use lowercase roman numerals (i, ii, iii) for the front matter, and then begin 1, 2, 3 numbering for the

rest of the document. It's a small detail, but one that can be frustrating to figure out. Steps for how to assign different numerals to these first pages are included in Table 9.2.

Double-check that all references listed in the text are also listed on the reference page. Then check again to see if there are references listed on the reference page that are not in the body of the dissertation. Use the “CTRL” and “F” key to type in and find authors' names in the manuscript.

It is important to ensure that the references are consistent with the required style manual and the institution's doctoral dissertation manuscript guidelines. Do the references follow appropriate style? Is punctuation of citations correct? Are the margins and indents on the reference list correct? Be sure all elements are consistent on the reference list. For example, APA format only requires the use of an author's first initial. Therefore be sure to only use the first initial on all author entries.

Each appendix will need to be inserted as a separate page. Candidates may need to consider taking a screen shot of items that are difficult to attach. Images may be captured by using the snipping tool (in Word), Snagit, or by clicking “Fn” (function) plus the “Print Screen” button on the keyboard. Screen shots must be saved in another program before importing to a Word document. Double-check for clarity of the item to be sure it is legible.

**Table 9.2. How to Assign Different Numbers to the First Pages**

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STEP ONE: Create a Page Break

- Click on the top of the first page where you want the new page numbering style to start.
- On the Insert tab, click Page Break in the Pages group.

STEP TWO: Turn off the “Link to Previous” feature

- On the first page of your section break, double-click in the footer area to activate the footer.
- On the Design tab, in the Navigation group, you will see that Link to Previous will be automatically selected. Click the check box to deselect this feature.

STEP THREE: Format your page numbers

- Double-click on the footer that you want the page numbering to start at.
  - In the Header and Footer group, click Page Number then Format Page Numbers. Select your preferred numbering format (1, 2, 3 or i, ii, iii, etc.). Next, click “Start on” and select the number you want to start the section and click OK.
  - To return to the body of your document, click Close Header and Footer.
-

The formatting of the final dissertation manuscript can be like a foot blister that appears after running for so long. Candidates may want to consider getting some outside help from an editor (or a teenager) who can help ease the pain of formatting. The *Association for the Support of Graduate Students* ([www.asgs.org](http://www.asgs.org)) maintains a database of editors available for hire and can be a helpful way to delegate this work. After all, time is money and the division of labor can help the candidate keep the dissertation moving along.

### **Editing for Scholarly Writing**

The ability to write succinctly, proofread, edit, and prepare the final manuscript is an important requirement in the final stages of the doctoral process. Some reasons for poor editing include the writing style, pseudo-intellectualism, hedging and jargon, lack of editing, poor tone, and sentences and paragraphs that are too long or pretentious.

Candidates need to be proficient in scholarly writing and editing, although it may be helpful to obtain a proofreader to review their final work. In addition to the writing principles covered in previous chapters, double-check the manuscript by following these basic principles of scholarly writing:

- Use active voice versus passive voice
- Delete words that have no meaning
- Avoid long sentences and keep sentences and paragraphs short
- Use a natural style while maintaining a research writing style
- Use effective transitions between paragraphs
- Use appropriate tone for the chapters
- Use clear and understandable charts and tables to illustrate data
- Delete any needless repetition
- Include one topic or idea per paragraph
- Delete any hyperbole and jargon
- Use consistent terms (e.g., titles in table of contents should match the titles in the chapters)
- Use numbers and bullets to present lists of items

It is good to double-check the tone of the manuscript. The use of *tone* contributes to the character of the manuscript. Tone is the feel-

ing or atmosphere that is created in the manuscript by the words that are selected. The tone in writing a dissertation manuscript should be research based, concise, and even-tempered. The candidate should edit out any dramatic words or blatant and generalized statements. Figure 9.2 illustrates an editing checklist for the final dissertation manuscript.

The candidate should ensure that principles of effective composition and punctuation for dissertation manuscripts is followed. Make sure that active voice versus passive voice is used. An example of active voice is “John analyzed the data” versus “The data were analyzed by John.” Active voice is generally more brisk, concise, and controlled. The candidate should also ensure that simple language is used, such as “end” instead of “terminate,” “tell” instead of “advise,” “consider” instead of

Tone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure research-based writing</li> <li>• Use even-tempered words</li> <li>• Avoid drama or generalizations</li> </ul>
Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use active writing versus passive writing</li> <li>• Avoid repetition</li> <li>• Include references and sources to support content</li> </ul>
Movement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use short sentences and paragraphs</li> <li>• Be concise and succinct</li> <li>• Move smoothly from point-to-point</li> </ul>
Format	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Edit any jargon</li> <li>• Ensure tables conform to required style manual</li> <li>• Use simple and visually attractive format</li> </ul>
Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Edit excessive detail</li> <li>• Present details accurately</li> <li>• Present data in tables</li> </ul>
Voice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use research-based conversational style</li> <li>• Use genuine sounding style that is not pretentious</li> <li>• Avoid stilted style</li> </ul>
Rhythm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sentences should be clear and flow well</li> <li>• Edit glaring errors and jargon</li> <li>• Be consistent in writing</li> </ul>
Mechanics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure proper grammar and punctuation</li> <li>• Keep writing free from errors</li> <li>• Follow required manual style</li> </ul>

Figure 9.2. Editing Checklist for the Final Dissertation Manuscript

"Data" versus "Datum"	The word "data" is plural and generally when used in research state "data were," not "data was." Exceptions might be made when referring to a data set.
"Percent" versus "Percentage"	"Percentage" relates to a proportion, or share, of a whole whereas "percent" means per hundred, such as 20 percent interest.
"Among" versus "Between"	The word "between" is used to describe a comparison between two items whereas "among" describes comparisons of three or more items.
"e.g." versus "i.e."	"e.g.," is used for an example whereas "i.e.," is used in place of "in other words."
"About" versus "Approximately"	"About" indicates a rough estimate whereas "approximately" implies accuracy.
"Accept" versus "Except"	"Accept" means to receive or agree with whereas "except" means to exclude something.
"Prove" versus "Support"	Generally candidates should not use the word "prove" since it is very difficult to prove anything in one study but rather use the word support or reject a hypothesis.


**Figure 9.3. Examples of Common Writing Mistakes**

"give consideration to," "now" versus "at the present time," "use" versus "utilize," "see" versus "visualize," "near" versus "in close proximity."

The candidate should also ensure that proper punctuation is used throughout the manuscript. Use a comma to separate independent clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction, such as "The data were comprehensive, but some were hard to obtain." A semicolon is typically used to separate independent clauses that are not joined by a conjunction, such as "Hundreds of studies are conducted in educational research; none have been conducted on the topic of epistemology."

Hyphens are also often misused or omitted by candidates. Use a hyphen in compound adjectives, such as “long-range plans,” “state-of-the-art resources,” and “cloud-based communities.” Also double-check to make sure basic principles of punctuation are used and that the quality of writing meets the standards of the doctoral level. Some other common mistakes in writing are illustrated in Figure 9.3.

The preparation of the final doctoral manuscript requires the candidate to be not only proficient in research, but also in written communications. The ability to write clearly and succinctly is as important as the research findings. Candidates should patiently edit the final document to ensure that it is of high quality and the writing does not distract from the research. Lastly, Figure 9.4 provides some helpful principles

 <b>STRATEGIES TO PUSH THROUGH</b>	
<b>ROADBLOCK</b> Writer's block or fatigue	→ Step away from the chapter. Take a pit stop. Distract yourself to clear your mind. Do something else for a while.
Grammar and/or organizational problems in writing	→ Enlist the help of a peer, colleague, classmate, or family member to offer another set of eyes on the chapter.
Lack of confidence in clarity of writing	→ Summarize what you already did to an external person (a “thought partner”). Check for holes in explanations and discussions. Have a conversation about your research to gain renewed energy and focus. Model your writing after a similar dissertation in your discipline.
Struggling with formatting	→ If permitted, consider hiring an editor to help with difficulties. Do not waste time on small details that can be addressed later. Avoid perfectionistic thinking. Let it go and accept deficits that are minor and will not keep you from passing the defense. The dissertation marathon does not need to be completed in isolation.
Struggling with data analysis	→ If permitted, consider the use of a statistical tutor. Seek out institutional supports or consult the Association of Graduate Student Support Database for resources ( <a href="http://www.asgs.org">www.asgs.org</a> ). Search YouTube for video tutorials on statistical analysis procedures.
Uncooperative committee members	→ Use conflict resolution skills and your understanding of group dynamics. Confer with your chairperson, department head, or other program administrator on how to proceed. Stay cool and be professional.
Fear of successful completion	→ Work through psychological barriers to completion with peers, classmates, mentors, family, clergy, and other supports. If anxiety or fear is incapacitating your progress, consider hiring a dissertation coach or a licensed psychotherapist for support and guidance.

**Figure 9.4. Suggested Strategies to Push Through the Wall to Dissertation Completion**



and strategies for the candidate to complete the final manuscript and work with the committee members.

## **WHAT TO DO IF YOU FAIL THE DEFENSE: YOU CAN STILL PASS**

While we have tried to provide a positive tone throughout this book, we don't want to appear Pollyannaish or naïve. If the dissertation process is done right and all parties do their jobs, the candidate will have a successful outcome. However, not all candidates pass the defense the first time, and unfortunately, some may never pass.

Marathon runners with all the finest training in the world do not always cross the finish line either. They may experience mishaps and land mines—excessive heat on the day of the race, cramps, a fall, overexertion, injury, and sometimes, tragically, a marathon runner may die. However, a determined runner will choke it up, get back up, retrain, and do what is necessary to finish the next time. And so this is true for the candidate who fails a dissertation defense.

Failing the dissertation defense, like failing to complete the marathon, can be a devastating experience. Without a doubt, failing the defense can be as stressful as other crises in life such as a divorce, bankruptcy, loss of a job, death of a loved one, or a major health problem. When the committee chairperson announces that the candidate has failed, the experience can be overwhelming. Some typical feelings can be shock, disbelief, inadequacy, frustration, tension, insecurity, and a general feeling of numbness (Blum 2010).

At the onset of a crisis people often have difficulty believing that they may be better off in the long term. Yet it is amazing how people who experience life crises gain strength and wisdom. Often, those who have been knocked down redefine themselves, set new priorities in life, and develop a more mature outlook. A crisis may induce a person to change. The Chinese term for crisis, *wei-ji*, represents the words “danger” and “opportunity.”

Failing the defense is not the end of the world. The candidate generally has an opportunity to redefend the dissertation. However, the crisis still exists and the candidate needs to reassess his or her situation, deal with the emotions, and the reality of the event (Brown and Brown 2011).

Research suggests when people experience a crisis they evolve through a series of emotional stages of grief reactions (Kubler-Ross 1969). Not everyone will experience these stages in the same order, but a candidate can anticipate experiencing shock and disbelief, bargaining, depression, anger and resentment, acceptance, and action.

The initial stage of *shock and disbelief* is common to people in any highly stressful event. This initial feeling creates an overwhelming numbness, especially when the event is totally unexpected. People may initially fight the situation, reject the event, or appear to be in a daze. Nevertheless in the short run this feeling of denial and disbelief can be healthy because it helps people cope with the initial crisis and allows them to regroup and face the reality of the event when they are ready.

Fear and anxiety also can occur in this first stage. People may experience feelings of panic and vulnerability. They may become fearful of the unknown and develop a feeling of isolation. "What will I do now?" Candidates may direct these feelings toward other people such as the dissertation chairperson, committee members, or even to God, while at the same time, asking, "Why me?" as they seek comfort and strength.

The second stage often entails *bargaining*. In this stage the candidate may panic and look toward the committee members for other options to avoid or postpone the failing decision. A candidate may ask the committee members to reconsider their decision or make a desperate attempt to try to negotiate a conditional passing decision.

The third stage is characterized by *depression*. In this stage a person recognizes the reality of the crisis and may become depressed and disillusioned. They may avoid people and isolate themselves from people and the world. It may be psychologically unbearable to admit the failed defense to others. Candidates may sulk and become apathetic about completing the program or overcoming their situation.

The fourth stage of reacting to a failed defense may involve feelings of *anger* and *resentment*. During this time candidates may direct these feelings toward committee members as well as the entire doctoral program staff and university. Blame and resentment are typical emotions expressed when denial can no longer be maintained. Feelings of anger and resentment may be displayed by criticizing the program to others or refusing to participate in revisions of the dissertation manuscript.

There may be feelings of insecurity and vulnerability that manifest in fits of rage, self-pity, and envy. Candidates may rationalize the failed

decision and accuse the committee members of discrimination. During this time candidates may have difficulty sleeping, eating, and hearing other people's perspectives. Attempts to counsel the candidate and provide encouragement during this stage may be futile.

Candidates will have varying degrees of time to overcome these feelings and work through their emotions with the goal to work through to the fifth stage of *acceptance*. In this stage the candidate may be able to resign him or herself to the facts and the reality of the situation. Feelings of hope, encouragement, and optimism may emerge. While the candidate may still experience some insecurity, energy levels typically increase as he or she accepts the situation and begins to reflect on what went wrong during the dissertation defense and how adjustments can be made.

The last stage is marked by taking *action*. Candidates who reach this stage will become determined to develop a course of action, revise the manuscript, and begin preparations for the defense again. Typical expressions may include, "Well, if given a lemon, I'll make lemonade," or "never surrender." The candidates' stress may lessen in this stage as renewed feelings of determination emerge and an action plan is developed (Houghton et al. 2012). Candidates who are going to try again and work toward a successful defense will need to demonstrate resiliency. He or she must be able to master the contents of the study and be able to work with the committee members in a mature and professional manner (Cassuto 2010).

Keep in mind that the second time around for the defense should be easier than the first. If the candidate makes use of the knowledge gained from the first defense, and addresses the necessary issues, chances are he or she will do just fine.

## **CONDUCTING A SELF-REFLECTION SWOT ANALYSIS**

One of the valuable exercises that a candidate can do if he or she fails the defense is to conduct a self-reflection. Figure 9.5 shows an example of a *self-reflection SWOT analysis*. In completing this exercise the candidate should identify his or her *strengths*, *weaknesses*, *opportunities*, and *threats*. Working through this process can help the candidate

### Self-Reflection SWOT Analysis

*Directions: Review your dissertation manuscript and your performance at the defense and compete the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats below. Then prepare an action plan for improvement.*

<p><u>(S) Strengths</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reputation/good academic record</li> <li>- Interpersonal skills</li> <li>- Committee members</li> <li>- Core content competencies</li> </ul>	<p><u>(W) Weaknesses</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Research knowledge</li> <li>- Statistical skills</li> <li>- Writing ability</li> <li>- Managing conflicts</li> </ul>
<p><u>(O) Opportunities</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Publish the manuscript</li> <li>- Relevant and current topic</li> <li>- Institutional support</li> <li>- Promising career</li> </ul>	<p><u>(T) Threats</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lack of resources</li> <li>- Program instability</li> <li>- Attrition of members</li> <li>- Internal conflicts</li> </ul>

**Action Plan:** *Develop an action plan based on the SWOT analysis.*

Strengths: \_\_\_\_\_

Weaknesses: \_\_\_\_\_

Opportunities: \_\_\_\_\_

Threats: \_\_\_\_\_

**Figure 9.5. Example of a Self-Reflection SWOT Analysis**

to identify the areas that need improvement, take actions to address weaknesses, and develop an action plan for redefending the dissertation (Johnson and Stapel 2011).

Some typical *strengths* include the candidate’s competency in understanding his or her content, having knowledgeable and professional committee members, past reputation of the candidate within the university, and having a good academic record. Once his or her strengths

have been identified then the candidate may want to develop a plan to build upon them.

Identifying the candidate's list of *weaknesses* is next. Some typical weaknesses include lack of knowledge of statistics and research, limited writing skills, and inability to manage the internal conflict among committee members. Once a candidate identifies some of the weaknesses of the defense then corrective action should be initiated.

The next step in the self-reflection process includes identifying potential *opportunities*. They might include publishing the dissertation in a professional journal, becoming more knowledgeable on the topic, supporting a career, gaining additional institutional support, and using the defense experience to gain more wisdom (Nesbit 2012).

The last part of the self-reflection process includes identifying potential *threats* that may occur in finishing the manuscript and redefending the dissertation. Some examples include potential changes in the doctoral program that could impact the candidate, lack of sufficient resources to make revisions to the manuscript (e.g., statistical software, writing support), attrition of committee members due to retirement or sabbatical leave, and separation from the university.

Once a self-reflection is done, and the candidate has been reinvigorated and has employed necessary time management strategies, it is time to make any necessary revisions to the manuscript and retake the defense. Like the marathon runner, there is always another chance to finish.

## **STAYING IN THE RACE AND FINISHING**

The importance of staying motivated and making the final revisions and edits to the dissertation manuscript are necessary requirements to ultimately getting the degree. While the finish line may be in sight, the final stretch for the candidates who thought they were already done can be the most difficult. Candidates must stay focused, disciplined, and keep the end in sight. Try to circumvent the many distractions such as family obligations, lack of time and resources, getting the committee members' support, career challenges, or lack of personal drive and resourcefulness (Varney 2010).

This final stretch requires the candidate to dig deep and complete what is needed to make it to the finish line and get that degree. There is nothing worse than a candidate who is almost done but fails to complete the manuscript (and defend it again) and lives the rest of his or her life as an ABD (*all but dissertation*).

Candidates need to keep themselves motivated to make the finish line. Some motivational strategies that can be helpful during this stage include maintaining positivity, recreating the *backwards timeline*, inspiring and encouraging one's self, and taking time to celebrate progress.

Understanding and using these simple but powerful techniques can help create a motivational environment that can push the candidate to reach the finish line (West et al. 2011).

### **Using Good Time Management to Finish the Race**

Along with using motivational techniques, the use of effective *time management strategies* can help to provide the necessary balance between a candidate's life, retaking the defense (if the first attempt failed), and completing the manuscript. To successfully finish the race, candidates will need to be diligent and persistent in managing their time.

Managing time, especially at the final defense stage, is more important than ever. It involves understanding basic principles and then developing skills in applying them. Every activity carries a price and there is no such thing as a free lunch: it will cost a person time. The first step in developing effective time management skills is to identify major time wasters. Some typical time wasters include procrastination, disorganization, wrong priorities, the inability to say "no," overanalyzing the manuscript, perfectionism, and poor organization.

It may be helpful for candidates to review these time wasters and to identify which ones are relevant to them. For example, if a candidate has a tendency to overanalyze findings and strives for perfection, this may keep him or her from actually finishing the manuscript. It is better to strive for excellence and a finished manuscript than to strive for a perfect document that can't seem to get done.

Perfection can mask as an excuse for procrastination. It is common for people to avoid things that they do not like to do. The formatting of the final dissertation is an undesirable activity that most candidates loathe

1. Establish clear expectations by the committee members.
2. List all the activities needed to complete the goals.
3. Make a daily “to do” list.
4. Prioritize the activities by A, B, and C.
5. Eliminate time wasters and unnecessary activities.
6. Delegate activities to others.
7. Classify similar activities and do them at the same time.
8. Do activities only once and be decisive.
9. Regularly discuss progress with your committee chair.
10. Maximize every minute (develop a sense of urgency).

**Figure 9.6. Time Management Strategies for Candidates Completing the Final Manuscript**

and will put off. But rather than continuing to avoid an unpleasant task, the best action is to not delay and get it over with.

Once candidates have identified time wasters it's important to apply effective time management strategies. There is a difference between being busy and being productive. Candidates may need to learn to work smarter not harder. Figure 9.6 lists some effective time management strategies.

## SUMMARY

Depending upon the outcome of the dissertation defense the candidate will probably experience great joy or sadness. If the candidate passes, it is a time for celebration. However, if the candidate fails a defense, all is not lost. This is a time for self-reflection, revising the manuscript, and preparing to defend the dissertation again.

Candidates can expect to have revisions after the defense. There are several components of a dissertation study that typically need improvement. Some of these may include the introduction, data presentation, data analysis, literature review, conclusions, or recommendations. A careful review of the entire dissertation manuscript should be done to ensure there are no mistakes and to prepare it to be bound and electronically filed. The candidate also needs to keep him or herself motivated to ensure that the necessary formatting requirements are completed.

Revising and editing the manuscript should be based upon the feedback from the committee members. A candidate should make sure to include all necessary revisions and that the format of the manuscript conforms to the standards of the institution and guidelines for writing a dissertation in one's discipline.

## EXERCISES AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Using the evaluation figures in this chapter, assess your own dissertation manuscript. List the various strengths and areas in need of improvement.
2. Complete a post-defense, self-reflection analysis. List various strengths and weaknesses and actions to improve upon the weaknesses and build the strengths.

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## HOW TO PUBLISH AND PRESENT YOUR DISSERTATION

### OBJECTIVES

**A**t the end of this chapter you will be able to:

1. Know how to copyright and publish your original dissertation.
2. Know where to look for publication sources.
3. Understand the review process for scholarly journals.
4. Understand how to carve out journal articles from your dissertation.
5. Seek out conferences to present your dissertation.
6. Choose among conference presentation formats.
7. Recognize how to use your dissertation to advance your future research agenda.

### WHAT COMES NEXT

After the graduation celebration is finished and the doctoral candidate is now a graduate, it's time to seriously consider pursuing ways to publish and present the dissertation research. Some people may have had the opportunity to publish and present during their doctoral program,

which is terrific. But for those who have been hooded as a graduate from an institution and have not yet passed on their knowledge, consider it a scholarly obligation to disseminate the research to other scholars, to the profession, and to society as a whole.

There are many advantages to sharing one's work—both initially as a completed dissertation available in a library or online database, as well as taking the dissemination of the dissertation findings one step further with publications or presentations. Some of these benefits include the chance to advance one's career, advance the professional field, gain personal satisfaction, help others, and build the graduate's reputation.

Publications and presentations inevitably help graduates who take on academic positions, and are becoming more respected in the field as well. Disseminating one's work shows leadership, initiative, and a call to action within the profession. It also offers a way to give back to the profession by adding new scholarship to the discipline that is relevant to practice.

The doctoral experience produces a final product—the dissertation. Although the document will likely be required to be stored in the electronic files of the degree-granting institution and perhaps on the shelves of committee members, there are a wealth of other opportunities to get the word out about the findings.

The first recommended step (which may be undertaken by the academic institution) is to *copyright* the dissertation. Copyrighting the dissertation allows ownership of the material and compensation for infringement. The complexities of copyright laws are way beyond the scope of this book and the laws get tricky (especially with dissertations involving sponsored research), so be sure to review the details. Graduates may have their work copyrighted directly through the U.S. Copyright Office at eCo.com, or may use ProQuest Dissertations and Theses/UMI® to complete the service for them. The copyright is owned by the graduate—not UMI®.

Next it is important to consider how to publish the dissertation in its original form. By far the most common approach is to use UMI Dissertation Publishing. *UMI Dissertation Publishing* is a part of ProQuest Dissertations and Theses (PQDT) databases. PQDT is accessible at over 3,000 libraries worldwide. PQDT/UMI® collection is a repository of dissertations and theses. This allows for graduates to electronically submit their dissertations for open access or traditional publishing.

There is debate among academics and publishers about the use of the Internet to publicly disseminate intellectual property online through what is called *open access*. Graduates should check with their dissertation chairperson, the department, and their institution to determine if the school may have a policy on these publishing practices. Financial, ethical, and personal factors will influence the decision.

*Open access publishing* allows the dissertation to be accessible to the public in an electronic format available as a free download through PQDT Open. Some institutions will require this publication format, especially if the dissertation was completed with the support of federal funding. On the other hand, some institutions may prohibit or discourage open access publishing, especially if the research material is protected in relation to the study sample or study site. The laws on “fair use” are complicated and continue to evolve in our digital world.

*Traditional publishing* allows for PQDT/UMI® to list the dissertation available through an electronic subscription database purchased by library affiliates. There are currently over 2.3 million entries in the database. Dissertations may be purchased for a fee (with minimal royalties paid to the author) or available as a full-text document. The company also offers the option for graduates to purchase bound paper copies of the dissertation for personal use. These make excellent gifts to families and committee members who have persevered alongside the candidate during the pursuit of a doctorate.

All graduates who choose to publish their work with PQDT/UMI® will have their dissertation registered in their name to certify authorship. Additionally a copy of the work will be deposited in the Library of Congress. Publishing the dissertation will give it a publication number so that it can be referenced with a legitimate citation (instead of an “unpublished manuscript”). There are fees associated with each of these services. Graduates should review the PQDT/UMI® website for more details and for instructions on how to format the dissertation for publication and printing.

For those who choose to make their work available online at no charge to the public, the two most popular options are currently OpenThesis.org and Academia.edu. *OpenThesis.org* offers authors the opportunity to post their dissertation in a free, centralized online database. Institutions may have an account with OpenThesis.org to automatically publish

the dissertation works, or graduates may upload their work directly to the site.

Similarly *Academia.edu* is a platform for academics to share their research papers. The site allows users to electronically upload their dissertations with associated key words. Those key words will link to Google searches of people looking for related information on the Internet. *Academia.edu* also tracks user analytics (i.e., how many times the dissertation was reviewed, how it is appearing in searches). Like other open source websites, *Academia.edu* does not claim ownership rights to any of the materials posted on the site. The graduate retains all rights to his or her dissertation.

There are many different ways to disseminate the results of a dissertation beyond filing it in its original form. Possibilities might include giving presentations, workshops, consulting, publishing through articles, trade magazines, books, or through private companies interested in the work. By far the most commonly used approach to disseminate one's work is through scholarly publication or a conference presentation.

## HOW TO SUBMIT FOR SCHOLARLY PUBLICATION

Many graduates do not submit their dissertation for scholarly publication. There are a number of valid reasons for this—the demands of a new job, the experience of fatigue and loss of interest in the research topic, and of course the fear of rejection.

The peer review process itself is arduous, long, and can be disheartening following the pride of earning a doctorate. *Peer review* is a process journals use to ensure published articles represent the best scholarship available. When an article is submitted to a peer-reviewed journal, the editor will distribute it to other scholars in the field (i.e., the author's peers) to gather their opinion of the quality of the scholarship, the relevance to the professional field of practice, and appropriateness for the journal and the journal's audience.

Rejection rates for peer-reviewed journals range from 50% to 99%. Unlike the dissertation committee, feedback is less likely to be supportive and encouraging. Great ego strength is required in order to be willing to expend significant energy, knowing that rejection is possible.

That being said, it's worth every ounce of effort and every rejection to be able to have one's work validated and disseminated to society. More people read journal articles than books; and more people read books than dissertations—despite how fascinating they are. Thus each and every graduate is encouraged to consider publishing and presenting their dissertations.

The dissertation is a professional piece of work that was judged and evaluated by the dissertation committee in a similar way as a peer-reviewed journal article. It is an excellent source to extract a number of articles for publication in professional journals and periodicals.

One dissertation study can generate several articles and provide a foundation for other research studies tangential to the original one. For example, the main research study can be submitted for publication in a scholarly journal, the review of literature can provide an excellent article, and content from the dissertation can be developed into short feature articles for books, professional magazines, and newsletters.

There are many options for publication. It is generally good practice to “shoot for the top” with the most highly regarded scholarly journals and to work down from there. While a peer-reviewed journal with empirically based studies is by far the most respected and reputable (more on that in a bit), there is a cadre of alternative types of scholarship to consider for publication.

A *trade publication* for a non-academic audience is appropriate for topics that apply to the general population and practitioners in the field. Magazines, newsletters, and blogs for an organization offer a way to establish one's self in the field. These are written in a more natural, conversational tone and rarely contain references or statistical data. They can be fun to write, and certainly are appreciated by family members and friends outside of the discipline who may be interested in seeing the graduate's work published.

*Review articles* are a great way to make use of the literature covered in Chapter 2 of the dissertation. These articles will include not only a synthesis of articles related to a topic, but will also include the critical analysis, controversies, and gaps in the existing research. Much of this material is highly consistent with the tenants of a well-written dissertation literature review.

*Theoretical articles* are written based on a person's thoughts. These articles may review an existing theory, offer a new theoretical approach to a topic, or simply offer an idea for future research. Theoretical perspectives are valued greatly in academia, and some authors prefer this type of scholarly publication so that their opinions and beliefs about the world can be shared publicly. A graduate holds expertise in his or her field of study and is well-suited to author these articles.

*Practice articles* offer descriptions or case examples of approaches used in practice. Rather than coming from a research perspective, these articles are often based on practice wisdom and the knowledge of the author from his or her experiences in the field. Like theoretical articles, these pieces often offer ideas for future research and are appropriate to be authored by newly minted doctoral graduates.

Unlike the aforementioned publication types, *research articles* offer empirical evidence of data that were collected and analyzed by the researcher. These articles are not based on one's thoughts, opinions, or a review of others' works, but offer an original, scholarly, research-based contribution to the field. Research articles may come from quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods studies. Some journals are specifically geared toward action research and evaluation methods and may accept contributions that are context specific.

Most research articles are published in peer-reviewed journals. As previously mentioned, these are the most competitive of scholarly opportunities and also have the greatest impact on the graduate's reputation as a scholar and marketability for employment (especially in academia). The dissertation is a scholarly piece of research. Graduates are encouraged to target their work to these types of publications.

For the graduate to get started in publishing his or her work, begin with identifying *suitable sources for publication*. Finding a potential publication source is much like conducting a review of literature for a research study, but there are slightly different things to look for in the search. The search might include an extensive review of electronic databases, professional publications, journal articles, trade magazines, print books, electronic books, blogs, or other professionally used resources that might be a good fit with the dissertation topic. Talking to professionals in the field, librarians, and university professors can be valuable in finding a good source for publication.

As the graduate is aware, most university and public libraries have excellent electronic databases available. These databases provide abstracts and full-text academic information that can be exceptionally useful and are a quick way to find out about publications and subject areas. Since these databases are purchased by the institution, the sites are typically password protected and require login through a library home page. The graduate will be more likely to access full-text articles through these databases.

Some of the more popular databases in the social sciences include *ERIC*, *EBSCO*, *PsychInfo*, *SocIndex*, and *Medline*. General databases can also be helpful. *Academic Search Premier* and *FirstSearch* are popular sources for articles, books, Internet sites, archival materials, and research journals. They also provide abstracts, full-text information, and instant online access to materials.

Use of these databases through the institution will allow a search to be conducted by entering bibliographic data such as the author, title of the work, and journal citation. Most of the materials can be obtained at no charge to current students. Institutions often extend library privileges for six months to a year after graduation, so do not waste time accessing these resources available to the graduate. Other helpful features of databases paid for by the institution include advanced search functions, and the ability for the researcher to search and save the online information and to capture citation information.

It is also appropriate to search the Internet for journal information and, in some cases, the actual materials. Open access (i.e., free) journal databases are becoming more popular and more reliable. The *Directory of Open Access Journals* and *HighWire Press* currently contain thousands of free full-text journals. *PubMed Central* and *JSTOR* are excellent open source databases for health-related materials. Many of the 1.4 million sources available in *ERIC* are now available as open access text.

*Google Scholar* is a useful site that can be consulted for preliminary searches. Unlike the general search engine Google, graduates who search on the subset website scholar.google.com will find the opportunity to broadly search for scholarly literature. Abstracts are freely available. Some articles will have a PDF version available (clearly noted to the right of the search item), or library links to access the material.



Alternately, getting full-text articles may require the graduate to request the article from his or her home institution library database.

Google Scholar offers filtering options in the left sidebar. Choose a time period or custom range to narrow the search for material. It is also possible to create an alert to receive an e-mail notification each time a new article related to the key words is posted on Google.

Every major field of study has sources unique to their area available online. Check discipline-specific organizations for publications available to its members, or national and regional conferences that may offer a journal publication to go with the topic of the presentation.

The best approach, and often the next key goal recommended after completing the dissertation, is to prepare a research article for publication in a peer-reviewed journal. Peer-reviewed journals usually have websites to explain their submission process. Once a potential source is identified, take the time to go to the journal's website to determine whether it is a good fit with the topic, regarding the mission of the publication, style, and expectations.

Most publications provide "*instructions to authors*"—an outline of the guidelines and expectations for manuscript submissions. The publication might state the history of the publication, editor's name and submission contact information, desired length of articles, type of articles, and suggested topics of current interest. They also include writing guidelines such as spacing, margin settings, headings, subheadings, footnotes, references, tables, and publication style format.

Refereed journals accepting submissions will generally request inclusion of the author's organizational affiliation, professional title, degree, and other qualifications or experiences pertinent to the article. The website will probably include an outline of the submission process, and a statement that the editor reserves the right to make editorial revisions to manuscripts to conform with the publication's style.

When selecting a manuscript for submission in a peer-reviewed journal, it is important to be aware of some of the key statistics associated with the journal. These features typically include subscription rate, type of readers, acceptance rate, whether it is refereed, time for a decision, submission requirements, electronic or hard-copy manuscript preference, and length of time before publishing after acceptance.

Probably one of the most important of these features is the *acceptance rate*, which can range from 1% to 50%. Some of the more prestigious journals, such as *Harvard Educational Review* and *Phi Delta Kappan*, have acceptance rates at the lowest levels. Keep in mind that acceptance rates are not always the same at any given time for a publication, depending on the backlog of articles. In fact, a backlog can range from a few months to a few years. If a publication develops a small backlog the editor may advertise that they need articles and invite submissions. This is always good news for a prospective contributor as the publisher is in need of articles and more likely to accept a manuscript submission.

Think also about the intended goal of publishing the journal article and the audience for the journal. Will the purpose of the article be to influence practitioners? To inform policy makers? To demonstrate research methods used in the field? Is the goal to influence a wide audience in the profession or a narrower, specialized subgroup of scholar practitioners? Graduates should also consider whether their own personal goal is just to get something published (i.e., in a less competitive journal) or to publish in a well-known top-tier periodical.

Once a journal has been identified, it is of critical importance to a prospective author to know whether the publication is a *refereed* journal. A refereed journal, sometimes called a *juried* review, is one that has an editor and an editorial board, commonly called *reviewers*. Refereed journals are generally the top level of journals and often meet the highest standards of rigor as judged by professional peers (i.e., editorial committee members).

Many top universities, when assessing the academic performance of tenure-track professors, only accept articles published in scholarly, refereed journals when considering promotion, tenure, contract renewal, or advancement in rank. Any other publications, unless a similar scholarly resource, may be considered a service to the profession.

Below is a small sample of refereed journals across disciplines that may be relevant to the professional practice doctorate. Don't limit submissions to one discipline. Many journals are multidisciplinary; research methods and subject topic journals encourage and accept submissions across many professions.

- Academy of Management Review  
 American Economics Review  
 American Journal of Community Psychology  
 American Journal of Education  
 American Journal of Family Therapy  
 American Journal of Orthopsychiatry  
 American Journal of Psychotherapy  
 American Journal of Sociology  
 British Educational Journal  
 British Journal of Educational Studies  
 Children and Society  
 Clinical Social Work Journal  
 Community Mental Health Journal  
 Computers in Human Services  
 The Counseling Psychologist  
 Education Quarterly Review  
 Educational Researcher  
 Educational Review  
 Educational Science: Theory and Practice  
 Ethnography  
 Evaluation and Program Planning  
 Evaluation and Research in Education  
 Families in Society  
 Field Methods  
 The Gerontologist  
 Harvard Business Review  
 Health and Social Work  
 Human Communication Research  
 Information Systems Research  
 Journal of Abnormal Psychology  
 Journal of Advanced Nursing  
 Journal of Aging and Social Policy  
 Journal of Aging Studies  
 Journal of the American Society for Information Science  
 Journal of Applied Gerontology  
 Journal of Clinical Nursing  
 Journal of Communication  
 Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology  
 Journal of Education Finance  
 Journal of Exercise, Science and Fitness  
 Journal of Exercise Physiology  
 Journal of Finance  
 Journal of Finance and Economics  
 Journal of Healthcare Leadership  
 Journal of Management  
 Journal of Marital and Family Therapy  
 Journal of Mixed Method Research  
 Journal of Nursing Care Quality  
 Journal of Personality and Social Psychology  
 Journal of Political Economics  
 Journal of Progressive Human Services  
 Journal of School Business Management  
 Journal of School Leadership  
 Journal of Social Issues

Journal of Social Work Education	Policy and Practice of Public Human Services
Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare	Professional IEEE
Library & Information Science Research	Psychological Bulletin
Library Trends	Qualitative Health Care
MIS Quarterly	The Qualitative Report
Nursing	Qualitative Research Journal
Nursing Leadership	Quality Management in Healthcare
Nursing Research	Research on Social Work Practice
Omega: Journal of Death and Dying	School Personnel Administration
Phemenological Inquiry	Social Policy
	Social Work
	Youth in Society

When the refereed journal editor receives a manuscript submission, the author's name and organizational affiliation is removed, and the manuscript is sent to two or three of the peer reviewers, a process commonly called a *blind review*. Reviewers are given the submitted manuscript, an evaluation form (or sometimes a rubric), and a date when the reviewed manuscript is to be returned to the editor.

The typical manuscript evaluation form consists of the reviewer's name, date sent, date actually returned by the reviewer, manuscript title, assigned manuscript number, and sometimes the author's institution affiliation (whether a two-year or four-year institution) and title of author. Most manuscript evaluation forms will have closed-ended questions with a Likert-type scale (strongly agree to strongly disagree), a rubric, and open-ended questions. Some of the typical closed-ended questions include:

- Is the manuscript scholarly written?
- Is the content specifically relevant to the journal's audience?
- Is the manuscript well organized and clearly written?
- Are the contents and references current and accurate?
- Are the format and structural mechanics clear?
- Is the manuscript enjoyable to read and does it hold interest?

- Is the length appropriate for the journal?
- Are the conclusions clearly drawn and relevant?
- Do the reference citations conform to publication style?
- Are the literature review and methodology adequate?
- Does the manuscript represent a contribution to the field?

Most manuscript evaluation forms have one or more open-ended questions that allow the reviewers to make specific comments about the article. In some cases, the editor shares these comments with the author. This feedback can be extremely useful for future submissions or refinement of the article. Typical open-ended questions include:

- What are the strengths of the manuscript?
- What are the areas in need of improvement?
- What other comments can you give to the author?

The conclusion of a manuscript evaluation form often includes a section for the reviewer to provide recommendations on whether to accept the manuscript for publication, or not. For example a single, open-ended question may be asked or a checklist of items may be included on the form. Described below is an example of a checklist:

- \_\_\_\_\_ Accept
- \_\_\_\_\_ Accept pending minor conditional revisions
- \_\_\_\_\_ Resubmit with revisions
- \_\_\_\_\_ Reject and decline resubmission invitation

The turnaround time for a decision may be in as little as two to four months, but can take much longer at top-tier journals. It is not unusual for a manuscript to be returned to the author with a rejection, but an invitation to resubmit with major revisions. Authors should not be discouraged as this is often a sign that the manuscript may have a good chance of being accepted the next time. Keep in mind that most editors and reviewers have busy schedules and being an editor is often secondary to their main job. Authors need to be patient with editors.

## HOW TO CARVE OUT JOURNAL ARTICLES FROM YOUR DISSERTATION

It is important to target a journal for submission prior to selecting what material from the dissertation should be carved out for potential publication. The reason for this is threefold. First, don't waste time submitting to a journal that only publishes methodologies that were not used for the dissertation. For example, some journals require large sample sizes, advanced statistical analysis, and experimental designs. If the dissertation was an instrumental case study based on qualitative data collection tools, an obvious mismatch of the journal's dominant published methodologies would result in a swift rejection.

The second reason why it's important to select a target journal for publication prior to preparing an article is so you are familiar with that publication's style conventions. The structure and content of peer-reviewed articles are often consistent within a publication, but not across publications. The style of a journal may vary and change over time. It's important to model an article on the style of the journal you will submit to.

Finally, it may be considered unethical to submit an article to more than one journal at a time because articles can only be published once. Some journals take a painfully long amount of time to review an article. The author may have to wait up to a year only to find out that he or she has been rejected and now needs to find another publisher. Or, as marathon runners know, it is disappointing to train for a popular marathon (e.g., New York City, Chicago, Boston) just to find out they did not qualify. The carefully tailored selection of a journal to submit one's work to will result in a greater likelihood of having the article accepted for publication. Take special care to choose wisely.

There are some graduates who will try to convert the entire dissertation into a 15- to 20-page journal article. This is possible, as there are similarities in the organization of the five-chapter model dissertation and a typical research article. Each will have an abstract, an introduction, a review of the literature, a section on research methods, results, and a discussion. Dissertations designated by the committee as "with distinction" may be most likely to achieve success with this option. However, the challenge of compressing years of work and hundreds of

pages of information into one article are great and may not sit well with reviewers.

Graduates who make this attempt face significant challenges in regard to the content, format, and length of converting the dissertation to an article. Dissertation abstracts are often up to 350 words long, whereas journal article abstracts are usually limited to 120 to 150 words. Introductions should not contain definitions of key terms; theoretical frameworks must be condensed; literature reviews will be extremely brief in comparison to Chapter 2. Authors will need to refine their explanation of the research methods, and offer a highly focused review of some of the results. Over-interpretation of results is a common problem when authors attempt to transfer the dissertation in its entirety to a journal article (Thomas and Skinner 2012).

Graduates may want to consider coauthoring an article related to their dissertation with their dissertation advisor. An experienced *coauthor* may help the new graduate develop a paper that is more likely to be accepted. It is also one way to give back to the chairperson for his or her contributions to refining and helping create the dissertation manuscript.

An excellent approach to writing an article is to determine what slice of content from the dissertation would be appropriate to carve out for a journal submission. One suggestion of how to prune and prioritize the dissertation manuscript into a journal article is the use of the *bullet-point method* (Pollard 2005), as shown in Table 10.1. Here's how it works:

Step 1: Go through the entire dissertation and *define bullet points* of individual facts, issues, findings, or details that would be of interest to the selected journal audience reader. Consider what readers would need to know about the topic of the article. Limit each bullet point to no more than 12 words.

Step 2: Conduct a *bullet-point test*. Does the reader for this journal need this information? Does the reader already know this information? Eliminate bullet points that are redundant, too lengthy, obtuse, or already understood by the intended audience.

Step 3: Organize the remaining bullet points into a *functional outline*. Move each bullet point to the appropriate journal article sections (e.g., literature, methodology, findings). Choose bullet points very careful to be sure they fit with the intended goal of the article and the target audience.

**Table 10.1. Functional Bullet-Point Outline (Adapted with permission from Pollard 2005)**

Importance of the issue or problem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quickly and succinctly convince the reader why this problem needs to be addressed</li> <li>• Hook the reader in the first paragraph</li> </ul>
Relevant literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assume that readers have a good grasp on background information</li> <li>• Provide a summary</li> <li>• Clarify why literature is relevant to the target audience</li> </ul>
Fundamental concepts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include key points related to background information</li> <li>• State the goal or purpose of study</li> <li>• Identify key concepts in the research</li> </ul>
Methodology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep this section much shorter than the dissertation</li> <li>• Include methods that are relevant to findings</li> <li>• Follow conventions of the journal</li> </ul>
Findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be very selective in what to include</li> <li>• Only include findings relevant to readership</li> <li>• Do not over-interpret or over-analyze to demonstrate expertise</li> </ul>
Implications of findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include implications supported by findings in previous section</li> <li>• Relate to practice, profession, policy, society as appropriate</li> </ul>
Future research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep this section brief</li> <li>• How could the study be improved?</li> <li>• What are the limitations?</li> </ul>

Once these key points are organized in each subheading, the author can now organize his or her thoughts to write a coherent whole for a journal article. Remember that journal articles are written for journal readership. The purpose of the article is not to convince a dissertation committee of the soundness of a research study or to demonstrate doctoral competency in research methods in order to receive a diploma. The purpose of a journal article is to engage, or sell, an audience of readers on what has been done and why it matters to the field of practice.

Be sure to fine-tune the writing to align with the style, prose, and focus of the journal. Be diligent about checking spelling, grammar, sentence structure, and punctuation. Label all figures and charts in accordance with the journal guidelines. Carefully cite all in-text sources. Follow the submission guidelines for the journal, whether it is for online or print publication. With multiple attempts, with many revisions, and with some perseverance, there is a good chance your article will be accepted for publication.



## PRESENTING YOUR DISSERTATION AT CONFERENCES

While a print or online publication of the dissertation is a valuable way to disseminate findings to the public in the present and the future, there is also great value in presenting one's dissertation research at a conference, workshop, or colloquia.

Candidates do not need to wait to finish and defend the dissertation prior to presenting the dissertation to the public. People in attendance at conferences are often there because they are interested in the field. More importantly, they often have a keen interest in exactly what is being presented. Thus the audience is a highly respected and valued group. A presentation is a great way to gather feedback on ideas and findings in a way that may lead to a journal article.

Annual or regional meetings of professional organizations often have a call for proposals to present at conferences. It behooves the graduate to be on appropriate e-mail list servers and to join organizations that are consistent with his or her specialty practice. Review trade publications and journals and check websites regularly for *request for proposals* (known as RFPs) in your area. Submission deadlines are often many months in advance of a conference so it is important to review presentation guidelines prior to graduation.

Conference proposal requirements vary greatly. Some conferences require only a paragraph or two to describe what will be presented. Other conferences require online submission of a completed paper of significant length and substance with APA-formatted references. Always check the proposal requirements carefully to ensure the submitted presentation meets the theme of the conference, the format and criteria of the specific type of presentation, and the conference objectives.

In most cases conference organizers will review a proposal submission anonymously and a decision will be made fairly quickly. Even with large national organization such as the *American Educational Research Association*, the *National Association of Social Workers*, the *American Nurses Association*, or the *American Psychological Association*, conference presentations tend to have much higher acceptance rates in comparison to peer-reviewed journals by these entities.

Conference presentations take on multiple formats, each of which will have their own policies and guidelines. Those requiring the least preparation (and easiest way to gain entry) might include lightning sessions and poster presentations. On the other end of the spectrum, research paper presentations with proceedings deposited into the organization's repository of papers represent a more advanced, more reputable, and more competitive opportunity.

When applying to present at a conference, the content of a submitted proposal must address and align with stated criteria corresponding to the appropriate presentation format. The call for proposals should contain all necessary information to determine the criteria for each type of presentation. If it is unclear which type of format to submit, contact a conference organizer for clarification and guidance.

*Lightning sessions* or *demonstrations* allow presenters a very short amount of time (usually around 10 minutes) to present findings or ideas to an audience. Presenters with similar topics are grouped together and may use multimedia to show their work, idea, or product.

*Poster presentations* utilize a bulletin board display (often with accompanying handouts) to discuss a completed research project or a project that is still under development. This forum allows presenters to actively engage in informal discussions with other conference attendees and is a great way for doctoral candidates and new graduates to network.

*Round table discussions* situate small groups for conversations that are intended to advance, enhance, or share information about similar topics. Working papers may be distributed for discussion in the small group so that attendees may gather ideas and resources that inform subsequent research or practice.

A *panel discussion* usually involves four or five invited speakers (sometimes proposed by the panelists themselves) who share a time slot to discuss related issues. Panelists are typically seated in front of an audience that will also engage in the presentation.

*Special interest groups* (known as SIGs) or *Birds of a Feather sessions* involve short meetings or a mini-session, whereby individuals gather to discuss related topics. SIGs may sponsor round tables or panel discussions and are often a nice way to introduce one's self to an organization and to get to know others interested in a very specific field of inquiry.

*Paper sessions* offer an opportunity for authors to present their work. Presenters may be thematically grouped together for approximately 15-minute presentations of their papers, or present alone for up to an hour. When a group of colleagues present separate papers on a common topic or theme, this is often called a *colloquia*. Paper presentations may have a respondent who will offer commentary on the presenter's work, followed by the presenter's response.

Similar to theoretical journal articles, *scholarly papers* may be presented at conferences as a way to present well-developed arguments on practice or theory in one's discipline. These papers do not present research methods and findings, but offer theoretical or conceptual talking points on a topic of interest. Some graduates may find that their dissertation topic is best suited to this type of presentation.

Like the research article published in a peer-reviewed journal, the *crème de la crème* of a conference presentation are its *research paper* presentations. The demonstration of a research paper offers formal public presentation of the results of a quantitative, qualitative, mixed-methods, action research, or program evaluation study. These presentations are based on original data collection for research purposes or secondary data analysis. The five-chapter model dissertation of a professional practice doctoral graduate is ideal for this type of presentation.

Research paper presentations allow the graduate (or the soon-to-be-doctorate) to share findings more comprehensively than other types of presentations. Results will be presented directly to the people who will likely benefit the most from this research. The presenter will need to demonstrate the ability to think and communicate clearly, to address the practical significance of his or her work, and to engage others in a discussion on the topic. These can be wonderfully supportive, collegial events that benefit all parties.

It is becoming more common for conferences to be offered both virtually and in person. Virtual presentations or online seminars deliver presentation content through the Internet. Presentations can be *synchronous* (e.g., live with participants and the presenter attending in real time) or *asynchronous* (e.g., prerecorded information that can be reviewed privately at any time). Synchronous presentations are similar to face-to-face presentations in that the presenter must not only present material but also find ways to engage the audience in discussion.

Some of the advantages of virtual conference presentations are the increased number of participants, an opportunity to engage individuals across cultures and geography, and the chance to reach those who are on the job and unable to attend (or afford) in-person conferences (Young 2009). Disadvantages include the lack of interactivity of participants (especially when there are a large number of participants), a high risk of participants leaving the session due to boredom, and the lack of technology skills of presenters. Nonetheless this format for delivering a presentation is growing and is considered a valid option for disseminating one's work.

Depending on the format of the presentation as well as the facilities and technologies available, presenters may be expected to prepare PowerPoint or Prezi presentations, handouts, visual displays, or to use web-based technologies. Be sure to find out what is available and what presenters need to bring prior to arriving at a conference. All of this information will be provided in advance by conference organizers when authors are notified of their acceptance.

Conferences will typically ask each presenter to submit a *blurb*. This is a description of the session that is printed in a conference program. The blurb should be written in an exciting and engaging yet professional manner. It should provide enough information for conference attendees to decide whether or not to attend the session, and also explain the goals, objectives, and outcomes for attendees. Conference sessions are almost always offered concurrently, so attendees will need to know enough information to decide which sessions they want to attend.

Finally it is common for paper presenters to be asked to share their work in an online database associated with the conference or to submit papers to a journal affiliated with the sponsoring organization. It is usually recommended that presenters follow up on these prospects to help transition their work from presentation to publication.

Preparing a presentation for the educated public in one's professional field can be a highly rewarding and valuable experience both while a candidate or as a new graduate. The presentation will likely mimic the format of the dissertation defense (see Chapter 6), but with a narrower focus and more limited scope. The real purpose of a conference presentation for the professional practice doctorate is to demonstrate knowledge of the implications of one's work on the field. Doctorates will need

to keep the presentation simple but not talk down to participants, while also not being so technical or aloof as to bore the audience.

## SUMMARY

Doctoral graduates are encouraged to present and publish their dissertation research to disseminate findings to the profession and to society. The importance of sharing knowledge through publication in online or print scholarly publications cannot be stressed enough. Graduates have worked hard for this degree, and now it's time to publicize findings with the world. Whether this sharing is done through open access journals, trade publications, or peer-reviewed periodicals, graduates are encouraged to dust off their running shoes and get on the road to publication.

Opportunities abound for conference presentations in a multitude of formats and delivery methods. If you are not already connected, get engaged with professional organizations in your field and begin to market and network your strengths, expertise, and knowledge as a doctoral graduate.

The dissertation can provide the opportunity for additional research studies. Many postdoctoral scholars use their dissertation as a springboard for future scholarship and publications. The dissertation topic of inquiry may set the stage for a forthcoming research agenda that can be pursued in the field; the topic can be discussed within academic circles, and highlighted during job interviews. There are numerous possibilities for further scholarship by the professional practice doctoral graduate.

This marathon is complete and the diploma is in hand. Your journey to the finish line required knowledge, perseverance, resilience, sacrifice, and support. You are now part of an elite running club of doctorates in America.

What will you do next?

## EXERCISES AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Reflect upon your dissertation work and list possible journals and association conferences that might be suitable for your work. Consult Appendix A for some possibilities.

2. Describe the personal and professional rewards of disseminating your work.
3. What advice would you give to other colleagues who are not yet finished with the dissertation marathon? See the epilogue for some suggestions.

## REFERENCES

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- Thomas, B., and Skinner, H. (2012). Dissertation to journal article: A systematic approach. *Education Research International*, 2012, Article ID 862135, 11 pages. doi:10.1155/2012/862135
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## EPILOGUE

### ADVICE TO CANDIDATES FROM THOSE WHO MADE IT

*The authors asked selected people with earned doctorates to reflect upon their program and to provide advice to doctoral candidates on how to finish and successfully defend the dissertation. Here are their suggestions that may be helpful not only to doctoral candidates, but also for advisors, committee members, and administrative staff. The university where they obtained their degree is also listed.*

**“M**y dissertation chair at the University of Minnesota, Dr. Robert Keller, founder of the North Central Association, once remarked to me that ‘the key to success in completing the dissertation and succeeding in a life in academe is to develop a high tolerance for ambiguity and unlimited amounts of unwarranted optimism.’ He was right on both counts!”

Thomas P. Jandris, PhD  
University of Minnesota

“The writing of your dissertation should not be a lifelong endeavor. Carefully and thoughtfully consider a research topic that you are passionate about; refrain from asking your dissertation chair to recommend one for you; and do not get trapped into spending an inordinate amount



of time and energy on Chapter 2 Literature Review so that you can avoid writing Chapter 3 Methodology and Chapter 4 Findings!”

L. Arthur Safer, PhD

Northwestern University

“My advice is to start with a topic you are truly passionate about, spend a lot of time immersed in it, read about it, travel great distances to study it. . . . Eventually you will become the expert on your dissertation, and present it in front of the audience in a confident, knowledgeable way.”

Jie Lin, PhD

Texas A & M University

“My advice, which I borrowed from a chap named Paul, is ‘Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men.’” Colossians 3:23

William “Bill” J. Duey, PhD

University of Tennessee

“In my experience, it is tempting to gather a lot of data to the point where it can overwhelm the process. Rather than trying to explore everything, I would advise future students to clearly define what you want to investigate during the dissertation and stay focused as you pursue that goal.”

Andrew Tawfik, PhD

University of Missouri

“You have to want it; completing a doctorate is an exercise in persistence. Have personal and professional passion for your dissertation topic and select a dissertation chair for your committee who meets deadlines and supports the passion for your topic.”

Judy Skorek, EdD

Northern Illinois University

“When you get stressed or discouraged, focus on your goal—the PhD—and just do what you need to do to get there. And hopefully, most of the time, you’ll actually love your courses and dissertation.”

Annette Tomal, PhD

University of Illinois-Chicago

“Often emphasized is the importance of choosing a dissertation topic that one is passionate about. This choice may not be possible for everyone and passion might not be long sustained. Yet, one is well served by continually nurturing a passion, or at least, an intense interest, in the dissertation topic. Extensive reading, investigation, and the creative connecting of the topic to real, important, and meaningful issues is a crucial part of this process.”

Anthony Przeklasa, PhD  
Northwestern University

“Once in ABD stage, the advice that I can offer is pretty short: *Nulla dies sine linea!* Not a day without a line. Make a poster, a screen saver, and a t-shirt with these words, and more importantly, make it a point that no day should pass by without you putting some words on the paper for your dissertation.

Write a page, a paragraph, or even a sentence. Revise, edit, and polish previous paragraphs with new information from literature and feedback from your mentors. When brain-dead, format your tables and references. Do as much or as little as you can on any given day, but end no day without a line! In a year or two, the lines will add up to many pages that will make you proud.”

Elena Lyutykh, EdD  
Northern Illinois University

“As a doctoral candidate, consider yourself a *sleuthhound*, a tracker, a pursuer of knowledge, an investigator, and detective. Be always a beginner, as the poet Rilke recommended. In the beginning, we are all inherently researchers; from birth onward we are curious, we explore, we ask questions, we encounter mishaps and the corrections of others. We learn.

The transition from doctoral student to candidate represents a significant and sophisticated step in professional development. Learn all that you can about the process and product from your independent research and dissertation committee. Congratulate yourself for your accomplishments along the way. Pay forward the lessons learned and best practices.”

Donna A. Blaess, PhD  
University of Iowa

“I took the opportunity of a week away from home to immerse myself into writing and commit every waking moment to finishing the last two chapters of my dissertation. I know others who dedicated multiple weekends away to get serious about writing; this is a sacrifice of time away from family, but can be worth the uninterrupted time.

Find one or two fellow graduate students whose feedback you have valued in class, and make a pact to provide each other with chapter-by-chapter suggested edits and comments. This can act as a motivator for staying on track because you have set due dates for which you are held responsible by others. It can also provide you with an outside eye of someone who may be in your general field, but not necessarily your specific content area, so that your end product is accessible to a broader audience.”

Michelle Turner Mangan, PhD  
University of Wisconsin-Madison

“I recommend to doctoral students approaching the dissertation phase that they “remove their ego” from the dissertation process. This recommendation is based on the premise that students should be open and receptive to any and all feedback from their chairperson and committee members as they move through their research study.

As a seasoned dissertation member, I suggest that chairs and committee members also ‘remove their egos’ from this process to provide the student guidance and support to conduct their research.”

Kathy Hollywood, PhD  
Fordham University

“First, set a realistic goal that you can accomplish in a reasonable amount of time. Your dissertation is not your life’s work. Think of it as a springboard that launches your research career. You want to have a sturdy foundation, but you do not need to exhaust the topic.

Second, develop a good relationship with your advisor and committee. You want them on your side guiding and defending your research. Your advisor and committee members are also your mentors who can guide and support you in your academic career beyond the PhD.

Third, clearly define your academic identity. Your academic identity will determine which conferences to attend, which journals to target, and which crowd of scholars to hang around with. If you do not have a

clear identity yourself, it's difficult for others to know what you or your research represents. Lastly, have fun! Don't get too stressed. After all, it's just a dissertation."

Min-Dong Paul Lee, PhD  
Cornell University

"Work with your dissertation chairperson and build the relationship. You will be working with this person for possibly several years. The relationship you develop with the chairperson is key to your success. Follow your intuition."

Beth Venzke, PhD  
Indiana University-Bloomington

"Obtaining a terminal degree oftentimes is a lesson in the art of perseverance. Therefore, it is incumbent when identifying a dissertation topic to ensure that it will 'hold' your interest for a considerable amount of time. For when there is doubt about the topic that you have chosen, you feel as though you have reached a dead end, or the required edits are overwhelming, the notion of needing to persevere and remain constant to your intended purpose, idea, and task at-hand is paramount."

Scott Ebbrecht, EdD  
Nova-Southeastern University

"My advice is to remember that your dissertation should be a contribution to the scientific literature, not the final word on the subject. You are not expected to make the next Nobel prizewinning discovery. The dissertation marks the beginning of your research career, not your life's magnum opus. It is alright to leave some questions for future research."

Paul Pieper, PhD  
Northwestern University

"Plan with the end in mind and stay on track by working with your advisor to set logical timelines for targeted area of the dissertation—and if you can't meet those timelines because of extenuating circumstances, etc., refocus your planning and start over."

B. Graham, EdD  
University of Arkansas-Little Rock

“It is important to stay focused, determined, and confident. For me, it was the first time in my educational experience that I was challenged to take control of my own learning—it was very scary but very empowering. Make sure to take time to reflect not only on what you learned but also how you learned.”

Carol J. Reiseck, EdD  
Northern Illinois University

“My words of wisdom would be to become part of a doctoral dissertation ‘support group.’ This was very helpful to me as I struggled in this final stage of the journey at the *University of Chicago*. The group was made up of six of us, all women who were ‘a little older’ than the typical doctoral candidate. All of us also had other significant life responsibilities, as employees, parents, spouses, caregivers, etc. We offered one another essential emotional and psychological support and encouragement, as well as reviewing and critiquing our respective work products at each stage of the process. In addition, we all shared helpful advice, information, warnings, and ‘war’ stories.

The group continued for several years until each of us, one by one, completed our dissertation defense. This was possible because even though a member of the group had successfully completed the process, she continued to attend our meetings to offer valuable encouragement and support. We all successfully defended our dissertations and earned our PhDs, including celebrating with one another at the conclusion of each defense, by bringing champagne and flowers. This group of friends and colleagues truly ‘carried’ me through, as I didn’t want to disappoint them any more than myself. They all continue as valued colleagues and friends to this day.”

Carol Jabs, PhD  
University of Chicago

## **APPENDIX A: PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATION WEBSITES**

### **DOCTORAL SUPPORT**

Association for Support of Graduate Students  
[www.hopeline.com/gradhelp.html](http://www.hopeline.com/gradhelp.html)

Council of Graduate Schools  
[www.cgsnet.org/](http://www.cgsnet.org/)

U. S. Department of Education  
[www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov)

Council for Higher Education Accreditation  
[www.chea.org/Directories/regional.asp](http://www.chea.org/Directories/regional.asp)

American Psychological Association  
[www.apa.org/education/grad/index.aspx](http://www.apa.org/education/grad/index.aspx)

Group for the Advancement of Doctoral Education in Social Work  
[www.gadephd.org/](http://www.gadephd.org/)

The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business  
[www.aacsb.edu/resources/doctoral/links.asp](http://www.aacsb.edu/resources/doctoral/links.asp)

International Network for Doctoral Education in Nursing  
[www.nursing.jhu.edu/academics/programs/doctoral/phd/inden/index.html](http://www.nursing.jhu.edu/academics/programs/doctoral/phd/inden/index.html)

American Physical Therapy Association  
[www.apta.org/PTEducation/Overview/](http://www.apta.org/PTEducation/Overview/)

Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate  
[cpedinitiative.org/](http://cpedinitiative.org/)

International Communication Association  
[www.icahdq.org/](http://www.icahdq.org/)

The PhD Project  
[www.phdproject.org/](http://www.phdproject.org/)

The PhD Completion Project  
[www.phdcompletion.org/](http://www.phdcompletion.org/)

Alliances for Graduate Education and the Professoriate  
[www.nsfagep.org/](http://www.nsfagep.org/)

American Association of University Women  
[www.aauw.org](http://www.aauw.org)

National Association of Graduate-Professional Students  
[www.nagps.org/](http://www.nagps.org/)

GradShare  
[www.gradshare.com](http://www.gradshare.com)

National Graduate Student Crisis Line 1-800-GRAD-HLP  
[www.hopeline.com/gradhelp.html](http://www.hopeline.com/gradhelp.html)

GradResources  
<http://gradresources.org>

## **PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS FOR POTENTIAL CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS**

American Association of School Personnel Administrators  
[www.aaspa.org](http://www.aaspa.org)

Society for Human Resource Management  
[www.shrm.org](http://www.shrm.org)

Association of School Business Officials International  
[www.asbointl.org](http://www.asbointl.org)

National School Boards Association  
[www.nsba.org](http://www.nsba.org)

American Association of School Administrators  
[www.aasa.org](http://www.aasa.org)

Government Finance Officers Association  
[www.gfoa.org](http://www.gfoa.org)

Association of Supervision and Curriculum and Development  
[www.ascd.org](http://www.ascd.org)

American Educational Research Association  
[www.aera.net](http://www.aera.net)

Association for Education Finance and Policy  
[www.aefpweb.org](http://www.aefpweb.org)

National Business Education Association  
[www.nbea.org](http://www.nbea.org)

American Business Women's Association  
[www.abwa.org](http://www.abwa.org)

Council for Social Work Education  
[www.cswe.org](http://www.cswe.org)

Society for Social Work Research  
[www.sswr.org](http://www.sswr.org)

Group for the Advancement of Doctoral Education  
[www.gadephd.org](http://www.gadephd.org)

American Psychological Association  
[www.apa.org](http://www.apa.org)

Association for Psychological Science  
[www.psychologicalscience.org](http://www.psychologicalscience.org)



American Counseling Association  
[www.counseling.org](http://www.counseling.org)

American Mental Health Counselors Association  
[www.amhca.org](http://www.amhca.org)

American Association of Colleges of Nursing  
[www.aacn.nche.edu](http://www.aacn.nche.edu)

American Nurses Association  
[www.nursingworld.org](http://www.nursingworld.org)

American Organization of Nursing Executives  
[www.aone.org](http://www.aone.org)

American Hospital Association  
[www.aha.org](http://www.aha.org)

Gerontological Society of America  
[www.geron.org](http://www.geron.org)

Association for Gerontology in Higher Education  
[www.aghe.org](http://www.aghe.org)

American Sociological Association  
[www.asanet.org](http://www.asanet.org)

American Public Human Services Administration  
[www.aphsa.org](http://www.aphsa.org)

American Public Health Association  
[www.apha.org](http://www.apha.org)

Association of Schools of Public Health  
[www.asph.org](http://www.asph.org)

American Physical Therapy Association  
[www.apta.org](http://www.apta.org)

American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and  
Dance  
[www.aahperd.org](http://www.aahperd.org)

National Health and Exercise Association  
[www.nhesa.org](http://www.nhesa.org)

American Society of Exercise Physiologists  
[www.asep.org](http://www.asep.org)

American College of Sports Medicine  
<http://acsm.org/>

American Library Association  
[www.ala.org](http://www.ala.org)

National Communication Association  
[www.natcom.org](http://www.natcom.org)

International Association for Media and Communication Research  
<http://iamcr.org>

International Communication Association  
[www.icaheadq.org](http://www.icaheadq.org)

Association of Information Technology Professionals  
[www.aitp.org](http://www.aitp.org)

Association for Information Systems  
<http://start.aisnet.org/>

Educause  
[www.educause.edu](http://www.educause.edu)

IEEE Society  
[www.ieee.org](http://www.ieee.org)

Association for Computing Machinery  
[www.acm.org](http://www.acm.org)

American Association of Blacks in Higher Education  
[www.blacksinhighered.org](http://www.blacksinhighered.org)

American Association of Hispanics in Higher Education  
[www.aahhe.org](http://www.aahhe.org)

American Association of University Professors  
[www.aaup.org](http://www.aaup.org)

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## **APPENDIX B: PREPARING DOCUMENTS AND USING PRESENTATION AIDS**

### **POWERPOINT SLIDES**

**S**lides should outline your presentation. The key points should identify the major concepts and principles you plan to make.

1. Use bullets to separate ideas and outline the discussion; slides should not be read from.
2. Title slides, but keep the titles in the same location on each slide.
3. Include only necessary information; slide content should be self-evident.
4. Avoid “mega data” slides; your committee members should not be reading the slides.
5. Slides should be consistent and follow a logical sequence.
6. Provide a copy of the presentation outline if you want committee members to take notes.
7. Avoid overdoing transitions and animation; this takes away from your presentation.
8. Consider header font size between 28 and 44, and bullet font between 20 and 28.
9. Maximum of two graphics per slide.

10. Avoid excessive detail and be consistent with complementary colors.

## **ELECTRONIC SMART BOARDS, FLIP CHARTS, AND TRADITIONAL BLACKBOARDS**

1. Use all large capital letters.
2. Prepare in advance with a straight edge.
3. Print quickly with heavy lines.
4. Stand two feet away and print straight across.
5. Stand to the side and place chart in front of room.
6. Use main words; don't crowd.
7. Don't apologize for lack of quality.

## **HANDOUTS AND WRITTEN RESOURCES**

1. Use only if you want them to keep the information.
2. Distribute one at a time (easier to control).
3. Don't allow the handout to lose your control.
4. Keep handouts in order.
5. If possible, distribute handouts at beginning or for each section.
6. Tell participants in advance if handouts will be distributed.

## **VIDEOS, INTERNET, AND OTHER ELECTRONIC MULTIMEDIA**

1. Test equipment in advance.
2. Have a backup plan.
3. Don't over-rely on this media.
4. Use to reinforce your content.
5. Carefully preview material for relevancy.

## APPENDIX C: DOCTORAL CANDIDATE PERSONALITY STYLE INVENTORY

**I**nstructions: *For each statement, indicate which of the responses best describe your personality. Write a number 4 (most like you), 3 (next most like you), 2 (next most), and 1 (least like you).*

1. My colleagues tend to view me as:
  - \_\_\_\_\_ a. creative and original
  - \_\_\_\_\_ b. analytical and rational
  - \_\_\_\_\_ c. personable and empathetic
  - \_\_\_\_\_ d. pragmatic and assertive
  
2. When talking with people, I tend to be:
  - \_\_\_\_\_ a. logical and structured
  - \_\_\_\_\_ b. direct and to the point
  - \_\_\_\_\_ c. warm, sensitive, and insightful
  - \_\_\_\_\_ d. imaginative and animated
  
3. My preferred doctoral writing approach tends to be:
  - \_\_\_\_\_ a. creative and innovative
  - \_\_\_\_\_ b. structured and logical

- \_\_\_\_\_ c. personable and people centered
  - \_\_\_\_\_ d. practical and direct
4. When communicating with people, I tend to be:
- \_\_\_\_\_ a. direct and decisive
  - \_\_\_\_\_ b. casual, patient, and a good listener
  - \_\_\_\_\_ c. controlled, detailed, and non-emotional
  - \_\_\_\_\_ d. stimulating and thought provoking
5. When facing conflict with committee members or other people, I tend to be:
- \_\_\_\_\_ a. emotional, overactive, but personable
  - \_\_\_\_\_ b. rigid, stern, and controlling
  - \_\_\_\_\_ c. assertive and perhaps a little impatient
  - \_\_\_\_\_ d. perhaps a little condescending and opinionated

*Interpreting Your Scores:* Now transfer your rankings (4, 3, 2, 1) on the line provided for each of the statements below. Then add the total for each column at the bottom. Your highest score suggests your dominant personality style and your second highest suggests your secondary or backup style. The lowest score indicates the style you use the least.

	Intuitior	Feeler	Thinker	Doer
1.	_____ a	_____ c	_____ b	_____ d
2.	_____ d	_____ c	_____ a	_____ b
3.	_____ a	_____ c	_____ b	_____ d
4.	_____ d	_____ b	_____ c	_____ a
5.	_____ d	_____ a	_____ b	_____ c
Total	_____	_____	_____	_____

**PERSONALITY STYLES INTERPRETATION**

Style	Characteristics
Intuitior	Enthusiastic, tends to use whole concepts and stimulating ideas and focuses on creativity, originality, and innovations. Tends to be independent and a risk taker.

Feeler	Personal, concerned with feelings, uniqueness, and individuality. Tends to be more emotional, empathetic, sentimental, introspective, and subjective.
Thinker	Organized and structured. Tends to be logical and data oriented, as well as analytical and quantitative. Values numbers, facts, systematic inquiry, problem solving and decision making.
Doer	Concerned with the bottom line. Is practical, concrete, spirited, and down-to-earth. Values physical examples. Is goal oriented, assertive, and technically skillful.

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## **APPENDIX D: DOCTORAL CANDIDATE TIME MANAGEMENT ASSESSMENT**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Department: \_\_\_\_\_

**D**irections: *Please place an “X” on any item that you feel tends to waste your time. Then rank your top three (3) time wasters (#1 = worst) and then develop a plan to eliminate or reduce them.*

### **Ranking Time wasters**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Getting side-tracked and allowing distractions to interfere
- \_\_\_\_\_ Too much focus on perfectionism
- \_\_\_\_\_ Socializing with people too much
- \_\_\_\_\_ Analyzing everything too much
- \_\_\_\_\_ Overwhelmed by challenging tasks
- \_\_\_\_\_ Being confused about the research study and expectations
- \_\_\_\_\_ Not being able to say “no” to committee member requests
- \_\_\_\_\_ Spending too much time on e-mails and correspondence
- \_\_\_\_\_ Dealing with too many interruptions throughout the day
- \_\_\_\_\_ Experiencing too many technology or communication problems
- \_\_\_\_\_ Feeling guilty not spending enough time on work or with family

List any other time wasters:

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---

---

List ways to reduce or eliminate the time wasters:

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## APPENDIX E: DOCTORAL STRESS AND COMPOSURE SURVEY

**D**irections: *Answer each of the questions below by marking an “X” on the line under the true or false columns for each of the items.*

<b>True</b>	<b>False</b>	<b>Stress and Motivation Statements</b>
___	___	1. I tend to get frustrated with my committee members.
___	___	2. I often don't look forward to talking to committee members.
___	___	3. I feel “burned out” often during the day.
___	___	4. I don't exercise enough or stay in good shape.
___	___	5. I don't always eat healthy foods.
___	___	6. I often feel anxious and distracted when talking to my chairperson.
___	___	7. I find myself complaining.
___	___	8. I often feel apathetic about and frustrated with the doctoral program.
___	___	9. I allow myself to be easily distracted during the day.
___	___	10. I often find myself making excuses not to work on my manuscript.
___	___	11. I feel overwhelmed by the dissertation.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. I often doubt my abilities.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. I fear I will not finish the dissertation.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. I am consuming more alcohol than normal for myself.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. I am using over-the-counter or prescription drugs to stay awake, to stay alert, or to calm myself.

**Total:** True \_\_\_\_\_ False \_\_\_\_\_

Scoring: Add the total number of “true” answers. If you scored a total of three or more true answers, then you may need to better manage your stress. You might consider reading each statement you answered “true,” and think of ways to improve the situation. Even though you may have answered “true” to fewer than three, these can be significant and you should evaluate the extent to which you need to improve upon them.

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## APPENDIX F: DISSERTATION SUCCESS SELF-ASSESSMENT

**D**irections: *Identify two characteristics in each category of the Dissertation Success Self-Assessment (Blaess and Grant 2011) that are most likely to facilitate your successful completion of the dissertation and the top two characteristics that are most likely to hinder your successful completion of the dissertation. Create a Venn diagram to look for similarities and differences in factors that help or hinder the dissertation experience*

### PERSONALITY CHARACTERISTICS

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Perfectionism                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Ability to deal with frustration          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ability to live with ambiguity | <input type="checkbox"/> Fear of research                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Self-confidence                | <input type="checkbox"/> Ability to work with persons of authority |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Responsible                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Self-doubt/second guessing                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Decision-making                | <input type="checkbox"/> Self-esteem                               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Self-starter                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Affiliation needs                         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Need for approval              | <input type="checkbox"/> Acceptance of criticism                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pressure                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Independence                              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fear of failure                | <input type="checkbox"/> Boundaries                                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Self-efficacy                  |  |

- Fear of success
- Dependence
- Completing tasks

- Self-care (e.g., diet, exercise, sleep)

## MOTIVATION

- Interest in dissertation topic
- Establishing goals
- Self-direction
- Self-determination
- Academic risk taking

- Persistence
- Procrastination/avoidance
- Self-rewards/reinforcement
- Task completion
- Effort

## MANAGEMENT SKILLS

- Creating daily structure
- Managing time
- Physical space/room for the dissertation
- Setting priorities
- Structuring tasks

- Planning
- Meeting deadlines
- Organizational skills
- Sticking to a schedule
- Technology skills
- Setting boundaries

## DISSERTATION CHAIRPERSON

- Compatibility
- Collegiality
- Empathy
- Respect
- Perfectionism
- Availability
- Expectations
- Boundaries
- Interest in topic

- Concrete/constructive feedback
- Direction
- Micromanagement
- Goals (similar or divergent)
- Support and encouragement
- Timely return of drafts
- Frequency of communication

**DISSERTATION COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Interest in topic              | <input type="checkbox"/> Collegiality    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Micromanagement                | <input type="checkbox"/> Divergent goals |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Criticism                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Boundaries      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Timely return of drafts        | <input type="checkbox"/> Politics        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Respect                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Competition     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Concrete/constructive feedback |  |

**PEERS, FRIENDS, & COLLEAGUES**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Employment pressures and responsibilities | <input type="checkbox"/> Divergent career objectives/goals       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Isolation                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Affiliation demands (emotional, social) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Need for affiliation/contact              | <input type="checkbox"/> Criticism                               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Support and understanding                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Competition                             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Grievances (complaints, criticism)        | <input type="checkbox"/> Expectations                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Boundaries                                |  |

**FAMILY & INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Financial support of self/family | <input type="checkbox"/> Expectations                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Time spent with family           | <input type="checkbox"/> Criticism                             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family role(s)                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Demands (emotional, physical, social) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Divergent goals                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Financial planning                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Encouragement and support        | <input type="checkbox"/> Competition                           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Empathy and understanding        |  |



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