Writing a Dissertation

A Process of the Complete Journey, From Topic Development to Completed Dissertation

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Table of Contents

Introduction
Chapter 1
- Making a Plan
- Logistics
- Taking the Plunge

Chapter 2
- Your Topic
- Researching Your Topic
- Annotated Bibliography
- Methodology

Chapter 3
- Outlining Your Research
  - *Broad Topic Area*
  - *Literature Review*
  - *Problem Statement*
  - *Research Questions*
  - *Sample*
  - *Phenomenon/Variables/Hypotheses*
  - *Methodology and Design*
  - *Purpose Statement*
  - *Data Collection Approach*
  - *Data Analysis Approach*

Chapter 4
- Formulating Your Prospectus
  - *Introduction*
  - *Background of the Problem*
  - *Theoretical Foundations and Review of the Literature*
  - *Problem Statement*
  - *Research Questions, Hypotheses, Variables*
  - *Significance of the Study*
  - *Rationale for Methodology*
  - *Nature of the Research Design for the Study*
  - *Purpose of the Study*
  - *Instrumentation*

- *Data Collection*
- *Data Analysis Procedures*
- *Ethical Considerations*
- *References*
- *Appendices*

Chapter 5
- The Dissertation Proposal
  - *Getting Started*
  - *Table of Contents*
  - *List of Tables*
  - *List of Figures*
  - *Chapter 1*
  - *Chapter 2*
  - *Chapter 3*
  - *Wrapping Up the Proposal*
- Proposal Defense

Chapter 6
- Next Steps: Institutional Review Board and Data Collection
  - *Institutional Review Board*
  - *Data Collection*
  - *Conducting Data Analysis*
- Completing Your Dissertation
  - *Writing Chapter 4*
  - *Writing Chapter 5*
  - *References*
  - *Abstract*
  - *Dedication*
  - *Acknowledgement*
- Dissertation Defense
- Wrapping Up

Appendix A. Annotated Bibliography Examples

Appendix B. Literature Review Examples

Appendix C. Instrumentation Overview in Literature Review Sample

Introduction

You have made the decision to obtain your doctorate! Welcome to the elite group of academic overachievers! You have what it takes to prove that you are successful academically and are ready to take that next step in adding the title, Dr., to your name. You have likely spent countless hours debating if this is the right next step, or if it's even worth it, and decided yes to both. You may have also already figured out that this is not going to be easy, and it will certainly be academically challenging for you. Or maybe grad school was a breeze and you're looking to add a challenge. Either way, understand that the coursework component of your doctorate is the easy part.

According to some sources, it can take on average of 8.2 years to earn a PhD, with an attrition rate of 40-50%. According to the 2013 US Census data, 1.68% of Americans over the age of 25 held a PhD, and as of 2018, that number was 2.03%. The fact is that the path to a doctorate is not an easy one. It requires long hours studying, researching, reading, and being criticized. Many people probably figured the first three are just par for the course. That last one though: being criticized. You have to have thick skin to get through the dissertation process. You have to know which battles are worth fighting and which battles are not. Ask yourself, “is this the hill I want to die on? Is this really what I want to keep me from finishing?” I had many people throughout my doctorate that tried to help, or even though they were giving excellent advice. In reality, the best piece of advice I received was that in the doctorate dissertation, the goal is done. To be done. Of course, accuracy and integrity go with that. But the main thing is to determine which arguments are worth having and which ones aren’t. The truth is most aren’t. Learn to let it go.

You have to be open and ready to take significant negative feedback. If you’re the type of person to get defensive about criticism, that may be your downfall. You will need to find strategies to overcome your defensiveness, and be willing to change what you have, and change it again, and again, and again. In fact, one reviewer commented about a phrase I had used throughout my proposal, saying he wasn’t sure why he saw so many proposals with that same type of phrase. I responded that my methodologist told me to add that. He said it was unnecessary and advise that I remove it. Yes, that happens. Yes, it’s frustrating and maddening. Is it worth the battle? No. I just removed it throughout and moved on.

While I can’t tell you which battles are or are not worth fighting, I will work to give you a guide to writing a solid dissertation. The goal is to help make this process as easy as possible.

Chapter 1

Making a Plan

You've decided that you are going to get your doctorate. Congratulations on this exciting step! Your next step is admitting that you're absolutely crazy, right? Someone once said, “"If I were smart enough to complete a doctorate, why was I not smart enough to just say 'NO'." While quite tongue-in-cheek, it does illustrate how challenging the doctoral journey can be. To be successful, you must be resilient. You must be willing and ready to make sacrifices. You must have solid sources or methods to relax. A doctoral program and the dissertation involves more than just writing the dissertation. It involves a lot of energy, attention, and heart. The following will provide some insight into how to prepare for the doctoral dissertation.

There are countless ways to be successful in attaining your goals. If nothing else, you've already earned your undergraduate and your graduate degree. You've likely taken countless exams and written even more papers, including your master's Thesis. You're an old pro, right? Chances are that your life is quite different from when you were in undergrad. Maybe even grad school. You need a new plan to be successful. And then plan for it to all go wrong. Be honest about the best-case scenario and tell yourself that it is the best-case scenario. Truth is, many times, the original plan goes awry, even through no fault of our own. But you have to have an initial plan, even if it doesn't go the way you want it to.

Your plan should start with completing your coursework. Have a solid timeline for getting the class component of your doctorate completed as efficiently as possible. As I said previously, that's the easy part. Do the work required within each course. Learn the material. Does your program consist of two years of coursework? Commit to completing that in two years, barring major complications. What is the best case to finishing your dissertation process, according to your school? If it's one year, that's your best-case scenario goal. But, expect delays there. Plan to expect delays. Plan to forgive yourself for taking longer than you planned.

Plan ways for you to relax. Make a plan with your significant other on how they'll spend the time they'll have while you're busy. Are they comfortable cooking dinner while you work? Are they going to be good with having a new hobby? How about taking care of the kids at bedtime so you can get work done? What about housework? You need to be motivated for yourself, but you also need to have the support from your family. Are your kids going to be understanding that you won't be able to do everything like you used to? Are they aware of how important this goal is for you? How about the financial impact? Plan for this to cost more than you expect it to. Are you using loans? Do you have a fellowship? What if that fellowship ends, then what? Are you paying cash? There are countless personal questions and circumstances that will need to be addressed at some point throughout the doctoral journey. It's best that you start addressing those concerns as early as possible. Minimize unexpected surprises. Things will happen while you're getting your doctorate because life doesn't stop. It keeps going. Make sure you have excellent resources at your disposal for when you are completely stressed out and really need to destress. What are your go-to methods? These will save you. Especially because the demands of the doctorate are incredibly stressful.

Try to plan for the unexpected. Life, as you know, does not stop just because you're in school. You may lose your job unexpectedly. You may lose a loved one. You may lose your health. Ask yourself, honestly, could you keep going if something like that happened to you. That is a very personal question, one that I cannot answer for you. For me, I became very ill in my second year. I ended up on short term disability and was in and out of the hospital constantly for 6 months before doctors were finally able to give me a diagnosis as to what was making me sick. Once I had the diagnosis and treatment, I was significantly better. I did not take a break from my studies during that time. I did not stop. I kept pushing forward. In fact, for me, my studies kept me going. But I am not you. I do not expect anyone else to make the same decision, because everyone else is so very different and has different challenges. I was lucky to have been able to be treated and get better. But it was not easy. Know your limits. Respect those boundaries. If you need to take a break, take a break. If you need to push through, push through. Only you can make that decision. Do not sacrifice your long term health if you feel it's not worth it.

Learn your university's policies and procedures. Read them thoroughly. You will be held accountable for knowing this information. If you do not know the information and you violate a policy, you can and will be penalized. Ultimately, it is your responsibility to abide by the policies of the university, this includes following the procedures for the dissertation process. Know who your advisor is and how to reach them. This person will be your go-to for essential information throughout the process. Make sure you have the most up-to-date student manual and the information for necessary components that go beyond your coursework. If you are a distant learner, are you required to travel to your university throughout the program? Is there a cost to you for that? What are the deadlines for specific milestones? It is your responsibility to know and adhere to the many policies that exist, and to be able to follow directions. Are there resources available to you through the university to assist with finances, employment, or other issues? How can you take advantage of them? What are the guidelines for the faculty and the committee members? What are their deadlines? You need to know this information. While it may not seem important at the beginning, it is essential information later.

Set realistic expectations for your school, your family, and yourself. What can you realistically manage on a daily, weekly, even monthly basis? Are you, realistically, going to have the help you will need? Do you have the appropriate expectations of the university personnel and what they can and cannot do for you? Are you able to take and follow directions without being told multiple times? Are you able to readily apply changes and feedback? What do you want from your University? How hard are you willing to work? Be realistic with yourself, as this will minimize issues and stress. Realistic expectations may be one of the biggest challenges for many doctoral learners. We have all already had academic success. Many have had professional success. We assume we will succeed in this as well. Yet, we fail to be realistic with just how difficult this process can be. We often place undue burdens on others, expecting them to help us in ways that they are physically or procedurally unable to.

Be mindful and honest regarding the limitations of yourself and others. Know your strengths and your weaknesses. Be ready to have your weaknesses become a major point of contention, because they can and will lead to extreme frustration throughout the dissertation process if you fail to plan accordingly. Plan to overcome them. If statistics is your weak point, how are you going to compensate? If you hate to read, how are you going to manage the copious amount of reading you will be doing? If writing is not your strength, what steps will you take to get better? If you are disorganized, how will you stay on track? Are you a procrastinator? Do you have issues with conflict? Be honest with yourself and really be ready to work on yourself.

Find what is going to work best for you and do that. No one has the magic formula because what works for one person won't work for everyone. Do you need to set a schedule to stick to? Would you benefit from a Dissertation Coach? Do you need a Statistician?

Do you need an editor? How can you set aside time to read without it interfering with your responsibilities? Do you have a place to backup your documents that is secure and that is not on your primary computer? What is your plan if your computer crashes? Make sure that you have a contingency plan for your contingency plan.

Logistics

Once you have a basic academic plan and a basic life plan (and a corresponding contingency plan), then comes the logistics of the work itself. For starters, you will need to understand which writing style you will need to follow, most likely APA. Then purchase the most current manual and, if you're not already, become an expert in that writing style. Know that writing style like the back of your hand early. Remember, there are many resources to help, but it's best to refer to the manual often if you're uncertain. Learn how to properly set up Microsoft Word to automatically format or check for APA violations (such as two spaces after a period between sentences instead of one). One of the biggest sources of frustration for many academic writers, especially those who have been out of school for a while, is re-learning APA writing format. You will get frustrated if you continue lose points on your class assignments for APA errors. Take the feedback, incorporate it immediately, then move on. Also check your university's library or resources. Virtually every school offers assistance, whether it's tutoring or a writing center, or even offering templates of an example APA paper for you to follow. These templates will also provide excellent information about the many different components of APA and how the school expects you to utilize them. The sooner you master the writing style, the sooner you can focus on your academic voice and the content of the document.

Finding your academic voice is essential. But what is an academic voice? Academic voice is a way of writing that is clear, concise, and professional without attempting to sound fancy or adding unnecessary verbiage to complicate the message. It focuses on using formal, declarative statements and avoids the use of first person and casual language. Within the academic voice of each document, you must develop your authoritative register. This is the type of language specifically for use in the academic setting. You must develop a style of writing that indicates that you are the authority of the content or subject matter of which you are writing. This comes from writing based off research and utilizing sources to support your statements. If you make a statement that there is a relationship between eating waffles for breakfast and being successful at work, there had better be research cited within the text to support that statement. While I will get more into research and supporting documentation later, please bear in mind that when you make a declarative statement, your chair and other reviewers will say, “says who?”

If your regularly written academic assignments or your master’s thesis have been long ago, or your writing is not at that level, it might be wise to seek out additional support. Look at a tutor or some writing workshops. Some people look to hire a Dissertation Coach or begin considering the use of a Dissertation Editor. Look at the use of free resources first. If you still feel lost or that you really will benefit from the help, get help. The help is extremely useful, when you select the right people and resources. Otherwise, you may end up in a situation where you have too many hands trying to stir the pot. Essentially, too many opinions are almost worse than not enough.

Lastly, are you an independent learner or do you need people around you to help keep you focused? This will be important, especially if you are pursuing a doctoral degree through an online program. If you are a strong independent learner, you will not mind being left to get your work done and being able to take minimal direction and work quickly to make changes. However, if you have not taken online classes before, or you know you need someone there, you might want to consider an on-campus program. If that is not possible, and it isn’t always possible for everyone, look for support groups online. Most doctoral programs with online cohorts will find that their students will naturally or create Facebook groups for support and help. These groups will be an extremely useful source for valuable information and insight, even additional resources you may not have realized existed. You can find out new policy changes early. Or you can find out through others' successes and failures, what does and does not work. Does your university's IRB require a wet signature? Would online messaging be acceptable for social media use? People will share examples of their work, many times for free. What a better way to stay connected with classmates and peers than through groups where people are able to connect wherever they are in the world. Additionally, finding a faculty member at the school who is willing to mentor you can be a critical source of support and early (and free) help throughout the program. Look into your options and be ready to ask and reach out to the faculty and other doctoral learners. They are, arguably your best sources of support and information.

Taking the Plunge

If, after reading all of this, you are still ready and excited to take this next step, good luck! The real work will begin on getting your dissertation completed. If you are like me, I dove in and just pushed through and worked hard. I also fell victim to frustration and anger and questioned why I was putting myself through this. Of course, if you make it through your entire dissertation without asking that at one point or another, you probably aren't doing it right. For many, our master's degrees took somewhere between a year to a year and a half. They were extremely short, especially compared to our undergraduate careers. For a lack of a better, more appropriate analogy: your bachelor's degree is like running the mile, the master's degree is like the 400-meter sprint, your doctorate? That's like doing the New York City Marathon. Hopefully, however, with this guide, the journey through will be less arduous and you will be able to see yourself crossing that finish line. So, if you're ready and determined to become Dr, let's take this plunge!

Chapter 2
Your Topic

Developing your topic early is key to your success. If you are unable to identify and clearly articulate your topic area early, you will encounter significant frustration later. This includes having to change your topic several times or even having to start research from scratch when you are in the writing phase of your dissertation. That means that you will have lost years of research because the topic was not well developed and flushed out as early as possible. This doesn’t mean that your topic can’t evolve throughout the doctoral journey, but the last thing you want to do is get to writing your proposal only to be told that you can’t conduct research on your topic for any number of reasons. So, how do you identify a topic early that you will not be forced to change later?

First and foremost, you must select a topic that is relevant to your field of study. What that means is that, while you may be interested in the lived experience of South American migrants on a pathway to citizenship, if your field of study is Organizational Leadership, your interest is of little consequence to your field. While this may sound harsh, the fact is that you will appreciate hearing this advice early because you will be forced to change later if you fail to ensure that your topic is relevant to your field of study. I'm not saying to research something you dislike; I'm saying that you decided on a field of study for a reason, that reason should inform your topic area. While it seems like this would be common sense, there are cases where people have spent years researching a topic that has almost nothing to do with their field of study. They are then left to start from scratch. Essentially, you want to develop a topic that follows the same guidelines as a SMART goal. It should be specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and timely.

Specific. Your topic should be as specific as possible. While you may start large, you will need to narrow it down to a specific problem that needs to be addressed. For example, my broad topic area was life satisfaction. That is a rather broad topic area. I needed to narrow it down. As my field of study was Industrial Organizational Psychology, I included work/life balance. While that narrowed my topic a little, it is still a tremendously broad topic area. How to keep narrowing it down is the essential question. This is where I started looking at existing research on work/life balance and life satisfaction. You look at the themes or other commonalities that are present in the existing literature. While doing this, you are also examining what has been extensively researched. If it has, then it doesn't need to necessarily be research exactly like that any further.

In the existing research, it became apparent that the literature supported a relationship between work/life balance and stress and life satisfaction. They go together like Santa, reindeer, and elves. There's another piece to the puzzle that helps to narrow down my topic. However, there is extensive literature on the relationship between these three variables. So, it is well proven that there is a relationship. Interestingly, in the articles that I found, one other factor kept coming up: a financial component. What the literature research I was conducting flushed out was that there were many studies that tied financial considerations (whether it was income, or national GDP, or a cash margin, or poverty) to each of the individual variables (work/life balance, stress, and life satisfaction). But there was nothing there that tied them all together.

That became my preliminary topic: the relationship between work/life balance, stress, finances, and life satisfaction. While this sounds like it was an easy process, it took months of reading articles, and it took a significant amount of time looking for the key, looking for that clue. Every article that I read, I annotated and kept a thorough annotated document that I built on to support that I was on the right track. This meant that some (read: a lot) of the articles I read and annotated ended up getting removed from my draft and dissertation. But that does not mean that they were not integral to my research. They informed that I was, in fact, on the right track.

Measurable. Now that I had flushed out a preliminary topic, how would I measure it? This one can be challenging for some. Yet, the existing research will guide you on this. I knew early on that this area would be best served with quantitative research. Could I have researched it with a qualitative method? Absolutely. However, there was an abundance of literature that supported the use of psychometrically validated assessments to measure three of the four variables. The literature further supported the use of demographic data for the fourth variable. Further, I was looking at the relationship between the variables, I was not looking at the lived experiences of the people. Of course, at this point in topic development, the specifics of methodology are less important as whether it can be measured. Study after study indicated that my topic had many ways to measure the variables. Make sure that the literature you are reading provides support for the measurability of your topic. Is the measurement method viable and supported in research? If you are using a qualitative methodology, is there enough support for that methodology? If you are using quantitative methodology, is there enough support?

One example of where this key component missed was a classmate of mine wanted to study a specific theory in business. But had no measurable plan in which to study the theory, other than to research the theory. Unfortunately, he was unable to provide any measurable variable or context (i.e. population or setting) in which the theory was going to be measured. He had, by this point, spent a year researching the theory, but had failed to develop a testable hypothesis. The faculty spent hours with him trying to help him develop a measurable topic, and he was quite resistant to their assistance. I do not recall that gentleman going much further within the doctoral program. Luckily, however, most people have a topic that is measurable, and then it comes down to the *how* that they must determine.

Attainable. Your topic must consist of attainable data. You must be able to have access to the population you want to study. If you are looking to study active military members, do you have reliable access to that population? If not, you will not have an attainable topic. If you want to study elementary school students, you may have a challenge as they are a protected population in research. What is your plan to overcome this challenge? Are you able to get the appropriate site permissions from the places in which you hope to collect your data? These are important questions to ask yourself early. Importantly, if you know the population you wish to study, and you know the organization or facility early, start asking the agencies what the steps would be conduct research there. Some universities will only allow faculty or employees to conduct research there. The military requires several requests and permissions and is heavy on the restrictions of access of personnel. This can be a major challenge for some. If you are using archival data, do you have access to and permission to use that data?

Additionally, if you are planning to utilize quantitative surveys, are you able to get permission for those surveys? If not, do you have alternate options? It is best to start looking into the permissions for assessments that you intend on using as early as possible. Then, look into any other restrictions or challenges that may come with those assessments. Even if you end up using something else entirely, it’s better to have permission and not need it than to need it and not have it. Also, please make sure that any assessments you plan on using are able to be approved for your use by your university. I had a situation where one of my scales was denied because it had not been used on a US population. That left me scrambling to find another assessment that I could use, asking for permission, and rewriting sections of my proposal to make the necessary changes. I did all of that within a week. It is a stress I would not wish upon any of you. I was also quite fortunate that the author of the new scale was accommodating and responsive. Others have not had the same fortune.

The best advice I can provide is to have a backup plan. Then have a backup to your backup. The last thing you want to have happen is to be collecting data and have an issue getting the minimum needed sample because you didn't have the access or response you had thought you would have. This can be especially challenging for qualitative researchers, so be careful if you choose to conduct qualitative research. Some qualitative researchers have spent months on collecting enough responses for their research. Quantitative researchers tend to have an easier time getting the responses, and often are able to cite low responsivity as a limitation to the study. Most qualitative researchers don't have that flexibility.

Relevant. The challenging part, especially when there is an abundance of literature on a topic is determining if it is even still relevant to your field of interest. You can determine relevance through your literature research. In looking at the existing literature, is it recent? Is it within the last 10 years? The last 5? If the literature you are finding is all older material, it could be argued that the topic is no longer relevant to the field. You may have 50+ years of literature to support your topic, but if it fizzled out in the last 10 years or so, you may be beating a dead horse. Remember, your dissertation should be adding to the relevant literature in your field, not repeating what is already there.

The best example I have is from my own experience. I knew that the relationship between work/life balance, stress, finances, and life satisfaction was relevant because there was a continuing wave of new literature looking at different work/life balance initiatives, telecommuting, financial benefits, what supports organizations offer employees, job satisfaction, even examining the finances component in a variety of different ways (income, cash margin, people on financial assistance, national GDP), and looking at different types of shift work. It was relevant because there continued to be new research regarding the topic and looking into what makes people happy and how to keep them happy at work.

Find that continuous stream of information. If you’re looking in the right spot, it will be there. Remember, a lack of research is not grounds for the research to be conducted. At least not for a doctoral dissertation. You will need to have solid, substantive support for your research topic, the population, and the research method you plan to employ. Without the support in current or recent literature, you do not have a viable topic.

Timely. Are you able to complete your research within a timely manner? This means, are you able to collect your data in a timely fashion. This, obviously, goes hand in hand with the measurability. Not only are you able to measure it, but can you conduct your research in a timely manner? It is unlikely that you would want to conduct a longitudinal study, as that type of study in and of itself would take years to conduct. Bear in mind that quantitative research is often shorter than qualitative. Be prepared for this difference, especially if you are planning on conducting qualitative research.

As you can probably tell, ensuring your topic follows the basic SMART goal principles will ensure that your topic is relevant and doable. These are crucial to your continued research on your topic area. I cannot stress this enough: you do not want to get all the way into having written your proposal only to be told you will not be able to conduct your research. Please do not make that mistake, it is costly and infuriating.

Researching Your Topic

As has been touched upon, you will need to conduct extensive research on your topic. Once you have a broad topic area, it is best to begin conducting your research. This is where it may get a little tricky. Each school had different parameters and requirements. Some universities have a 10-year rule, others 7 years. My university had a rule that at least 75% of the resources had to be within 5 years of the date of Dean’s signature. Of course, when I started researching to when I attained Dean’s signature was 4 years. Which meant that a lot of the articles I found early on in my research ended up unused. That does not mean that it was not useful.

Early research leads to finding those necessary relationships and the tools that have been used. It helps you look at where the gaps in the research were, if they’ve been examined, how they’ve been examined. They lead to new ideas for research or even knowing that you’re either on the right track, or you’re not. This research can also lead you to understanding how the topic or even the industry has evolved throughout the years. This might mean that when you start researching one word or phrase, you can see how it may have been researched or examined under at least 3 other words or phrases. This can allow you to broaden your search to new areas or even find different relationship you were previously unaware existed. Ultimately, this research leads to your becoming an expert on your topic area. That’s the overall goal.

One crucial element when conducting this early research, as I touched on earlier, is to annotate every article you read that is relevant to your topic. Keep a running document with a properly annotated bibliography (whether your university requires it or not). Read no less than 3 articles per week. It would be advisable to read more weekly. Once you find your groove, you will start to get better at determining which articles are going to be relevant and which ones aren’t. You’ll be able to pick out which ones will help you advance your research. The word of caution I have is to make sure that you are reading articles that provide conflicting information based on your topic. This will help you avoid confirmation bias. Do not only read articles that support your topic. This will not help you become a better researcher.

For example, in my own research, the relationship between life satisfaction and finances was intriguing. I had found many articles that supported a relationship. Yet, for almost as many as I had found supporting a relationship, I found ones questioning the same relationship or failing to find the relationship. I discovered that there’s a phenomenon that has been observed repeatedly within the relationship. This research proved invaluable to my own research because it allowed me to gain a deeper understanding and develop a stronger support that my dependent variable (life satisfaction) was not solely dependent on one independent variable, but potentially the combined factors of many. Make sure that when you are compiling this research it includes opposing views. This can clue you in to possible research gaps.

While compiling this research, keep an eye out for things like the population, assessments/instruments commonly used, common themes, even authors. You may find that you keep seeing the same one or two authors on your topic. Look at the theories that the research is derived from. These theories will be integral to your doctoral research later.

Importantly, look at the recommended areas for future research. This is where you will find your gap in the literature. Remember, the absence of research is not evidence that there is a gap. You have to support the need to research that absence through existing literature. Find the support in those future research recommendation statements. These statements are your support. Just because there's no research on the effects of living on Mars on walruses doesn’t mean that there is a need to research it (granted, I’d probably still read that research because it sounds population, what methods, etc. Continue annotating each article you read. By the time you are ready to begin writing you actual dissertation proposal, you should have no less than 150 annotated articles pertaining to your topic, methodology, design, and analysis method.

It is further advisable to begin reading dissertations on your topic or methodology. I would further advise you to specifically read dissertations that were approved by your university. This is incredibly helpful as it prepares you for the caliber of work and content that is expected of you to complete your own dissertation. I cannot stress enough how important this will be for your success. These dissertations can also provide you with crucial (free) guidance as to what, specifically, your university is looking for in a completed dissertation. You may also benefit from reading multiple dissertations to identify an academic voice that works best for you. You will also likely benefit, as I did, from seeing what other people did and how they did it. Most people benefit from seeing examples, those are the best ones.

Annotated Bibliography

Writing the annotated bibliography is not something that most people are thrilled to do. However, a solidly written annotated bibliography can turn a potentially painstaking Literature Review into just putting together what you have already written. All of that research you have been conducting should essentially write your Literature Review section of your dissertation. If you have done a thorough job on the research phase, this will be much easier. In your annotations, you will want to present what the authors did in terms of how they studied the topic. What methodology they used, what were the variables, the population, the participants, how the specific study was conducted, the results, any implications, and any recommendations for future research (Appendix A).

I cannot stress the importance of developing a comprehensive annotated bibliography throughout your research phase enough. This will, hands down, prove to be one of the single most effective acts you can take throughout your research process to ensure that the actual writing of your dissertation is not a completely time-consuming process. My first draft of my literature review took less than a week to write. This was also the section that my chair commended my first write up as an excellent literature review – no changes were required. Yes, as I proceeded through my research and my dissertation, I added more articles, but the content was always given the greenlight. I completely attribute this to having developed solid annotations early and maintaining that process throughout.

Methodology

So, now you have been conducting research, writing your annotations, and you know you are on the right path. Your topic is solid, and you know what you should be doing. Right? Not quite. Now that you have developed a strong understanding of your topic, you have probably also had the opportunity to learn more about the methodology that has been used to research your topic. You've likely seen a solid combination of quantitative versus qualitative research on your topic. You may have even decided which methodology with which you are more comfortable. Maybe the thought of numbers is terrifying. Perhaps you can't stand the idea of coding the responses. Either way, you must be prepared to understand your topic and potential study from both methodological perspectives. There is a third methodology: mixed methods. Mixed methods methodology uses a combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods. There are some schools that will not allow the use of mixed methods in doctoral research.

Qualitative research answers the 'why' questions surrounding an identified phenomenon. Qualitative research serves to explore the lived experiences of a given observed phenomenon. This methodology utilizes semi-structured and unstructured interviews, focus groups, observations, and written materials. It also focuses on the triangulation of data from multiple qualitative sources to determine reliability and validity. Qualitative researchers are able to provide greater descriptive and representational accounts surrounding a phenomenon to inform how it is experienced by the individuals. This typically involves asking participants open ended questions, recording their responses, then having transcribe them onto paper, and analyze the responses for common themes or shared experiences found within the sample.

Quantitative research answers the 'what' questions, specifically what a population experiences in a specific circumstance. Quantitative research focuses on testing hypotheses to determine the likelihood, significance, magnitude, and direction and uses numerical data to either support or reject a claim. There are four types of quantitative analysis methods: descriptive, correlational, causal comparative/quasi-experimental, and experimental. Most dissertation research that uses a quantitative methodology use correlational analysis. This involves collecting numerical data regarding two or more variables and conducting analysis to determine if a relationship exists between those variables and the magnitude of said relationship. Quantitative research utilizes close-ended instrumentation (e.g. rating scales, questionnaires, checklists) to determine a score that can be used to respond to test hypotheses.

Mixed methods analysis utilizes the collection, analysis, and integration of both quantitative and qualitative methods. This is useful for researchers in order to gain breadth and depth to understanding of a phenomenon. This will employ the use of triangulation to gather various vantage points through methods, data points, and techniques. It serves to provide a more comprehensive understanding or to allow researchers to develop a theory about a phenomenon and test said theory. This method is often not advised to use in doctoral research because it is complex, takes significant time and resources to plan and execute, and it can be difficult to resolve discrepancies that may arise in the interpretation of the data. As this is not an advisable method in doctoral research, I will not go further into this method.

It should be important to note that, at the early stages of your research and topic development, you should have a solid idea of which methodology you plan on using, even if you haven't yet figured out which analysis you will be using. This is helpful because it can point you in the direction of knowing whether you will have to find research to support the development of your own questions and the field test them if you are using qualitative or to find and obtain permission to use instruments if you are using quantitative. It is also important at this point to have an early understanding that qualitative research will naturally take longer, and the final dissertation will be longer than a quantitative dissertation. Quantitative research tends to have a much faster data analysis process and writing the results is far more straightforward. Qualitative research relies on the researcher's interpretation of the responses from each participant. For example, when running a quantitative analysis, quantitative researchers can export their data from the survey tool used (more on that later) into Excel to clean the data (again, more on that later), then export that data directly into Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and run the analysis. Running the analysis in SPSS takes minutes, as the program does it for you. The entire analysis process for quantitative researchers can take maybe an hour to two hours total.

Qualitative researchers, however, must conduct the interviews/focus groups, then transcribe (write verbatim) the interviews (an hour long interview can easily take two hours to transcribe), then look for themes throughout each interview (again, a process that can take hours). There are programs that you can pay for that will transcribe for you. There are also programs that are designed to assist with thematic analysis. However, I have found in my own experiences that I missed more when using those programs than when I've just done the work myself.

Then, writing the data in your dissertation will be different based on your methodology. Again, quantitative researchers will report the numerical data. This will make this section shorter and faster to write. It is also very technical and straightforward. Qualitative researchers, however, you have to write up your thematic analysis and provide the support and the reasoning behind your conclusions. Your data analysis section of your dissertation will be longer and more personal. Additionally, more often than not, when I've seen doctoral candidates get delayed or have to collect additional sources of data, more often than not, it's qualitative researchers. This is not to tell you not to conduct a qualitative study; rather, this is to forewarn you of the potential challenges you may face as a qualitative researcher.

Chapter 3
Outlining Your Research

The early formation stage of your proposal may have different names based on the university you attend. However, this early formation stage leads to the development of a prospectus. A prospectus is a preliminary plan for conducting research and is not meant to be detailed or technical but is an analysis of the proposed research. It is advisable to create a brief outline first that will expand into the prospectus. The university I attended called this outline the 10 Strategic Points. The ten components that were needed to be briefly addressed included the broad topic area, literature review preview, problem statement, research questions, sample, describe the phenomenon/define variables and hypotheses, methodology and design, purpose statement, data collection approach, and data analysis approach. This document is meant to be 2 to 3 pages, maximum. Therefore, brevity, is important, remember, this is an outline, not a draft. It is important to note that at this stage, this document is fluid and components can, and likely will, change.

Broad Topic Area

This should be one statement that provides the reader with an understanding of what your proposed research will be studying. This can include the type of relationship (i.e. the lived experience, the correlation between, etc.), the variables/phenomenon, and, if needed, the population. This could be "the lived experiences of single working mothers of children with autism". Or it could be "the relationship between cell phone use and car accidents among teen drivers in the Southeastern United States". It's basically writing down what you plan to study.

Literature Review

This should not be an in-depth review. This should be a very brief overview. This should give a brief statement about what the existing literature shows, the theoretical foundation you plan to use for your research (just the names of the theories and their authors, not a description), a bulleted list of the topics for your review of the literature, and a two- to three-sentence summary. Save the details for your prospectus!

Problem Statement

This is literally one sentence. Follow whatever structure or guideline your university has, if there is one. This should include the fact that what you are looking to study is not yet known and should provide a concise statement of what is not yet known. This will likely evolve throughout your research. Please do not get too caught up on these early components. I have seen too many people who have difficulty moving beyond their initial work to allow it to evolve into what their later work will become. My initial problem statement read, “It is not known if there is a hierarchical relationship between work/life balance, stress, and personal economic status and life satisfaction.” That was not my final problem statement, but this was my starting point.

Research Questions

This is where you list your research questions. Just a simple 1, 2, 3, 4, etc. of what your proposed or anticipated research question surrounding your study will be. Again, these will likely change or evolve throughout the process. My final study had five research questions. My first 10 strategic points, I had seven. Remember, it is important to note, that I conducted a quantitative study. It is important to note that your research question(s) should directly relate to your hypotheses. Meaning that your research question should basically pose the question that your hypothesis/hypotheses will test.

Sample

This should be the group of people you actively plan to use as participants for your study. You should start with the location of your population of interest (a specific region or state, for example). Then identify the specific population of interest (i.e. k-12 teachers, working adults, enlisted army soldiers, etc.). Then your target sample. This target sample should be based on your research design. Quantitative researchers will likely require a larger target sample size (e.g. 120 participants). Qualitative researchers will need a smaller sample size (e.g. 25 participants). Be as specific as possible regarding your planned sample but be mindful that this may change. Your initial sample may include 25 k-12 public school teachers who teach STEM classes in the Midwest region of the United States. When you go to collect your data, you may be looking at 15 k-8 public school teachers who teach STEM classes in Missouri, for example. Again, this is just to really start to identify your intended research and start to realistically think about what you will need to do to accomplish your research.

Phenomenon/Variables/Hypotheses

If you are qualitative, you will write one statement regarding the phenomenon you plan to study. If you are quantitative, you will list your independent variables and your dependent variables. You will also list your hypotheses and the corresponding null hypotheses. If you have not yet written a hypothesis and corresponding null hypothesis, there is a specific structure. The null hypothesis is typically provided first. It is not the opposite of the hypothesis you are presenting. For example, if you are hypothesizing that there is a positive relationship between rain and car accidents, the null is not there is a negative relationship between rain and car accidents. The null is the absence of said relationship. So, your null hypothesis would state, “There is no statistically significant relationship between rain and car accidents.” Your hypothesis, or commonly called the alternate hypothesis, is “There is a statistically significant relationship between rain and car accidents.”

Please take note that your stated variables should be what you are testing in your hypotheses. If your stated variables are somehow different from what your research question and hypotheses are planning to test, you will need to make revisions.

Methodology and Design

At this point, you should have an idea as to whether you are conducting a qualitative or quantitative methodology. Even if you’re not certain yet, you can list one methodology that you would prefer, and go from there. This is a simple quantitative or qualitative. The design is your anticipated design. Are you doing a qualitative case study, of phenomenological design? Or are you going to do a quantitative correlational or causal comparative? In this document that is all you provide. The details will come later.

Purpose Statement

This is a one sentence thesis of your research. It should read something like, “the purpose of this qualitative descriptive study is to explore the lived experiences of men who transitioned to be stay-at-home dads” or “the purpose of this quantitative correlational study is to determine if, and to what extent, a relationship exists between job satisfaction and organizational commitment.”

Data Collection Approach

This should be a one sentence statement regarding the method that will be used to collect the data. For example, “surveys will be administered to the sample via email using SurveyMonkey/Qualtrics/Google Forms/whatever survey tool” or “interviews will be conducted in person/via Zoom/WebEx/Video Conferencing technology”. Any instrumentation that will be used should be listed and the corresponding variable, but not described, include the demographic survey.

Data Analysis Approach

This is a two to three sentence summary of what, specifically will be done to analyze the data. For example, “SPSS will be used to analyze the data. Multiple Linear Regression will be used to test the hypotheses." or "Interviews will be transcribed and thematically analyzed to explore common themes".

Remember, this document is your starting point at putting together your prospectus. Your prospectus and your proposal are still in early formation stages. These can and may change. Please do not get too hung up on the details at this point, as you are likely still researching and learning about your topic and research methods. This document serves to give you a starting point to begin putting together your research proposal.

Chapter 4

Formulating Your Prospectus

Your prospectus is a preliminary plan for your doctoral research. It is not a thoroughly detailed paper, rather it provides an analysis of the issues you may face in your research. In many cases, your doctoral prospectus is a major component in your proposal. Much of the information provided in the prospectus is transferred into your Chapter 1 of your dissertation proposal. With this in mind, you will want to develop a solid first draft. Yet, the goal of the first draft is to get it written, not to get it right. Edits are easier to make than the initial draft. Of course, the prospectus should be between 6-10 pages, so brevity is key. Think of the prospectus as an introduction to your proposal, it's like a movie trailer: it gives enough information that the audience is interested in reading the proposal, but not enough that it gives all the details away.

Your university will likely provide you with a template and information as to what is expected to be included in your prospectus. This will provide you the necessary information you will need to write your first draft. Again, remember, this will undergo several rounds of revisions before it is approved. You will notice that the topics within the prospectus are closely aligned with the topics from your Ten

Strategic Points document and will feed into your Proposal later. In fact, if you are like most people, you will over-write your prospectus. That is NOT a bad thing. My best advice is to make sure you have an up-to-date proposal template and copy and paste everything from your prospectus into the appropriate sections of your proposal. As you make changes to your prospectus (edits, changing the phrasing of research questions, etc.), make those same modifications to your proposal template. Future you will thank you for this.

Introduction

The introduction of your prospectus introduces your topic. This briefly overviews your intended research topic, why this is worth researching, and how you will conduct the research. This should be one paragraph. This should introduce your dissertation topic, as well as present a concise case for how the proposed research will fill a gap in current literature. This should elaborate on the Broad Topic Area.

Background of the Problem

The background section of your prospectus serves to briefly explain the history and current state of the topic. This section should be about two to three paragraphs. It should concisely identify the need for the research, which is identified as a gap within the research that is supported by literature. Again, an absence of the research is not support of a gap. You need to find and specifically cite an article from within 5 years of anticipated Dean’s signature that states that future research is recommended on your topic area. That one (or more than one) reference serves to provide the supporting documentation that research is still needed on your topic. In this section, you should briefly discuss how that gap has evolved historically and developed into your specific research topic, including population. Your problem statement for your research will be developed from and justified by this gap; therefore, it is essential that this gap is well defined and supported extensively in the existing literature.

Theoretical Foundations and Review of the Literature

This section builds into your chapter 2 of your proposal. Please be mindful that in the theoretical foundations section you will need to use seminal articles to describe the theories. Yes, that means using resources from potentially the 1940's or earlier. Do not be afraid to use the resources, they are required here. Conversely, in your review of the literature, I would advise that you do not use any articles that are outside of the university's recommended guidelines (e.g. 5 years, 7 years, 10 years). This will keep you better equipped later if you are using other articles that might be outside of that time frame. This section of your prospectus should be two to three paragraphs total.

Theoretical Foundations/Conceptual Framework. This section identifies your theory or model that you are using as the foundation for your research. It should provide a brief presentation of the theory or model and explain how the problem relates to the theory. The theory or model you use will directly inform your questions (if you're qualitative) or it should come directly from your instrumentation (if you're quantitative). For example, I used the Satisfaction with Life Scale. I went back to the article where this scale was developed and read the theoretical foundation (hedonic treadmill) from which it was developed and researched that theory. That theory (hedonic treadmill) informed my study. If you are using a quantitative methodology and using more than one instrument, as I did, you may have multiple theories and/or models that will be the basis of your research. My study had two theories (hedonic treadmill and role theory) and two models (transactional model of stress and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs). This was because I had was using four different instruments to collect data on my variables. Each instrument had a different theoretical foundation. Do not be afraid if this is the case with you. Include them all.

Review of the Literature. The review of the literature section serves to provide a broad overview of the existing literature pertaining to your topic. It briefly describes the literature and its relevance to your proposed research. It is advisable that you provide a brief, one-to-two sentence description of your theme/topic/variables. Additionally, ensure that you provide at least one citation from your literature to support these statements. Please save your in-depth writing for your proposal. If you are like me, you're likely over-writing for the prospectus. Just move all of that writing into a proposal template. Keep the work, just not in your prospectus.

Again, you are going to want to make sure that your research topic and theoretical foundations are aligned with one another. The topic needs to be related to the theory or theories/model(s) you are using. If you are quantitative and follow my advice above (use the theories from your instrumentation), this will be evident. Be mindful that the review of the literature section will include components that show you understand the various aspects of the phenomenon or variables, the design, the instrumentation/survey(s), the population and sample, and key topics related to your study. While you are not expected to provide this detail in your prospectus, be aware that these components are what is going to be required in your proposal. Please make sure that you have supported alignment within your research as this will save you tremendous time and energy later.

Problem Statement

This section is a one paragraph section that includes your problem statement, the population affected by the problem, and how your study will contribute to the affected population. The problem statement itself is your brief sentence that succinctly tells what is not currently known in the available research. Some universities will have a proscribed format that they prefer. Please use the format that they require. There are certain components that will likely be required in your problem statement. If you are qualitative, you may need to use phrasing such as: “It is not known how or why…”. If you are quantitative, you may need to use phrasing such as: “It is not known if, or to what extent…”. Provide a clear, concise statement regarding the magnitude of the problem and provide support from the literature. Again, you will be required to ensure that your problem statement is aligned with your gap that is supported in your review of the literature and background of the problem.

In terms of alignment, you should be thinking of it as a roadmap. The alignment of your study provides the A-to-B-to-C directions that confirm that you are on the right path to get to your destination. You cannot get to your destination if you don’t know the way there. Your alignment is your way there. Please make sure you have everything where it needs to be.

Research Questions, Hypotheses, Variables

This is a two to three paragraph section that will provide a narrow focus of your study and will specify your research question(s) that will address the problem statement. This will define your variables or groups you will study. It will further provide the hypothesized relationship, or the phenomena being investigated. You will state the research question(s) your study will answer. If you are qualitative you will describe the phenomenon that you will study. If you are quantitative, you will identify the variables and present your hypotheses. When you are presenting your hypotheses, there is a specific format. You will state you research question, then the null hypothesis and then the alternate hypothesis in outline format.

RQ1: To what extent do …..?

H_{01}: Factors ….do not significantly predict…

H_{1A}: Factors…do significantly predict…

Again, your research questions and corresponding hypotheses should be directly derived from you gap, problem statement, and theoretical foundation you previously provided. If you have variables in your research questions and hypotheses that are not listed in your problem statement – you do NOT have alignment. The caveat here is if your variable in your problem statement has components that you are researching, such as leadership style, you need to list those in parentheses in your problem statement. My problem statement included the phrase, “factors pertaining to work/life balance” because my variable work/life balance contained two constructs (work/life balance as family interference with work and work/life balance as work interference with family). This distinction was clearly defined throughout my proposal and dissertation to show and support alignment.

Significance of the Study

This section provides the support as to why this study is significant. The length of this section of your prospectus should be one paragraph and should provide a brief description of how the research fits with current literature and how it will contribute to the body of research. This should be related to the background of the problem and the problem statement. It should also incorporate how the study will contribute to the literature pertaining to the theoretical foundation. Additionally, you should address how your research will have practical, real world value. You should be able to see by now how important it is for your research to have proper alignment throughout your research.

Rationale for Methodology

This section, at least in the university I attended, required two components: a one paragraph narrative within the prospectus and completion of the table provided in the appendix. The narrative section serves to clearly justify the methodology (qualitative, quantitative, or mixed) and provides the argument as to why your selected methodology is the best for your study. You need to support your argument with original sources, not books. This section should be in alignment with the problem statement and research questions.

Nature of the Research Design for the Study

This section will describe the research design you will use for your study. Your design should be directly related to your methodology. In one paragraph, you will explain why this design was selected and describe the sample being studied. You will further provide the explain the process that you will use to collect data. This should be justified based on your hypotheses/variables or phenomenon. There are certain design types that are recommended to ensure a doable study. These include descriptive/survey, correlational, causal-comparative, quasi-experimental, and experimental for quantitative research. Qualitative designs include case study, narrative, grounded theory, historical, and phenomenological. It is your responsibility to have a solid understanding of your methodology and design, and how you are going to be able to conduct your study using it. If you are unable to adequately provide support for your methodology and/or design, you may have to change your methodology and/or design. Please ensure that you have conducted more than enough research to support the methodology and design. Remember, the literature you have been reading should inform your methodology and design. You should not just pick one because you prefer it if the literature does not support its use. The last thing you want to do is to have to change your methodology and design when writing your prospectus.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study section is a one paragraph synopsis that provides a reflection of the problem statement while identifying how you will accomplish the study. There should be a declarative statement that articulates the research methodology, design, target population, variables/phenomenon, and geographic location. An example is, “the purpose of this quantitative correlational study is to determine if, and to what extent, a relationship exists between vaccines and childhood mortality rates in the Midwest.” Within this section, if you are using quantitative methodology, you can specify which instruments (or subscale of an instrument) will test which variables. Specify how the study will address the gap you provided in the literature. As you can see, this section must be in alignment with your research methodology, design, and problem statement.

Instrumentation

This one paragraph section details the data collection instruments and sources (tests, questionnaires, interviews, databases, media, etc.). You are to identify and describe the types of data you will be collecting for each research question/variable. You will also identify the tools, instruments, or databases that you will use to collect your data. If you are using a quantitative methodology you need to identify the specific validated instrument or data source that has been previously used in quantitative research and provide citation(s) for the instrument/data source. While the recommended length is one paragraph, you can provide a bulleted list of information pertaining to each instrument you are using that specifies who developed the instrument, the validity, and reliability. Provide citations for each bullet point.

Data Collection

In this two-paragraph section, you will detail the process used to collect your data. This will include defining your target population and expected sample size. If you are a quantitative researcher, you will want to use the G*Power analysis to obtain your minimum needed sample size. The G*Power Software can be installed via a free download online (just do an internet search for G*Power software and find the one that is appropriate for your computer). The minimum needed sample size is essential to ensure that you are able to produce statistically significant results (quantitative) or meaningful results (qualitative). You will be conducting an *a priori* analysis, as this is determining the sample you WILL need.

You will be providing a brief overview of your step-by-step procedure to collect data using the tools, instruments, databases from the *Instrumentation* section. You must include specific items:

- Obtaining initial informed consent
- IRB review
- Sample Selection
- Groupings
- Protecting Rights/Well-being
- Maintaining Data Security
- Sample Recruitment
- Data Collection Instruments and approaches
- Field Testing Instruments
- Notifying Participants
- Collecting the Data

Some of these steps may not be needed depending on your methodology. If you are unsure or are confused, the best advice I can give you is to look up a recently (within the last 2 years) published dissertation from your university with your methodology and design (preferably) and look at what they included or excluded. Quantitative researchers typically do not have to field test their instruments while qualitative researchers typically do. You must also define the sample as the set of people or organizations being studied.

Data Analysis Procedures

The data analysis section is a one paragraph section that describes how data were collected for each variable or research question. It further describes the type of data to be analyzed and analyses type (descriptive, inferential, non-statistical). This must be in alignment with your methodology and design.

For quantitative researchers you must describe the analyses and include the inferential and/or descriptive statistics that will be completed. You should be able to provide clear and concise directions as to how you are conducting your research. This is important as it would allow for future researchers to potentially replicate your study. You must also ensure there is a clear and obvious alignment between the variable, the data to be collected, instrument or data source, and analysis for each hypothesis.

For qualitative researchers you must describe the analytic approach that is appropriate for your research design and research questions to be completed. Be mindful that each of your research questions may require a different approach to data analysis, as well as providing descriptive statistics. Further, you must ensure a clear alignment between your research questions, the data, tools or data sources, as well as your analysis to understand and/or explain the phenomenon.

Remember, it is not your chair's responsibility to know your data analysis methods; it is yours. You must research your method, design, and analysis method and be able to support the use of each within your study. If you are unable to provide substantial support for its use, you may be required to change it to something with greater support.

Ethical Considerations

The ethical considerations section should be one paragraph and discuss the potential ethical issues surrounding your research. You must include how you will protect your participants and the data. This section must include:

- Description of potential ethical concerns that might occur during data collection.
- Description of how the identities of participants and data will be protected.

- Description of recruitment, informed consent, and site authorization processes.
- Identifies ethical considerations related to the target population and organization or location.

Again, this section should be in alignment with and directly related to your data collection section.

References

Remember to put any and all citations in your reference list. You reference list should be alphabetized and follow the appropriate writing format. Typically, this will be APA format. Follow the guidelines in the most recent APA writing style manual and ensure that you have all of the necessary components included. One big difference in the dissertation you will typically need to include the doi numbers for your references if available. This means you may need to do some digging to find, but you NEED to include them when possible. ONLY if the article/source does not have a doi number are you allowed to use a publicly accessible web address; you cannot use a web address for a source that would require a login (e.g. your university library).

Appendices

It is likely that you will have to include information or other documentation into the appendices of your prospectus. Please ensure that you have the necessary items included, per your chair/university. Remember, the appendices go after your references.

Chapter 5

The Dissertation Proposal

Congratulations! You have made it through years of research and getting prepared for this one moment! I kid, of course, but you really have already come so far. You have likely completed all of your coursework, or are close to it, have your draft of your prospectus completed, and are ready to tackle this next hurdle: writing your proposal. I will be the first (maybe) to tell you that getting through your proposal and Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval is pure, living hell. You will be literally pushed past your mental breaking point. You will want to scream, yell, probably throw your computer out of a window, and probably want to quit at least a few times. Those times are when you need to find and remember what motivated you to start your doctorate in the first place. Remember what you have gone through thus far to get where you are. I know the one time I genuinely considered quitting, I stopped and thought about all of the time and money to get the where I was, I wasn't going to let that all go to waste. I also thought about what message that would send to my kids, and how I didn't want them to think that just because something seems hard or is mind-numbingly frustrating, you should give up. I wanted them to learn how to overcome obstacles and challenges and push through, especially for something that is worthwhile. If it's worth doing, it's going to be hard.

Getting Started

The great thing about your dissertation proposal is that if you wrote the annotations I previously advised you to write and have a solid prospectus draft, two of your dissertation chapters are already started. This is great news for you! That means that you are already started on a proposal draft, and just have to flush out the rest of your content. I know, I know, easier said than done. Do not wait for your prospectus to be approved to begin writing your proposal. Doing so will only cause unnecessary delays. Case in point – I received approval on my proposal two months after my prospectus was approved. Had I waited, I would have wasted many, many more months. Finally, make sure you are using the most up-to-date template that is required. Further, stay on top of changes, the last thing you want is to be submitting to your committee using an old template and missing information.

You will talk to many people who will give you different opinions on how to draft your proposal and in what order to complete your chapters. Some people will tell you to write Chapter 2 first (this is where your literature review will be), others will tell you just to start writing, I did mine in order: Chapter 1, Chapter 2, Chapter 3. There is really no right or wrong way, just pick which sections are the easiest for you to write and do those first. Get the low-hanging fruit, as it were, out of the way. You'll see the progress you've made and feel better about how you are coming along with your proposal draft. This is certainly preferable to the alternative, where you try to write the more difficult components first, then get stuck because you're not sure what to put there, and then you feel discouraged because you haven't really written much.

Before you get excited and get started, here are some (hopefully) helpful tips that can make your life a little easier as you go through your proposal.

If you have not done so already, go find recent (within 2 years) dissertations that pertain to your methodology or topic. When you read through these dissertations, look at the type of language the authors used, look at how it is structured, look at the way they defended their topic, gap, methodology, and design. Essentially, you are looking to see the mechanics of the writing and to see what works or doesn't work for you. This can help you develop your academic voice in your proposal and get a better mental picture of how you want to make your case for your research. This is also a fantastic way to get an idea of how to structure your literature review. Further, you can also get some great resources for your Chapter 3 (methodology section) that will help you make sense of some of the more complicated components. I can honestly say that the most valuable source that I used to discuss and defend my own methodology and design was found by reading another person's dissertation. That one dissertation saved me hours upon hours of researching and frustration, because the source was right there. There is no need to reinvent the wheel.

Be overly deliberate in your academic writing. What you might think makes sense, your chair or another reviewer will flag and ask for greater clarification. For example, if you begin a sentence with the phrase, “This was explored”, be prepared for someone to ask, “what was explored?” Even if your sentence immediately follows what “this” is. You will need to specify in each sentence what the “this” is.

Don't be afraid to be redundant. Your dissertation will repeat things, over and over, and over again. You will feel like a broken record. That's the point. It is extremely repetitive. If your chair says that a sentence or an explanation needs to be in multiple places, put it in multiple places. Do not reinvent the wheel. There will be instances where it will make the most sense to copy and paste sentences or even paragraphs in multiple places. Why try to find a new way to say something you’ve already said?

Don’t be too married to your proposal. Yes, I know, you’ve put a tremendous amount of you into it, but if your chair keeps coming back to you telling you something isn’t right or doesn’t fit, be ready to remove it and move on with your life. I had one sentence that my chair and I went back and forth over three times, finally I just deleted it. It wasn’t worth the battle, removing it didn’t take away from my research.

The goal is to be done. Remember that. Yes, it’s your research, but your chair and your committee are the ones who have to approve it. You will spend many hours working on revisions and making changes. Do not take any of the feedback personally. Get over the emotional component of criticism. They aren’t criticizing you; they’re trying to help you become a better researcher and a more effective writer.

Further, know your study inside and out. That doesn’t mean you have to be an expert in statistical analyses or all things pertaining to your method. It means you need to know your topic, the relationships, your theory/theories and/or model(s), and you have to be able to talk, in-depth, about it. Know your key research articles. You will have some articles that are integral to the formation of your topic, your gap, your population, your instrumentation, etc. It is your responsibility to know this information. One of my professors once told me to imagine my proposal as if I was a lawyer building a defense case. That is exactly what you are doing. Each of your articles serve as pieces of evidence supporting your case; the more comprehensive and thorough your literature supporting your case, the stronger your case is. For example, I can talk to anyone and everyone about my topic, the development of the gap, the problem that I isolated, even the main theoretical foundations. I can talk about how my study further contributed to knowledge in the area of my field, I can speak directly about the research and the main theoretical foundation and how the results of my study can be perfectly explained using the theoretical foundation, and then provide opportunities for future research based off the results.

Yet, I am not the expert of all things statistics. I would still need to look up the information and have things available to discuss the tests of assumptions and what the multiple regression model provided. I intentionally did not hire a statistician. I did that in spite of my weakness in statistics. This forced me to learn it enough to speak about it and to it. Building a strong proposal with the appropriate supporting citations will ensure that you are in the best position to understand your results. The more you speak to it and about it, the more research you conduct, the more you read about your topic, the better you will be.

If you are using human participants (or plan to), you may be required to complete certifications that essentially prove that you have the knowledge and training to conduct research with human participants. Your university may require these trainings regardless of your source of information. Some universities may require multiple trainings and certifications. Get these started as soon as possible, if you have not already completed them. You will likely need to submit proof of completion for IRB.

If you have not already, get site authorization, or at least make sure you have the preliminary permissions. Some places will give a conditional authorization, that will state it depends on university IRB approval, or the fulfillment of another condition. Some places have a lengthy application process. My original site took 4 months for approval. And have a contingency plan. I cannot stress this enough! You do NOT want to have to suddenly change sites without a contingency plan in place. Please make sure you have this secured as quickly as possible.

If you are using a pre-existing instrument, you will need permission to use it. Look online, many instruments have a disclaimer that they are free and open for academic use. Get a screen shot of that, copy the web address, whatever is needed, and keep a copy of that on your computer in your files. If not, you will need to contact the person who created the instrument and request permission. Once you receive this permission, you must maintain a copy of said permission for IRB submission. It would be wise to have a separate folder on your computer designated just for your proposal documents, and within that folder, have another folder with these permissions. This will make it easier for you to find when it comes time to submit to IRB.

Table of Contents

In the beginning of your proposal template, you will see the Table of Contents. Please not that you will make no corrections directly to the table. Virtually all of your headers are pre-populated for you. This will make your life easier. Should you have to add to the appendices later, you will add the header. If you are uncertain how to do this, please use the *Help* function of your program. There may be differences based on versions of Microsoft Word you are using or if you are using a different program altogether. Once you are done with your proposal, you will refresh your table and it will automatically update to reflect the page numbers.

List of Tables

Not everyone includes tables in the proposal. If you do not, please disregard this section. If you do, please ensure you are inserting tables properly into your proposal; otherwise, they will not populate into the List of Tables when you refresh. Again, use the help function in your program to ensure you are following the proper steps.

List of Figures

Again, most people do not include figures in their proposal. If you do not, please disregard this page. If you do include figures, please make sure you insert the figures properly for the List of Figures table to refresh accurately. Again, use the help function in your program to ensure you are following the proper steps.

Chapter 1

Chapter one follows a similar template to the prospectus, and you should see here how important it is for you to have developed a really strong prospectus. Again, use what you have written in the prospectus to put into your proposal in the appropriate headings and then you will expand on that information. If you took my previous advice, you have already put your prospectus information and any excess writing you did there into your proposal template and have a significant chunk completed. Also, within the proposal, you will be writing in future tense: “This researcher will seek…” “The gap will be addressed…”

Chapter 1 generally consists of the following sections:

- Introduction
- Background of the Study
- Problem Statement
- Purpose of the Study
- Research Questions and/or Hypotheses
- Advancing Scientific Knowledge and Significance of the Study
- Rational for Methodology
- Nature of the Research Design for the Study
- Definition of Terms
- Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations
- Summary and Organization of the Remainder of the Study

One of biggest differences between the Prospectus and the Proposal is the Prospectus has maximum section length requirements, while the Proposal has minimum section length requirements. Be mindful of these requirements.

Introduction. In your proposal, this section should be a minimum of three or four paragraphs. You'll want to introduce your topic and discuss the value of conducting the study. You are going to want to use examples and support from the research you've conducted. Feel free to be thorough here. You will present what will be covered within Chapter 1, such as the existing literature, the relationships that have been discovered or supported. You will briefly discuss the gap and how your research will address it. You will present how you will analyze your data and how it will contribute to new knowledge in your field and how it will impact professionals in your professional industry. Ultimately, you will want to ensure that your writing is well structured and has a logical flow. You will need to ensure proper paragraph and sentence structure, as well as correct punctuation and spelling. Finally, ensure that your work adheres to the APA writing style.

When you write your proposal, you must be deliberate in your writing. Avoid adding adverbs, they are unnecessary. When you make a declarative statement, provide supporting statements that are cited from recent research. Recent research, again, is research published within the designated timeframe as dictated by your university. My university had a 5 year from Dean’s signature rule. Remember, you must answer the “says who” question after each statement that you make regarding the existing literature and existing relationships or phenomena that you intend to research. Furthermore, when you are writing your proposal, paragraphs must be less than one page in length. If you are getting close to that mark, find a logical place to break the paragraph into two. This may be more likely in Chapter 2 than in Chapter 1 but be mindful of this. You want to keep your writing as technical and concise as possible.

The introduction will consist of a paragraph that introduces your topic. The next paragraph should briefly discuss the key existing literature supporting your intended research and what the research will seek to do. The next paragraph should highlight the gap in the research, identify the phenomenon or variables being studied, as well as the instrumentation you intend to use. Paragraph four should discuss how the data will be calculated, the contribution of new knowledge, and how the results will assist in assisting professionals in your field. The final paragraph should give a synopsis of what Chapter 1 will entail, specifically addressing what each section of the Chapter will discuss. Be as succinct as possible.

Background of the Study. The background of your study should be no less than 2 to three paragraphs, at least one page in length. Within the background of the study, you will be providing a brief history of the problem, providing empirical research results from your annotated literature review you have already completed. The first paragraph should consist of *recent* research. This is not an extensive history of the problem, save that for Chapter 2.

The second paragraph is where you will identify the results, societal needs, recommendations for future study, or the identified needs that support your gap. You will need to provide this support from at least 3 empirical articles. You should aim to have between 3-5 articles supporting your gap. This serves to build the justification for your study using cited information that supports a logical argument.

The paragraph is where you will discuss the problem through a larger than local scale. You will be providing support for how your study will contribute to societal and/or professional needs. Again, use supporting evidence from empirical research to support the need and why this is important. What I mean by that is you use existing research to support that the relationships exist and that the need for future recommendation was supported within the recent literature. You must provide evidence supporting the need for your study within your target population. If you are researching the LGBTQ+ population, you must cite literature supporting that the problem needs to be addressed within that population. If you are studying military personnel, you must support the need to research that population. If you cannot provide this evidence, be prepared to potentially change your population.

Problem Statement. The problem statement section should be at least 4 paragraphs in length. You should open this section with your properly formatted problem statement (as proscribed by your university). You will go into greater detail in this section about how this problem statement relates to the gap in the literature. You must present evidence supporting this relationship, such as real issues that are affecting society, the frequency with which the problem occurs, the extent of suffering caused by the problem, the perceived lack of attention, the discussion of the problem within the literature and what should be done to address the problem, and what negative outcomes researching the problem will address.

You will have to describe the general population, target population, and sample in this section. Again, you will have to cite the need for this population to be studied within the context of your proposed research. You cannot just say, “the target population is female k-8 teachers” without supporting the need that this population needs to be studied within the context of your research. A better example of how to structure this discussion would be to first provide your problem statement. Then, state:

> This relationship/phenomena/etc. is likely to exist in the population of…, as research indicated…(citation). The results of this study will be applicable to… The general population for this study contains… For the purpose of this study, the target population includes… Candidates will be recruited (briefly state your recruitment method). The sample will include… (approximately ___ individuals).

This would essentially serve as your first paragraph of the Problem Statement section.

The second paragraph would provide the literature support for the relationships you had previously identified within the literature that identify the gap or the need for your proposed research. You will want to provide cited support for the negative consequence of the identified relationship/phenomena/etc. This will explicitly identify that there is a problem that is negatively affecting your population, it will specifically state how the problem is negatively affecting the population. This serves to support that this particular problem needs to be addressed.

The third paragraph should briefly discuss how the study will contribute to existing literature and the application of the theory/theories you are using. Use supporting literature for this part. You cannot just state that your study will contribute, but you have to specify how. You will also present an argument as to how your study will contribute to the real-world problem and how professionals/policies within your field of study will be able to use the results of your study. You should look to detail the existing relationships further and how the existing literature provides support for the gap. You should include a statement that your research will serve to address that gap. You may need to break this into two paragraphs.

The final paragraph of this section should briefly specify how your study will address the gap. For example, “In exploring (relationship/phenomena/etc.), this study seeks to (what you plan to identify) among (general population).” You will provide a single sentence supporting the gap supported with an in-text citation. You can make a statement to the effect of “this supports the need to address the problem with new research.” You will summarize how the study will contribute to new knowledge regarding the relationship/phenomena/etc. Provide a specific expected outcome.

You may see in your instructions to discuss the “unit of analysis” within your study. The unit of analysis is the phenomena, individuals, group, or the organization you are explicitly seeking to study. In my case, the unit of analysis was the individual response. You will also need to ensure that you have proper alignment between the problem statement and the identified gap. Please ensure that your identified gap is clearly illustrated within your problem statement. This means that the variables or phenomena you identified within your gap must be part of your problem statement. If your gap is that there is a need for further research on the lived experience of coping mechanisms among family members of terminally ill patients, then your problem statement must include the coping mechanisms among family members of terminally ill patients. Do not break the coping mechanisms down further unless you have done so in the gap. Yes, you will sound redundant. That’s the point.

Purpose of the Study. The purpose of the study section should be no less than 2 paragraphs. Your first sentence should be your purpose statement. It should basically match your problem statement in terms of variables being studied. This means that if your gap state that research needs to be conducted to identify the relationship between music in a major key and happiness, your problem statement should identify that it is not known if there is a relationship between music in a major key and happiness, your purpose statement should then state that the purpose of this (methodology - quantitative/qualitative) (design – correlational/case study) study is to (asses/explore) (if/what or how) music in a major key (predicts/affects) happiness among (population/geographic location). As an example, “the purpose of this quantitative correlational study is to assess if, and to what extent, a relationship exists between music in a major key and happiness among college students in the Midwest.” Or “the purpose of this qualitative descriptive study is the explore how listening to music in a major key contributes to the perception of happiness among college students in the Midwest.” You will continue the first paragraph discussing the what the analysis of the results will explore or examine. If you are quantitative, you will define your variables and the relationships of those variables. If you are qualitative, you will be describing the nature of the phenomena you will be exploring.

The second paragraph should recap the target population. A brief discussion as to how the data will be collected should be included. You can include a statement that participants will voluntarily participate in the interview/focus group that will be conducted online or in-person. Alternatively, of you are quantitative, you can state that participants will voluntarily respond to the survey on the survey site you are using (SurveyMonkey, Qualtrics, etc.). You should identify that participants will individually respond. Then you should identify how the participants will be asked to respond. This is whether through rating their perceptions on a Likert-type scale (quantitative) or through responding to structured interview questions in person. This gives the reader the understanding as to what kind of data is going to be collected.

A third paragraph can include a statement as to limitations of the participants within the type of instrumentation you are employing for your research. In my own proposal, I discussed the limitation of self-perception and that the instrumentation I was using relied on third-party rater and reporting of perceptions. The final sentence should be how the study will address the gap/need and be supported with an in-text citation.

Research Questions and/or Hypotheses. This section should be no less than 2 to three paragraphs. If you are a qualitative researcher, you will state you research question and describe the phenomena you will study. In qualitative studies, the research questions will provide guidance for the data that will be collected. You will NOT identify instrumentation. Quantitative researchers will state the research questions, identify and describe the variables, and state the hypotheses using the appropriate format for the design and analysis. Researchers will provide a discussion of the research questions as they relate to the problem statement. The discussion will include how the research questions are related to the theory/theories or model(s) previously discussed.

Typically, this section can begin with a statement that presents the type of study (method and design) and what it will study (relationship/phenomena). For example, “this quantitative correlational study will study the predictor variable(s) (list predictor/independent variables) and the criterion variable(s) (list criterion/dependent variables). If you are quantitative, you will want to state which scales will be used to measure each variable. You will then discuss what each research question will be seeking to explore. For example, “the first research question will determine what, if any, relationship exists between the predictor variable and the criterion variable.” You will discuss the null hypothesis and what happens should the null hypothesis not be rejected.

The next paragraph should detail the theories and/or models that are being used to inform the variables and how the research questions are informed from those theories. If you are uncertain as to how to do this, the theoretical foundations from the instrumentation is what your theoretical foundation for your study is. Therefore, if your instrument was formed based on attachment theory, then attachment theory will be used to explore how the predictor variable contributes to the criterion variable.

In a qualitative study, you will provide a brief discussion of how your design will be used to collect the data on your phenomena and provide empirical support for your specific phenomena. This support should directly inform what your study will explore within your phenomena. Essentially, you are explaining what the phenomena is that you are going to study, and provide explanations of the phenomena, as supported within existing literature.

You will then provide the research questions and any corresponding hypotheses. If you are qualitative, it will only be the research questions. If you are quantitative, you will provide the hypotheses as well. The qualitative format is as follows:

RQ1: How do (population) understand and describe (for descriptive studies) the (phenomena)?

RQ2: What do (population) regard as crucial aspects of (phenomena) that contributed to (goal/outcome/situation)?

The quantitative format is as follows:

RQ1: To what extent does (predictor variable) predict (criterion variable)?

H_{01}: (Predictor variable) does not significantly predict level of (criterion variable).

H_{1A}: (Predictor variable) does significantly predict level of (criterion variable).

Quantitative researchers will have at least one null hypothesis and one alternate hypothesis per research question. Please bear in mind that your variables/listed phenomena should be directly taken from your gap, problem statement, and purpose statement.

Advancing Scientific Knowledge and Significance of the Study. This section should be no less than one to two pages in length. You should split it into two subsections: (1) Advancing Scientific Knowledge and (2) Significance of the Study.

Advancing Scientific Knowledge. You will begin by presenting the specific broad topic area that you are studying. You will then provide statements that define and support the gap, providing citations where needed. You will restate your problem statement. You will provide a statement on how your research will address the gap. You have likely already written these statements before, you will reiterate these statements here. Yes, it is going to be redundant.

In your next paragraph, you can detail how your study will utilize the theory/theories and/or model(s) that you are using within your study. Make sure you cite your statements regarding the theories and the constructs that are being researched. You should write a statement as to how your study will advance the theoretical understanding or application of your theory. Explain how you will contribute to new knowledge regarding the application of the theory/theories and a potential for future research. If you have multiple theories and/or models, this may take two paragraphs.

You will then provide a paragraph regarding the advancement of scientific knowledge in relation to your study. This is how your study will directly contribute to the practical application within your field. Again, cite references where needed to support existing relationships.

Significance of the Study. Your first paragraph here should immediately state that your research will attempt to address a research gap. Then, clearly provide a narrative regarding your literature that prove a gap exists. Again, you have likely already written this within your Chapter 1, you will restate this here. You will state that a gap exists, and what that gap is. You should include a statement to the effect of, “this study will address the gap by investigating… (your purpose statement)”.

You will then provide information about how your study will contribute new knowledge that can inform future research designs on the variables or phenomena. This should be one paragraph in length and include citations to support your information, where needed. Again, please refer to similar dissertations for guidance if you are confused. Other dissertations can give you great ideas and information to pull from.

You should include a paragraph regarding the practical application and how this will impact your field, providing specifics. Again, provide supporting statements with references. You will want to provide the desired outcome that your research will have on persons within your field. Really think of how your research can improve the lives of the population you are studying. That’s what you want to include here.

Rationale for Methodology. This section should be no less than two to three paragraphs. You will begin this section by identifying your research methodology. This will be either qualitative or quantitative. You should then discuss what that methodology is. You are essentially defining your methodology. You will need to have seminal literary support (textbooks and/or empirical research) for this paragraph. You can briefly state your design and define what that design does, providing citations. If you are collecting demographic data, please include a statement that you are doing so. Provide a single sentence explaining why the methodology is the most appropriate.

The next paragraph will begin with restating your problem statement. Explain how your problem statement informs the methodology and design. This should include supporting statements with citations. You are expected to justify your methodology with your problem statement and either the variables or the phenomena, again using seminal sources.

A third paragraph should discuss why the alternative methodology would not be appropriate for your study. You will define what that methodology is (quantitative or qualitative) and utilize the type of data and relationship that your study will be collection or looking to determine to support why this methodology would not be appropriate.

Nature of the Research Design. This section is to be no less than three to four paragraphs, or one page. You will state the research design you will be using (descriptive, phenomenological, correlational, causal comparative, etc.) and what your design will be doing (exploring X, Y, Z; examining the relationship of X, Y, Z). It would be wise to restate your phenomena or your variables here. Provide a statement as to what, specifically, your research design will do, provide a citation. This should comprise your first paragraph.

Paragraph two can begin with a restatement of your purpose statement and going on to explain, in one sentence, that the design you selected is the most appropriate. The following several sentences can provide why alternative designs within your methodology are not appropriate. Again, use citations. If you are qualitative, you need to justify the design based on appropriateness to address your research questions.

Paragraph three will consist of a brief discussion of your target population. Provide a statement of the G*Power analysis (if needed). You will need to include a statement regarding the unit of observation. If you are measuring individual responses (i.e. survey responses) your unit of observation is each individual response. If you are looking at comparisons between groups, the unit of observation should be each group. Restate which instruments (if you are quantitative) will be used to measure which variables. Briefly discuss how the data will be collected (i.e. posting a link to a survey). Make sure that you include a statement that participants will be voluntarily responding. If you are quantitative, it is likely that the responses will be automatically sent to you by the survey tool you are using. Please include a statement as to how you will collect the responses.

Definition of Terms. The Definition of Terms is a unique section of your proposal in that it does not have a set minimum length. However, you will need to ensure that you are providing definitions for terms that appear often throughout your proposal. You will be defining any terms that would not be known to the average person. You will have to define your variables or your phenomena.

Each definition should be roughly one to two sentences. These need to be supported with citations from existing literature.

Assumptions, Limitations, Delimitations. This section will be no less than three to four paragraphs. You will begin this section with the definitions of the terms: assumptions, limitations, and delimitations. You will need to cite these.

Your next “paragraph” will have a subtitle: Assumptions. You can list your assumptions numerically to make it easier for you later on. Use citations for every assumption you provide. You can first list that you assume that your theories and/or models are applicable to your study. You can provide that you assume your methodology and design are the most appropriate. You can list that you assume participants will be honest, that participants will read the instructions, that the sample will be from the target population, that your data collection tool will protect anonymity (if quantitative), that the instrumentation is valid and reliable (quantitative), that the results can be generalized, or any other assumptions your research will make.

The third “paragraph” will consist of limitations. You will have to list the limitations within your research, such as the sample, or the data collection instrumentation or method, even the variables or phenomena you are studying, or any other limitations you can think of.

The fourth "paragraph" will be your delimitations. You will discuss how you sought to offset the limitations you provided. Therefore, for every limitation you list, you should have a delimitation.

Bear in mind that you are responsible for providing a rationale for each assumption, limitation, and delimitation.

Summary and Organization of the Remainder of the Study. Your summary will need to be no less than one to two pages. Your first paragraph should include a brief recap of what Chapter 1 did (I restated what the sections within Chapter 1 were). Then, you will restate your purpose statement and your problem statement.

Paragraph 2 can discuss your variables or phenomena. Provide the operational definitions for your variables or phenomena. If you are qualitative, you may need to provide further justification for your phenomena.

Paragraph 3 should begin with how you developed your problem statement. This should include a revisit to your gap and how it is supported in the literature. Provide the citations as to why the gap supports a need for further research. You should include a statement to the effect that your theories/models will examine/explore your research variables/phenomena.

Paragraph 4 can discuss how, specifically, your research will address the research gap.

Paragraph 5 will discuss your methodology and design. In this paragraph you will discuss the target population, the instrumentation you are using, and your data analysis method.

Paragraph 6 will discuss what your research seeks to accomplish (advancing scientific knowledge and significance).

Paragraph 7 should provide an introduction into what Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 will address.

Chapter 2

For me, Chapter 2 was the easiest to write. That is largely because of the Review of the Literature. Do not let the Review of the Literature section overwhelm you, the sheer magnitude of that section can sometimes seem like the worst part. I promise, it's really not that bad. Chapter 2 consists of five subsections:

- Introduction to the Chapter and Background to the Problem
- Identification of the Gap
- Theoretical Foundations and/or Conceptual Framework
- Review of the Literature

- Summary

This section will use a combination of tenses, largely because you are reporting prior research. Don’t get too hung up on this, you will be fine. Just keep track of what you have already done and what you still have to do, in terms of your research. This Chapter is one that was largely not addressed in the prospectus, so you will be working from your annotated bibliography you should have been compiling throughout your doctoral coursework. That’s the working literature review that I mentioned earlier, and by this point you should have somewhere between 125-150 articles or books that you have provided annotations for. If you did that, and did it properly, this Chapter will be your easiest. That’s why it is imperative that the annotations are thorough and provide a comprehensive background to your study. Further, hopefully, when you wrote your annotations, you included articles that discussed your method and design and other components of your study, rather than just your topic. These will be essential in Chapter 3.

Introduction to the Chapter and Background to the Gap.

Your introduction and background section of Chapter 2 will need to be at least two to three pages and include two subsections: the introduction and the background of the gap.

Your opening paragraph should include a brief synopsis of what the Chapter will cover. Simple one-sentence synopses would be most appropriate for this, so don't overthink it.

Paragraph two should give a more thorough overview of what the Review of the Literature will do, and the topics that will be covered. You should include a statement that your literature review will support the need for continued research on your topic area, as well a statement that the literature will provide the foundation for your study.

Your next paragraph will be a little different. In this paragraph you will be detailing how you conducted your research for your literature review. You should include all the browsing services you used (i.e. Google Scholar, ProQuest, EBSCOHost, etc.). You will then include a statement with each of the search terms you used to gather your information. You should include a statement regarding literature that you omitted (if you did) due to appropriateness to your study. Finally, include a statement regarding the year I which you provided parameters for your literature review, as this will ensure compliance with having recent literature within your review.

Put the phrase "Background to the problem." at the beginning of the next paragraph in **Bold** font and sentence case with a period after it. The first few paragraphs of the Background section should begin with the history of your topic area. What you want to do here is provide the brief historical background that illustrates how your topic has been researched and how it has evolved throughout the existing research. You can go back past that time restraint from your University, but be very careful, as you will have to abide by the restraints (e.g. 75% or more resources within 5 years).

You are going to want to focus on the research history of the topic, not the pop-culture history. What you write here MUST be supported with citations. Think of this section as if you were a defense attorney building a case to defend your client. In this case, your client is your research. You want to show unquestionable evidence that proves that your research topic is valid, is of interest to your industry, that it is still relevant today, and that there is a clear gap that still warrants research.

Your final paragraph of this subsection should provide support for how the literature supports the gap you previously identified. How this gap led to the development of your problem statement. You will then provide a statement as to how the findings of your research will contribute to the knowledge of the topic.

Identification of the Gap. This section will need to be at least 2 pages in length. You will begin by summarizing the societal or big problem. You will need to indicate what has been discovered and what still needs to be discovered. Your first paragraph you will provide a brief historical overview of the research on this topic. Depending on your topic, you may have a vaster historical foundation (mine stretched to 1948 here), but I quickly indicated how research transformed and continued throughout the 1980s through the 2000s. This rounded out my first paragraph. My second paragraph discussed recent literature and how they related to earlier research.

The third paragraph will be your defense of your gap. So, you should begin with your statement regarding the gap that you wrote in Chapter 1. You will need to cite that the research clearly showed relationships between any variables you are going to research, and use supporting citations. You will need to cite articles that illustrate that further research is needed, and that it is needed specifically in the area you are looking to research. Once you have provided this support, you will provide your “It is unknown if….” problem statement.

Your next paragraph should begin with the statement that new research is needed to examine or explore your topic. State that your proposed research seeks to address the gap. State the historical importance of this topic and how continued research will provide further insight or add value. Add a statement as to how this research will contribute to the practical application in your field.

Within this section, you are going to need to identify the key sources used as the basis for your gap. Identify the trends you observed within the literature and how the research focus has changed, especially within the preceding 5 years. You will need to include key findings that emerged from the research (did the research support something new or did it refute it). Then discuss any limitations that were found in the literature (i.e. population, relationships examined, assessments used, etc.) that support your gap. You will need to specifically defined areas where future research is recommended.

Theoretical Foundations and/or Conceptual Framework. This section will be no less than two to three pages in length. This is likely where the bulk of your older sources will be used. That is because you will need to use seminal sources for your theories and/or models. If you are quantitative, your theoretical foundation should come directly from the instrumentation you are using to assess your variables. That means that if you are using multiple instruments, you will have multiple theories. For example, in my own research, I had to use four different instruments for my variables, I had two theories and two models. My theoretical foundations section was roughly 7 pages in length.

Your opening paragraph should provide a brief background regarding which theory/theories and/or model(s) have been commonly used to explore your variables/phenomena. You should also articulate which theory/theories and/or model(s) you will be using for your variables/phenomena. Only present the one(s) you are using, do not provide every one that has ever been used, you want to keep this targeted. If you are using multiple theories/models identify which theory will be the prominent one you are using for your study and how it will be applied. Then, provide a statement about how your study will examine the relationships (e.g. “this study will seek to determine if there is a relationship….). You should conclude this paragraph with a statement that informs the reader that the following sections will describe the theories/models and uses them to define your variables/phenomena.

When you write about each theory or model you are using, it would be a wise idea to begin each new section with your theory/model name in **bold** font. Your discussion on each theory should begin with what the theory focuses on explaining within the field. You want to explain what the theory/model proposed and detail the constructs that are able to be measured with the theory/model. You must use supporting literature and provide evidence to support the use of the theory to measure your variable/phenomena. Once you are done discussing the theory/model, you should include a statement that says, "For the purpose of this study, X theory/model supports the measurement of Q variable/phenomena as it relates to R variables/constructs." Within this section, you want to ensure that you are able to clearly illustrate that you understand the foundational background, historical use, and relevant research to the theory/model. You will also be providing support and building a logical argument as to how the research questions are developed based on your theory/model.

Review of the Literature. This section will be the longest individual section within your proposal, as you probably already know. This section will need to be no less than 30 pages and will need to have no less than 50 peer-reviewed, empirical research articles. Do NOT let this overwhelm you. This can include articles from scholarly journal and government/foundation research articles. Keep these within the preceding 3 to 5 years of your anticipated completion. The more recent, the better. Yes, even after I wrote this section, I added to it all the way up to my proposal defense. As you are going through your revisions, you will want to ensure that you are adding current research to your literature review to ensure that you will have the most current knowledge and information available. This will also help you to maintain that 75% of current literature mark. Within my own literature review I had only 1 article outside of the 5-year mark. You are allowed up to 10 books and 5 dissertations within your entire dissertation; however, you are going to want to keep these sources to a bare minimum and only use when absolutely necessary. The assumption is that if you are including it in your proposal/dissertation that you have read the entirety of every source.

Organization of the Literature Review. You can organize your literature in a number of ways; however, the way that is probably the easiest for writers to organize and write the review is by breaking down your literature based on your variables or themes. I began mine with my dependent variable. Then went on to discuss the independent variables. This allowed me to build my argument as to why the exploration of the relationship between the variables was necessary. This also made it easier for my committee members to easily read and follow the literature review and understand how I came to my gap and problem statement.

Remember that long document with the annotations that I advised you to write throughout your doctoral coursework? This is where you will bring that out and really use it. When I was ready to write my literature review section, I divided up my annotations into the separate variables and organized them by commonalities. For example, if research used a similar population, I grouped them together. If it used the same instrument, they were grouped together. If articles measured the same variables (i.e. life satisfaction and stress), they were grouped together. This allowed for a logical flow within the writing and made it easier for the readers to follow along. Remember, you are using pre-existing literature to tell a story about how your topic evolved. In any story, you want it to have a clear understanding of how the story progresses, a beginning, middle, and end. This is where you will tell the story you found in the literature.

Writing the Literature Review. Now that you’ve organized your articles that you’ve annotated and know how to present your literature review, you have to actually write it! Those annotations should have included quite a bit of information in it, most you have already paraphrased. Now comes the really fun part. If you did a good job on your annotations, writing the literature review is largely already done for you.

In your literature review, you will first state what the author(s) did in one sentence. For example, “Smith (year) explored the observed phenomenon that some people experience higher levels of [feeling/experience] in [circumstances/situation] than others.” or “Jones (year) examined the relationship between [variables], citing support that [supportive observation from article].” From there, you will include a statement of the constructs that were measured (qualitative). A statement of how this was explored/examined, what methodology and design. The sample and what instrumentation (any surveys) that were utilized. Then state the findings and results. Then state what areas for future research were identified and recommended within the research. Finally, you’ll want to include how the results or findings contribute to your own research (e.g. “These findings support the relationship between….”). There are two examples of my own literature review samples in Appendix B. Again, ensure you meet the minimum required quantity of articles (50). If you meet this, you will automatically hit your minimum page requirement. Be advised that this may be different depending on your university. So please make sure you are following the appropriate guidelines for your university.

Once you have completed writing your review of the literature and BEFORE moving on to the summary section, you will include a subsection on Instrumentation. In this section, you will present each instrument that was used to measure each construct or variable. You will then provide a discussion regarding the specific instrument you will be using in your research. In this discussion, if you are quantitative, you will need to include a brief discussion on the reliability and validity statistics and provide evidentiary support that the scale is valid and reliable to measure your variable. You should include a statement as to why the instrument you discuss is or is not an appropriate selection for your study. I provided some examples in Appendix C.

You will need to ensure that for every in-text citation, you have a corresponding reference in your reference list and vice versa. One great resource to use to check this is reciteworks.com. Remember, this should be in proper APA format. Congratulations!! You have completed the dreaded first draft of your literature review! That is a huge accomplishment! Now, remember, you will be making additions to this section, and your content expert may challenge you on what you wrote. Please make sure that you did your due diligence to ensure that your words and your work are to the best of your ability and meet the academic standards that your doctoral degree will require. Ensure that you have paraphrased and do not just copy and paste text from the articles. Maintain your academic integrity here, this is absolutely essential. You do not want to have all of your hard work be thrown away because of major errors in writing or judgment.

Summary. Your Chapter 2 Summary section will need to be at least one to two pages in length. You are going to be summarizing all of the information you wrote in Chapter 2, using it to define the key points within your research. Your first paragraph within the summary should give a brief overview of the introduction and background to the problem section. You will want to summarize your historical research as succinctly as possible.

Your second paragraph should discuss the gap. Again, summarize as succinctly as possible. Use citations throughout, where needed, to provide the evidentiary support required. You should also include a statement on the general population that you will be studying for your research.

The third paragraph should include the summary of your theoretical foundations and/or conceptual framework. If you are quantitative, you will want to introduce the theory/model, then state that the theory/model directly led to the development of your instrument, and what construct it is measuring. Provide citations to support these statements. If you are qualitative, you will want to summarize how your theory or model informs your research question within the scope of your research. You are using this paragraph to justify your variables or phenomena and the instrumentation or sources. Please ensure you have provided ample evidence to do just that.

The following paragraph will be synthesizing your review of the literature section. I began mine with a statement that the literature on the dependent variable led to the development of my overarching research question. I provided statements that were supported through in-text citations from articles I used in my literature review to support the relationships that were supported within the literature. I used this literature to indicate how the research evolved to support further relationships among my variables. I concluded this paragraph with a statement that further research was needed among my variables.

The next paragraph discussed the methodologies and design that were presented throughout the literature review. Specifically, I defined what my methodology was and presented that the research overwhelmingly supported the use of a specific design. This justified the use of my specific methodology and design. In your proposal, your gap may be the use of a different design or a different methodology. Please ensure that you provide the evidentiary support to justify this. What your committee and any other reviewers are looking for is that you have the support within the existing literature to conduct your research with the methodology and design you propose. If you cannot do that, you will have issues with defending your choice. This may result in your chair or methodologist requiring you to change your methodology or design at this point. Please make sure that you provided ample support to justify your methodology and design.

The next paragraph should present the instrumentation or sources that were used throughout your literature review. Provide statements that indicate whether an instrument/source is appropriate or inappropriate for your research and why. You are justifying your use of specific sources of data here, so ensure that this is solidly written and supported by citations. Remember, you are building the argument as to why your sources of data collection are the most appropriate for your research. You may end up having to change these if the support isn't adequate.

Your next paragraph will discuss what Chapter 3 will present. This can be simple statements regarding the sections within Chapter 3, you should not go in detail here, just providing a basic overview. This is essentially a transition into Chapter 3, so please be mindful that you should be introducing your reader into the next Chapter.

Chapter 3

If you are like me, Chapter 3 is the most challenging one to write. I was not a statistics guru. In fact, this made me extremely nervous about writing this Chapter. This also caused me to be that much more thorough with my research and my writing of this Chapter. This Chapter also took me the longest to write because of how many times I went back to triple check my information. I strongly encourage my quantitative researchers to do your own work – do NOT hire a statistician. While statisticians are fantastic, the problem you will run into is that you will not be able to defend your statistical analyses later on. This is important as your committee will ask you about your statistical analyses and why you chose to run specific analyses. You need to know why and how to defend it. If you are uncertain about your methodology or design, please read other dissertations that used the same design. This will help you understand what you need to present to justify your methodology and design and will help you identify possible sources to read for more information.

Chapter 3 will consist of the following sections:

- Introduction
- Statement of the Problem
- Research Questions and/or Hypotheses
- Research Methodology
- Research Design
- Population and Sample Selection
- Instrumentation/Sources of Data
- Validity/Trustworthiness
- Reliability
- Data Collection and Management
- Data Analysis Procedures
- Ethical Considerations
- Limitations and Delimitations
- Summary

This Chapter will be written in future tense as this is explaining what you will be doing. Bear in mind, that this Chapter will be detailing how you will be collecting and analyzing your data. The more comprehensive and thorough a job you do here, the easier your life will be in Chapter 4, when you are reporting what you did. If you are a quantitative researcher, this chapter will be extremely technical and dry. If you are qualitative, this chapter will rely on your ability to tell the story.

Introduction. Your Chapter 3 introduction should be no less than two to three paragraphs. You should begin this section with your purpose statement. I provided a brief summary of the literature review and how it developed to the research questions. Then, you should state how your methodology was selected based on prior research and that the design you selected is the most appropriate for your research.

Your second paragraph should specify the variables/phenomena and how you will be testing your hypotheses or investigate your relationship(s). You will give a statement as to how you will collect your data. You should provide a brief overview of what Chapter 3 will cover: an in-depth analysis of your methodology, design, the process, including validity, reliability and ethical considerations.

Statement of the Problem. This section will be one to two paragraphs. Of course, you should begin this section with the Problem statement. I added a statement that my independent variables were identified as predictors of my dependent variable through the literature review. Then, restated the gap, and the supporting need for future research.

Research Questions and/or Hypotheses. This section should be no less than one to two pages in length. It is beneficial to begin stating the methodology and design that your research will employ. You can then state what your study will seek to examine or explore. Identify your variables/phenomena. Then describe or state how you will measure your variables/phenomena (i.e. what scale will measure what variable). Use your citations! You can then list your research questions and any corresponding hypotheses. Again, as you did in your Chapter 1, follow the same format (I literally copied and pasted that from Chapter 1 to Chapter 3 – no need to redo work that was already done).

Once these have been listed, you will describe how you will collect primary data. Primary data is the data you will be analyzing.

Again, specify which scale will be used to collect specific variable data (quantitative research). If you are using multiple instruments, indicate which instrument will be used for which variable. Provide a statement about which information will be collected through your demographic survey. If you are using scales, you will want to discuss the rating scales (i.e. "…uses a scale from 0 to 4, where 0 = never and 4 = always"). Discuss how you will present the instructions for the participants. If you are qualitative, you will need to discuss your data sources to answer each research question.

Research Methodology. This section should be one to two pages minimum. You should begin by stating the methodology that you will be using for your research. The first paragraph should serve to thoroughly define what your methodology is, using citations to support your statements.

Your second paragraph should detail the opposite methodologies (e.g. the ones you are NOT using) and explain why these are not appropriate for your study. Provide supporting statements as to why the other methodologies (i.e. qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods) is not practical in your research.

Your third paragraph should discuss prior research and the methodology employed within those articles. In this paragraph, you should be providing the justification for your methodology. You will then discuss the gaps in the research and how this led to the problem statement, and how this informed your methodology. What you are doing is providing justification for your methodology. You are also providing a rationale for the methodology that is based on empirical studies. You must use scholarly sources.

Research Design. This section will also be at least one to two pages in length. You will be elaborating on the research design you presented in Chapter 1, providing the rationale for your selected design. This should justify why your design is the most appropriate, as opposed to another design within your methodology. Your first sentence should indicate the type of design you will be using. Is it experimental, non-experimental? Correlational or causal comparative? Is it a grounded theory or content analysis? Thematic analysis or phenomenological? Narrative or case study? State that immediately. Then state what you will be measuring/exploring in terms of your design. For example, in a correlational study, you study the strength and direction of the relationships between your variables. Make a statement as to why your design is the most appropriate (e.g. it has been commonly used, it is the are that needs further research). Explain what studies using the design you selected are useful in accomplishing. What you're doing here is defining your design and justifying its appropriateness for your study.

If you are a quantitative researcher, you will need to include a paragraph that details your variables, their structure, the unit of analysis, and unit of observation. You will have to discuss multiple data sources if you are using multiple data sources. In most cases using human participants, each participant is the unit of analysis. If you are studying differences between families, each family unit is the unit of analysis. The unit of analysis is essentially the item or person that you are examining in terms of scoring. For example, if you are comparing class averages in a school, each class is your unit of analysis. The unit of observation is the score or response from each participant. In most quantitative studies utilizing surveys, each individual response is the unit of observation. To go back to the class average example, each class average will be your unit of observation. The unit of observation is what you're using to measure your participants.

If you are a qualitative researcher, you will also be defining your unit of analysis and unit of observation. If you are using multiple data sources, you will need to specify the matching cases. Typically, your unit of analysis would be each sample participant. In a case study design, the unit of analysis is what's called a "bounded system", which could be one individual, one family, one group – it's essentially what you are studying for your case.

Regardless of whether you are quantitative or qualitative, you will need to provide brief descriptions of the other designs within your methodology that you are not going to be using. This serves to illustrate the justification and rationale as to why the one you selected is the most appropriate. You must also use authoritative sources (scholarly resources) to support your statements.

Population and Sample Selection. This section will be at least one to two pages in length. You will be describing your general population/population of interest, target population, and sample. It is a good practice to have each as a separate subsection within the section. This may result in a couple of very short subsections, but it does increase readability and understanding for your committee. Within your subsection regarding your research sample, you will need to include a G*Power analysis if you are a quantitative researcher. The G*Power software is free to use (you can find it online), and you will be required to screenshot your results and include in your Appendix. You will also be required to discuss the parameters, such as the statistical significance level and the sufficient power to indicate at least a medium effect size. A medium effect size is sufficient for your research. You will then state that the power analysis determined a sample size of X is needed to perform the statistical analysis (whatever you are doing – Pearson Correlation, Multiple Linear Regressions, ANOVA, etc.). You should then provide a brief discussion into prior research with a variety of sample sizes based on their own research, thus defending your sample size. You will be required to provide evidence based on empirical literature that your sample is adequate for your research design.

You will need to provide a discussion as to how you will recruit your participants and what your anticipated response rate will be. Plan to over-recruit. If you need 70 participants, look to recruit between 110-120, minimum. State as much. Remember, if you are using a target population where the people do not know you (which increases anonymity – important for later if you're quantitative), you may only receive about a 5-10% response rate to your survey link. You will need to ensure that you have as large a target population as possible to ensure that you are able to get your necessary sample. You will need to discuss if you will be sending out the link weekly, or if your site will be sending out your survey for you. If your site is sending it out, you will need to state how you will give the survey link to your site (email it to the HR/IRB department) and state their recruitment practices. Include a statement as to what will happen if you do not achieve the necessary sample size. This will help you account for attrition. If you are qualitative, discuss how you will be identifying your participants and select those to participate in your interviews.

If you are qualitative, your university may have specific guidelines on the necessary sample size. Please ensure you are following those guidelines. This should also include if you are using a survey for triangulation purposes. You must include a plan to account for attrition. For qualitative researchers, this will likely mean extending your collection time. It is not uncommon for qualitative researchers to spend several months to a year in data collection obtaining the necessary sample.

You will then discuss your sampling method. Examples of this would be convenience sampling or purposive sampling. You will need to explain why this is the sampling method you are using. Explain what that sampling method involves, in order to inform your audience as to what you are doing. If you are using a purposive sampling method, you must identify the screening criteria and the device you used to screen participants.

Explain where you will conduct you study. If you are using a private organization, do NOT give the name. You can, however, give the type of business it is (e.g. a hospital) and the approximate geographic location (e.g. in the Southeast United States). You want to leave this information as vague as possible in order to ensure that the participants cannot be identified by the readers. If you are too specific here, it could be problematic.

You will need to include a subsection regarding your site authorization, the only exceptions may occur with qualitative researchers who will not need to have a site to recruit participants or if you are using archival data. If you are unsure, contact your chair and/or your IRB department to verify. If you need site authorization, you will need to discuss how you obtained site authorization. Again, make sure you have confirmed with your chair and IRB departments to ensure you have completed any necessary steps and have all required documentation. You will get held up in IRB if this is not accurately completed. Start working on site authorization as early as possible. Even when you are writing your 10 Points. The LAST thing you want to have happen is to have your site fall through right before, during, or after IRB submission.

You will briefly discuss the process of collecting data once IRB approval is obtained. If you are using a survey tool (such as SurveyMonkey or Qualtrics), include a statement that you are using it. You will need to discuss how participants will receive and complete the Informed Consent Form and what will happen if they decline or if they agree. You must state that they will not be allowed to proceed with the process if they decline. Finally, a statement that participants are required to complete the Informed Consent form is needed.

Statements regarding anonymity/confidentiality should be provided within this section. Please be mindful that if you are qualitative, you must include a statement into any known risks to the participant in agreeing to participate in your study. Discuss what will happen if your participants withdraw (e.g. destroy all interview content). If you are providing a monetary incentive for participation, this should be included here.

Instrumentation/Sources of Data. The title of this section will entirely depend on your methodology. Quantitative researchers will use “Instrumentation” while qualitative researchers will use

“Sources of Data”. This section should be no less than one to three pages. If you are quantitative, this could be longer if you are using multiple instruments. This section will provide a detailed discussion of your instrumentation or materials that you will be using to collect your data. This will include reliability and validity of your data, collection instrument, or experiment. You must provide support from related studies and/or the original publication where the instrumentation was developed. If you are quantitative, you will also need to include citations from subsequent uses of the instrument(s) you will be using. It would be best to introduce what you will be using to collect your data in the introduction paragraph and whether the instrumentation (if you are quantitative) uses a Likert-type scale to measure the constructs. Please provide a statement how the results will allow for data analysis. If you are qualitative, ensure that you have given a solid foundation as to the type of interview(s) you will be conducting and explain the methods in conducting said interview type. It is likely, however, that you will be using a semi-structured interview technique.

Qualitative Researchers. You will discuss that you will include descriptions of the participants’ experiences and the corresponding transcriptions. If you are recording your interviews, please ensure that this is noted here. Remember to include some statement regarding the importance of nonverbal communication as well as verbal and include a supporting citation. You must include a discussion to the reliability of the data, with a focus on the strategy and skillset of the interviewer. If you are using open-ended questions, explain why. If you are using close-ended questions, explain why. You must provide supporting reliability information as to why you are qualified to conduct said interview with that technique.

Further, you will discuss the validity of interviewing for your research, use citations to support your assertions. I highly recommend that you refer to previously published dissertations with your method and design to gain a greater understanding of what you will need to include.

Quantitative Researchers. If you are using multiple instruments, it would be beneficial to discuss each one separately. You will include the article when it was developed and discuss how it was developed. Include if they had begun with a greater number of items and how items were removed (i.e. if initial factor analysis led to removal of items with items below certain loadings level). You will then indicate that a copy of the scale is in your appendix (give a parenthetical indication of which appendix it is in). Then you will briefly discuss how the instrument is scored and list the items from the scale. The following paragraph should briefly discuss the reliability and validity of the instrument, as found in subsequent uses of the instrument. Repeat for each instrument. If your instrument has multiple subscales, you must list each separately based on the constructs being measured, and then provide reliability and validity information for each subscale, as well as the instrument as a whole. Provide supporting citations.

If you are using a demographic survey to collect data for one of your variables, you must support the use of demographic information to provide said data. It is further important that you are replicating the questions that had previously been used to maintain consistency in regard to that variable. You will detail the questions that will be asked in the demographic survey, including factors that do not directly pertain to your variable. Discuss how you will use the demographic information to calculate the data for your variable, if needed.

If you are using instruments with Likert-type rating scales, you will need to give a background regarding Likert-type scales and why they are useful at measuring numerical data. You may need to repeat how each of your instruments and/or subscales utilizes a

Likert-type scale. You will also then need to provide a discussion as to how you will convert the ordinal data gathered from a Likert-type scale into interval scores that can be used for statistical analysis. Provide supporting citations.

Validity/Trustworthiness. This section should be no less than two to four paragraphs, or roughly one page. If you are quantitative, you will be providing validity. If you are qualitative, you should be providing trustworthiness. Trustworthiness pertains to the elements that establish credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the study. You can support this through rigorous techniques and methods, thick description, audit trials, methodological processes and procedures, well-defined coding, ample examples of quotes, and findings that are clearly emerged from the data. You must define credibility or dependability, describing any threats to credibility or dependability that are inherent in the design, sampling, data collection, and data analysis. You must also discuss how those threats will be minimized.

For quantitative researchers, you must provide detailed validity statistics for instruments, identifying how the instruments were developed. You cannot use part of a validated survey nor can you adapt it. Validated instruments that are borrowed must be included in the appendices as either a pdf or jpeg along with the Word file of the instrument. The content of the instruments should be identical. This means that if you are using a scale that has multiple subscales, but you are only interested in the data from ONE of the subscales, you must still use the ENTIRE instrument in you research.

It is useful to begin this section with a discussion of what validity is and define each of the different types of validity. Ensure that you have evidentiary support for each definition. Then go on to discuss, at length, the validity of each instrument and/or subscale that you are using.

Reliability. This section will be no less than two to four paragraphs, or one page. Of course, like validity, if you are quantitative and using multiple instruments, this will likely be longer. For qualitative researchers, you are required to establish consistency and repeatability of data collection through documented methodology. You must provide detailed data collection protocols (interview/observations/etc.), creation of the database, and use of triangulation, if applicable.

For quantitative researchers, you will benefit from defining what reliability is and different types of reliability statistics. Then you will be required to provide reliability statistics for each of the instruments and subscales (if applicable) you are utilizing. The structure should be similar to that of your validity subsection.

Data Collection and Management. This section will be no less than one to three pages. Be as thorough as possible here, this is one area where your Institutional Review Board will be examining to ensure that you are protecting the identities of your participants and that you are adhering to Institutional guidelines in terms of collecting and maintaining your data.

For qualitative researchers, you must provide detailed description of your intended data collection process, including all sources of data and methods you intend to use. Bear in mind that your collected data MUST be sufficient in breadth and depth to answer your research question(s) and you must be able to correctly interpret and present the data in terms of themes, research question, and/or instrument. Again, refer to the population and sample selection guidelines to ensure that you are collecting an adequate sample size to answer your research question(s).

For quantitative researchers, you must describe, in detail, how you will collect your data. This must be precise to allow for replication purposes by other researchers, including how each instrument or source was used, how and where data was collected and recorded. You must provide a step-by-step process that will be used to collect your data. If you are collecting data from different sources, you may need to collect data in parallel, with multiple groups completing the same survey. It may be beneficial to provide a flow-chart to illustrate the data collection method.

Regardless of your methodology, it is necessary to include a statement that indicates that data collection will begin AFTER you attain Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. It is of utmost importance that you DO NOT collect or attempt to collect ANY data prior to IRB approval. You can face severe consequences for violating this. If you are using human participants, you must include a statement that you will follow all ethical guidelines set forth by your university's IRB, any professional organization pertaining to your field (e.g. the American Psychological Association), and Federal Regulations regarding protection of human subjects and site specifically which Title, Part, Federal Code Title, and explain specifically that the collection of personal identifiers is prohibited. Provide a statement that this information will not be collected.

You must include information as to how you will obtain Informed Consent from participants and protecting the rights and well-being of sample participants. Include site authorization letters (if needed) and the Informed Consent Form in the appendices. If site authorization is required, you must detail the process for attaining site approval, if not already attained. If you have already attained site authorization, write this in the past tense.

If you are using pre-existing instruments, you must include that you already received permission to use those instruments. You must include a jpeg or pdf of the permission in the Appendix and put an in-text parenthetical indication as to where it can be found.

Explain what you will do to collect your data AFTER you have IRB approval. You will discuss the step-by-step process that participants will go through to participate in your study, including if they are completing the survey online: how many sections will there be? what are the specific sections? Will they be part of a Zoom meeting? Where will you post/link recruitment materials? What is your expected response rate? Restate your target population. How long will you recruit? What will you do if you don’t collect the minimum necessary responses?

You will explain how you will prepare your data to be analyzed. Are you going to be transcribing it? Do you have to clean your quantitative data? How will you do that? Specify which software you will be using to clean and prepare your data. Are you going to use a Multiple Imputation Method for missing values?

Discuss how you will store and manage your data. Will it be on your personal computer? Is your personal computer password protected? Do others have access to it? Once you are done with your analysis, where will your data be stored? On a USB drive? Will it be encrypted, and password protected? Where will you store this? You must indicate the length of time which you will retain the data (this must be in alliance with your university or site requirements – whichever is longer). How will you destroy the data once that time has expired?

Data Analysis Procedures. This section will be no less than one to three pages. You should begin this section with a restatement of your purpose statement and/or problem statement, as well as your research question(s) and any corresponding hypotheses. You can feel free to copy and paste these from prior sections. This needs to be verbatim. While it may seem common sense, please remember that your research questions and hypotheses should be the same throughout your proposal.

You will be required to describe, in detail, the relevant data that you will collect for EACH research question and/or variable. For quantitative studies, you <u>must</u> specify which scale and/or subscale of the instruments you are using AND the type of data for each. What this means is that, if you are collecting demographic data, you must include that you are collecting *descriptive* data. Your instrument data should be considered *inferential* data. You should restate which software you will use for analysis. Then restate your independent/dependent variables.

If you are using scales, provide how the scale measures each response (e.g. X will rate each question by a five-level Likert scale from 0 (never) to 4 (very often)). You must then provide support for how you will make these ordinal metrics into interval data that can be used to analyze inferential statistics. Please remember, ordinal data cannot be used to analyze inferential statistics, so this must be converted. You will need to support this conversion with in-text citation from a peer-reviewed academic journal.

You will then detail the data management practices that you will utilize. You will need to specify how the raw data will be organized and prepared for analysis. If you are quantitative, you will need to include your G*Power analysis to determine your minimum needed sample size. Also include a statement regarding your intended recruitment size. Include statements regarding the instruments you will use and indicate that they have been proven valid and reliable, support with in-text citations. State what survey tool you will use to administer the survey. If you are qualitative, this should include ID matching of respondents. You will also describe transcription processes, your descriptive statistic measuring (remember, this is your demographic data), any observation checklists, and so on. Add a statement that the researcher will utilize strict data management and confidentiality procedures.

You will then detail your data analysis procedures. For quantitative researchers, you must describe the data preparation. This may include checking data for accuracy, especially if you collect data from multiple sources. If collecting data from multiple sources, you must aggregate the data to secure a common unit of analysis in all files, even merging files if needed. You must include information on how you will compute the descriptive statistics for the sample as well as the scores for the scale and subscales, the reliability analysis for each scale and subscale. You must also state and justify all statistical tests you will be using to generate the information. Then describe the assumptions checks for the statistical analysis you will be conducting.

For qualitative researchers, you will need to identify and discuss the specific analysis approach or strategy. You will then need to describe the coding procedures you will use. Ensure that you know the differences between the coding and theming practices/processes for the different types of approaches in qualitative research (Thematic, Narrative, Phenomenological, or Grounded Theory). You must also provide a discussion regarding the necessary sample size.

You will then need to provide justification for each data analysis procedure (statistical and non-statistical). You will need to provide a discussion as to how the data analysis is aligned with your research question and design. Ensure that your section is written in a concise and logical manner.

Ethical Considerations. This section will be at least three to four paragraphs. In this section, you will provide a discussion of ethical issues. Commonly, this is derived from the Belmont Report. As such, you must detail the different principles and how you will address these ethical issues. You must also discuss ethical considerations regarding your university’s IRB. Explain each of the principles/issues relevant to your study. Identify the potential risks of harm that are inherent in the study.

You must detail the procedures for obtaining Informed Consent and the process in which you will protect the rights and well-being of your participants. You must address the key ethical criteria: anonymity, confidentiality, privacy, strategies to prevent coercion, and any potential conflict of interest.

You must then describe in detail the data management procedures that will be used to securely store and maintain data. This includes the length of time the data will be kept, where it will be kept, and how it will be destroyed. You need to explain what you plan to do to implement each of the principles/issues relevant to the study data management, data analysis, and publication. You will need to ensure that your Informed Consent form is included in your Appendices. Please ensure that all approvals, forms, permissions, recruitment forms, and data collection forms that you mentioned in the Data Collection section are included in your Appendices.

Limitations and Delimitations. This section will need to be two to three paragraphs. You will restate the limitations from Chapter 1and explains why the limitations are unavoidable. You will describe the delimitations as they pertain to methodology, sample, instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis. You will need to state the consequences of each limitation and delimitation regarding data quantity, quality, and validity/generalizability of the findings. You must then discuss the strategies to minimize and/or mitigate the negative consequences.

Summary. This section will be no less than one to two pages. You will summarize the key points that you presented in Chapter 3 using authoritative, empirical citations. You must prove alignment of your title, problem statement, purpose statement, research questions and hypotheses, methodology, design, data collection, instruments, and analysis. This is incredibly important! You MUST be able to clearly indicate how each of those are aligned with each other and inform your study. You will provide a transition as to what Chapter 4 will discuss. Remember, all research presented in Chapter 3 must be scholarly, topic-related, and gathered from academic, professional, original sources. You must provide accurate, correct citations. All citations must be in your reference page. A great resource to check for this is reciteworks.com.

Wrapping Up the Proposal

Congratulations! You have written the first draft of your proposal! This is quite an accomplishment! Now on to the hard part – the revisions. No matter how solid your first draft is, you WILL have revisions, additions, and changes to make. Keep focused and do not give up. Hold yourself and your committee accountable to the time frames as outlined by your university. As you get through your committee reviews and revisions, remember to be respectful, and that your committee members know things you may not. They likely know what your university's academic quality processes and IRB requirements are and are actively trying to help you get through those as smoothly as possible. They are largely on your side, they are NOT your enemies here, please remember that. Your chair is not criticizing YOU, your chair is actively trying to get you to get through your dissertation process. IF you find that you are having difficulty, please contact your chair and try to discuss your concerns. If there are pervasive issues that are extremely egregious (i.e. committee member failing to provide timely feedback), contact your student advisor for guidance.

Otherwise, if your chair is giving you feedback, or you keep cycling back to one particular area that is problematic, you can request a conference call with your chair to go over this area and get further clarification. Ultimately, you need to ask yourself, do you really NEED that sentence or that source. This is where you ask yourself which battles are worth fighting and which ones are not. Also, please, PLEASE, make sure you are following directions and doing what is asked of you. I have seen many, many people get angry because they did not follow the directions, or they took the feedback personally, or they end up fighting every little point with their chair instead of making the changes or getting clarification. The constant battles will cause you to be discouraged and eventually give up on the process. These people may eventually go on to express having had a significant negative experience with the school, or even try to persuade others to not proceed. This is a long, arduous process, you must decide if this is worth it. I can generally tell, early on, the people who are going to complete their doctorates and those who aren't. It has nothing to do with intelligence. I have seen people become overwhelmed with their assignments throughout their coursework (in terms of what their assignment is asking them to do – not the volume of the work or competing responsibilities), people who have difficulty following directions, or difficulty with taking constructive criticism. Please be honest with yourself. If you find that you are in these categories – take the necessary steps to rectify those barriers. If you do not, you will be significantly less likely to complete. Heed the advice of the faculty who are guiding you throughout your doctoral journey. Mentally prepare yourself for disappointments and frustration. Mentally prepare yourself to not graduate when you think you will. Do NOT get angry with your university or chair for delays in the process if you end up taking longer. While I definitely understand (believe me, I finished a year after I had wanted to), it does nothing to get mad at the people that are trying to help you finish. Be as patient as possible and just work hard to get through it.

Academic Quality Review. The AQR process is not standard across all universities. Some have an AQR process (some may call it something else) while others will not. This is separate from your committee and separate from IRB. The AQR process serves as an unbiased peer-reviewer who provides feedback on corrections that are needed or other concerns that may present once the proposal gets to IRB. My university followed a rigorous AQR process, and my proposal process required the approval of the AQR reviewer in order to move ahead to proposal defense and IRB. My chair coordinated with an AQR reviewer to conduct a preliminary review of my proposal. This was invaluable. She gave me information that allowed me to make corrections that saved me at least 4 weeks' worth of time (between submission, review, corrections, and resubmission).

That same reviewer ended up being my assigned AQR reviewer for that round, which made it much smoother. When I submitted, she did give back with changes that were needed, I was not approved that first round. I made the changes, immediately, and resubmitted. I passed the second round with conditions. This meant that, overall, I met all of the requirements; however, I had to make minor corrections that would need to be documented and submitted with my final dissertation. THAT is important – IF your university follows this, or a similar process, and you are REQUIRED to submit the changes with documentation with your final dissertation, make the changes immediately. Then, on a separate document, either make a chart or narrative of the changes that you made, identify where (page numbers) they were made, and any other pertinent information. I promise you, by the time you get to your dissertation defense, you will have forgotten all of the changes. Future you will thank current you for that.

Proposal Defense

Begin to prepare your defense documents. Check with your committee or university for what is required for your proposal defense (if one is required). This defense will help your committee know that you are able to conduct your study and that you are prepared for the data collection and data analysis. This defense is also fantastic practice for your dissertation defense.

There may be a specific template that you will have to follow. The purpose of this is to ensure that your study adheres to the appropriate guidelines of the University and the IRB ethical guidelines. Once you get passed the Proposal Defense, you'll be on to IRB review. You will want to check with your chair as to which information to include, and remember, this is supposed to be a summarization of your proposal. Your committee (or anyone else in the defense committee) will ask you questions pertaining to your proposed study, including your methodology and design. While you don't have to know everything about all methods and designs, you should be knowledgeable about the method and design you will employ. The questions that may be asked can include anything pertaining to your study, so be prepared. These questions aren't meant to stump you or make you feel unqualified. These questions are designed to ensure that you are prepared to conduct your study, that you are knowledgeable about your topic, the research questions, etc. It would be the best idea to reach out to others that have passed this point and ask them for guidance, or even if they'd be willing to do a practice defense with you. This can help you find problem areas or clean up sections that may not be as concise or smooth as you would like. They can also give pointers and feedback on how much information is too much or not enough.

Your Proposal Defense will be a scheduled meeting (either in person or video conference) where ALL members of the defense committee will vote on whether you are ready to move forward to IRB. Show up no less than 5 minutes early if it's an in-person defense, no more than 5 minutes early if it's a video conference. Dress professionally. Feel free to have notecards or something else with notes for yourself. You are, generally, not required to have everything memorized. If a defense committee member asks a question, you are allowed to go back to your notes, or a slide on your PowerPoint (if you're using PowerPoint), or whatever presentation materials you are using. These resources can help you answer the question or respond more completely.

Try not to be nervous. I know, I know, that's easier said than done. But try to be as calm as possible. Your committee is there to help you, not hurt you. Speak clearly. Minimize filler phrases and words. Minimize the use of "uh" and "um" as much as possible. That is hard to do, especially since most people don't know they're doing it. Practice saying words you have difficulty saying. Some people cannot, for the life of them, say phenomenological, others can't say methodological. I struggled with homoscedasticity. I practiced saying that word for about two days prior to my defense. Just know that, as long as YOU did the work, you will be fine.

Chapter 6

Next Steps: Institutional Review Board and Data Collection

Institutional Review Board

Institutional Review Board. By now, hopefully, you will have completed everything you need for IRB submission. Each university will have different processes, as IRB is specific to the university. Follow the procedures, and make sure you have completed everything. IRB ensures that you are conducting research in an ethical manner. You MUST pass IRB in order to collect data. If you are using a survey tool (Qualtrics, SurveyMonkey, etc.) to collect any data, your IRB may require a link to test and to ensure that you have included the Informed Consent Form, and that the tool is set up properly (meaning, if the participant does not agree to the Informed Consent, they will NOT proceed to the survey). Most survey tools have a feature where you can have the survey and link set up, but not be "live" until you select it to do so. Therefore, it would be wise to set up your survey using the survey tool of your choice while you are doing your proposal revisions. This way, when you submit to IRB, this is already completed.

Your IRB reviewer may request additional information, or specific information. There may be specific templates that must be submitted. If IRB sends it back to you, please coordinate with your chair or IRB reviewer to determine what is needed. My own IRB process was not fun. My first IRB reviewer advised that I could not use the demographic questions for one of my variables (this is after my chair, methodologist, and an Academic Quality Reviewer all approved it). So, I removed all but two of the questions for that variable (the two that were absolutely essential for my variable), and resubmitted. After two weeks, I received a call from my chair because IRB wanted me to remove the variable completely. I did respond that I couldn't remove it because the inclusion of that variable was where my defined gap was. If I removed it, I didn't have a study. This is already about 4 weeks after initial submission to IRB. I was basically told I couldn't measure the variable the way that I wrote, and the way that it had been measured in countless other studies (many of which were included in my literature review).

I immediately went to work to try and find another way to measure the variable, as I NEEDED to have it. I spent the next several days searching empirical peer-reviewed journals for any other way, and found a scale that I could use, and searched and discovered that (luckily) permission was not needed for academic research. I then spent the next several days re-writing the corresponding sections in Chapters 1, 2, and 3 to include the new scale. I also added it to my Appendices and was prepared to resubmit with the new revisions, after approval from my chair. I sent it over to her, and the next day I got an email communication from a different IRB reviewer stating that my original demographic questions were approved and I was allowed to proceed with my study – I was approved. Apparently, my very awesome chair took it upon herself (and she really went above and beyond for me here) and requested that her supervisor review my proposal and IRB submission. However, the amount of stress and frustration that I went through up until this point was quite astounding, as you can probably imagine.

But I went ahead and did what was necessary and made the necessary changes, even though the last set ended up being completely tossed out. Just move on when this happens. Ask yourself which hill you're willing to die on. Remind yourself that the goal is to be done.

Once you get your IRB approval, you are officially a Doctoral Candidate! Congratulations!! Now the fun part begins! Go ahead and collect your data. The caveat is if you still need final approvals from your site to collect data. If you do, please follow their protocols and procedures to attain final site authorization.

Data Collection

Now that you have approval to collect data, you can reach out to your potential participants. This is where you will follow what you wrote in your Chapter 3 for data collection. If you are quantitative, you will likely have significantly less work to do at this point, as you will provide the link to the survey to whomever or wherever it needs to be posted and then send reminders out weekly for your designated time period.

If you are qualitative, this will require more work for you. You will have to actively recruit your participants, have them schedule a time to interview them, or schedule multiple people for a focus group, and then conduct the interviews. As a word of caution, I have seen cases where qualitative researchers have taken nearly 10 months to a year to collect enough data! I have also seen cases where qualitative researchers had to go back and interview additional participants because the interviews were not long enough. Please be mindful of these potential issues as the can and will arise throughout your journey if you are a qualitative researcher.

Whichever method you are using, I believe most researchers can agree that this is the fun part. This was my favorite part – collecting and analyzing my data. I really loved being able to see the data coming in and I couldn't wait to see how the data told the story. I was excited to learn if my hypotheses were correct!

One thing I will say is that while you are collecting your data, spend the time to change your proposal into the past tense. This is because now you will have conducted your research. After your data collection period is over (quantitative), or you have collected enough responses (qualitative). You will begin your analysis.

Conducting Data Analysis

Your data analysis is the part that can be quite tedious. The analysis will, again, depend on your method and design. This is where it is imperative that you have the supports and resources from others who have been through this or are currently going through it with you. They can give you crucial information and tips that can make this an easier process.

If you are quantitative, you will have to export your data from your survey tool. I exported mine into Excel for data cleansing. I completed my data cleaning and scoring there. It is imperative that you retain the copy of the raw data as this can (and likely will) be requested for review. I actually kept an Excel spreadsheet with multiple tabs in it – one with the raw, untouched data, one with breaks in the data for the lines where each score was going to be, then one with the scored data, that included the inverted scores in the scales that required them. This way, my reviewer later could see exactly what I had done. I was NOT told to do this. I figured that it would best serve me and my reviewers to have everything laid out and available step-by-step. I did not want ANY unnecessary delays later in the process.

Once my data was cleaned, I exported it into SPSS and coded it there for analysis. Please do NOT get overwhelmed here. If you do not remember or know how to do something, there are countless resources, some free, some paid. There are countless YouTube videos that can walk you through coding your data in SPSS properly. Another resource that I used, that I did pay for a subscription for (and I highly recommend using it if you are not a statistical guru or even an SPSS whiz) is called Laerd Statistics. Laerd Statistics is a website with SPSS tutorials and guides. It will walk you through almost every statistical analysis you would use for your dissertation. This includes any tests of assumptions you will need to complete, and even helps to explain them to you. This can be exceptionally useful as you will have to explain it in your Chapter 4. I will say that I ran my analysis, from start to finish twice to make sure I had done it correctly.

If you are qualitative, you will have to transcribe your interviews. It would be best to do this immediately. Do NOT wait to do them all at once. Especially if you have multiple interviews scheduled for a week. Transcribing a 30-minute interview will take significantly longer than 30 minutes. I’ve had to transcribe 50-minute sessions, it took me easily a couple of hours for each one. You’ll go back and replay a section four or five times to catch what the person said, and this is especially true in a group setting where multiple people may speak simultaneously. There are programs that will do it for you, and the technology is constantly changing. So, I would ask around what the commonly used software is and check for the cost. At the time of this writing, people are using and recommending MAXQDA, but I’ve seen nVivo used – I didn’t like nVivo for thematic analysis, but that could just be me. There are books that align with MAXQDA and are helpful with using that resource.

No matter what methodology you use, you are accountable for your data analysis – please be extremely mindful that you can and will be asked questions and even potentially challenged on your findings. Therefore, it is imperative that you know how your data was analyzed and can speak to it. Be ready to defend your analysis and your interpretation, especially if you’re qualitative. Additionally, now that your data collection and analysis is complete, you must go back to your proposal and make the changes as needed (in Chapters 1 and 3). It is imperative that you make these corrections, as it is necessary for you to proceed through the remainder of the dissertation process.

Completing Your Dissertation

Writing Chapter 4

Introduction. When you have hit this point, you have finally reached the really fun part – this is where you will get to write your analysis and provide the results that you have worked so diligently to obtain. Your introduction should be no less than two to four paragraphs, or roughly one page. Here is where you will need to be mindful of your tense – everything you have already completed should be in the past tense. You will need to reintroduce the purpose of your research. Use your purpose statement from your proposal. This means that instead of saying “the purpose of this __ study is…” you will write “the purpose of this __ study was…”. You will briefly describe your methodology, research question(s), and any hypotheses (if applicable). I provided three sentences regarding my methodology and design. I then copied and pasted my research questions and hypotheses from my proposal into my introduction. I then discussed my variables and the corresponding instrument used. It would be wise to include a table with your variables and their corresponding instruments that were used to test for them. You will also provide a statement of what Chapter 4 will cover (this statement will be present tense: “Chapter 4 summarizes/outlines…”). I provided three such statements, as Chapter 4 covers quite a bit of information. Further, you MUST go back throughout your proposal and update the data (such as sample size) and any methodology that was used. Anything that was dependent on the results of your data collection and analysis needs to be updated to reflect the information.

Descriptive Findings. Your descriptive findings section does not have a minimum length requirement, but there are certain components you will need to ensure that you have adequately addressed. In the descriptive findings section, you will be providing a narrative summary about the demographics or characteristics of your sample. First, you will provide a brief introductory paragraph that introduces your data collection method (i.e. convenience sampling, purposive sampling, snowball method, etc.), you should provide your final sample size before proceeding to the descriptive data.

For quantitative researchers, you will present the statistics you gathered about your sample. If you did not meet your minimum sample size from your *a priori* G*Power analysis you conducted for your proposal, you will need to discuss the consequences of failing to meet your sample size. This can include limitations, change of statistical analysis, or even change of design. For example, I included a subsection in my chapter, called “Sample profile”. I broke it down further into other subsections – gender and age, race and ethnicity, marital status and dependents, education level, and employment status and hours worked per week. I provided the narrative, with actual numbers and the corresponding percentages. I also provided corresponding tables for each. Please be mindful of your institution’s requirements for table formatting. This will be incredibly important for your form and formatting.

You will then include a chapter 4 subsection titled “Descriptive statistics for variables of interest”. If you used composite continuous variables, reliability coefficients computed will need to be included before the descriptive statistics. They have to be compared with coefficients reported by the instrument authors and prior users. Low reliability may require you to change your design and analysis. If you have to change your statistical analysis you will need to present the new analysis and justify why the change was needed. Again, Laerd Statistics can help you with this. Within this subsection, you should briefly discuss the instrumentation used, including how many items are in each instrument and how each item in the instrument is assessed (i.e. using a five-point Likert scale). You will then proceed with the tables and the corresponding descriptive data for your variables. You will, again, provide the narrative, then the table. You should also include normality of distributions, which should include skewness and kurtosis statistics of your variable data.

For qualitative researchers, you will present the sample profile, and provide statistics for any demographic data you collected or retrieved. Your first paragraph should detail how many participants were included, and their demographic composition. Provide the account of what kind of interviews and questions you conducted (i.e. semi-structured interview with open-ended questions). State how you collected the data and that they were recorded. Provide information about the raw data collected and how this raw data is appropriate for responding to your research question(s). Use citations. If you do not collect demographic data, you must state why and include citations to support this. You should provide the narrative summary of interview times, minimum and maximum interview length, average, and total combined interview times. Include the number of transcribed pages and specify that the font and spacing (e.g. double-spaced, 12-point font, Times New Roman). Include a table that illustrates the information for the interviews and volume of text. Additionally, the summary of data collected should be included in your Appendices.

Regardless of methodology, you should be including visual graphic organizers (i.e. tables, charts, histograms, etc.) to organize and display your coded data and descriptive data. As previously discussed, if you are quantitative, this should include tests of assumptions, such as skewness and kurtosis and homogeneity of variance. If you had to use nonparametric procedures, this must be justified here. For qualitative, as previously discussed, your table needs to include the applicable information (i.e. number of interviews conducted, duration of each, number of transcript pages, number of observations conducted, duration, number of pages of typed field notes, number of code occurrences, network diagrams, model created, etc.).

Data Analysis Procedures. The data analysis procedures section does not have a minimum page requirement. This section serves to provide a description of the process you used to analyze your data. If you used research questions and/or hypotheses, it is recommended that you use those to frame your data analysis procedures around each. I would recommend doing this, as it makes it significantly easier for your reviewer to read and understand what was done and how it responds to each research question and corresponding hypothesis. If you are qualitative, you can choose to organize this section by chronology of phenomenon, by themes and patterns, or by another approach that would be appropriate based on your design. The idea is to make it easy to read and understand by others.

If you are qualitative, you must bear in mind that your coding procedure is determined by your design. First, you should identify and describe your analytical approach. Second, describe your coding process, description of how you developed the codes, categories, and how they are related to your themes. You will need to provide examples of your codes and themes with quotations. This will serve to demonstrate how your codes were developed into themes. You will also need to include evidence of your initial and final codes and themes in text and/or in your Appendix. If you had to change your analysis method from what was approved in Chapter 3, you must explain and justify the reasoning.

Qualitative researchers must also describe the approach used to ensure validity and reliability for your data. This may include expert panels review of questions, practice interviews, member checking, and triangulation of data. You must identify and discuss any sources of error, missing data, or outliers and the potential effects and/or limitations on the data. If you ran any statistical tests, you must provide Power Analysis and Tests of Assumptions, as appropriate. You will further have to justify how the analysis aligns with the research question(s). As well as providing how data and findings were organized (i.e. chronology of phenomena, themes and patterns, etc.).

If you are quantitative, you must include the data preparation first. You should begin with a discussion of what software you used to analyze your data, that you conducted data screening and data cleaning. Provide a statement that you used descriptive statistics to explore and summarize the data, including reliability, tests of assumptions, and inferential statistical procedures.

You should include the subsections of data screening and cleaning, validity and reliability, tests of assumptions, power analysis, and alignment. These tests may vary depending on your design and analysis. If you retained any values as missing, you must provide justification as to why. For example, I left certain demographic data as missing and conducted the analyses with the missing data. This was because the absence of the response to a factor, such as gender, was not an essential component to my analysis. If you were able to run the analysis as planned, then you must present the statistical procedures per research question. If you had to change the analysis, you will present the results of the new analysis per research question. You should not include any analyses that are unrelated to your research questions.

Any changes to your design must have been justified (as previously recommended). Ensure that you have provided validity and reliability statistics for your results. Identify any incidents of error, missing data, or and/outliers and the potential effects and/or limitations on your study results. You must include a *post hoc* Power Analysis and appropriate Tests of Assumptions. Include any charts, graphs, histograms, tables, and any other visuals to enhance understanding and readability of your data. You must provide the justification for how your analysis aligns with each research question and corresponding hypotheses and how it is appropriate for you research design.

Results. The results section, again, has no minimum page requirement. It is important to note that this is the primary section of Chapter 4 as it presents the data in a non-evaluative, unbiased, organized way relating to each research question and/or hypothesis. You must list each research question as you address each one to inform the reader what you are doing. List the research question(s) in the order as they are in preceding chapters. For qualitative researchers, you should organize your data by theme, participant and/or research question(s).

Qualitative researchers must present results of analysis in appropriate narrative, tabular, graphical and/or visual format. If you used thematic analysis, coding and theming process must be described completely. Integration of quotes must be used to substantiate stated findings and build the narrative picture. For narrative analysis, a narrative story must be included. For case studies, a case study summary must be included. Finally, for a grounded theory, a model or theory must be present. You must present any thematic findings in your own words in the narrative form as if you are telling the story/summarizing the experience, then use select quotes, usually one or a few sentences not to exceed a paragraph. Again, include tables for initial codes, themes and meanings, as well as sample quotes. You must provide sufficient data or information (quantity and quality) for the research question(s), as appropriate per your design. Include evidence in your Appendix as well as in this section.

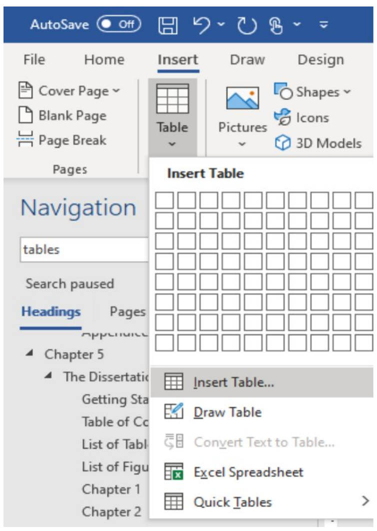
It is imperative that you fully describe and display your data analysis per your design and analytic method. Your data set should be summarized to include the count and example of responses, matrices, or other visual format as appropriate per your design. Any outliers should be described and explained as appropriate. Further, your findings should be reported in a manner appropriate for your design (thematic analysis use section titles, narrative designs use stories, grounded theory uses models or theories, and case studies use visual models or narrative stories.

For quantitative researchers, this section needs to be organized by research question and corresponding hypotheses. Findings need to be presented by hypothesis and section titles should be used. The results are presented in order of significance. You will need to present the results of your statistical analyses with appropriate format and include tables, graphs, and charts. Specifically, descriptive statistics, assumptions checks, and end results need tables and/or figures. You must also discuss the quantity in relation to sample/population size and quality in relation to sampling method, data collection process, and data completion/accuracy. Bear in mind that your committee or university reviewer reserves the right to ask for the raw data. Should the reviewer determine data collected is insufficient, you may be required to collect additional data.

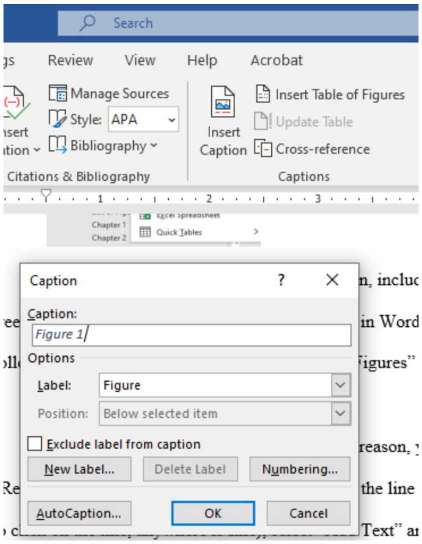
You must include inferential statistics. This includes the required tests of normality, tests of assumptions, statistical analyses and *p*-values (significance level) reported for each hypothesis. The treatment of any missing values and/or outliers must be fully described. If you had control variables, these should be reported and discussed. Any data outputs that you collect in SPSS (or other statistical program) should be included in your appendices. Some universities will have the caveat that this is unnecessary if it is included in your Chapter 4; however, I would err on the side of caution and include it in both places. You can always remove later if advised to.

**If you are running a multiple linear regression, SPSS will provide the correlational data in the aggregate data output. However, SPSS will NOT flag the significant correlational levels in this output. So, if you want to have a quick visual way to know, you can run each Pearson Correlational analysis on your data to have SPSS flag the significant values. This may also serve as a great way to double check the data output for accuracy as the output data (e.g. numerical values) should not change.

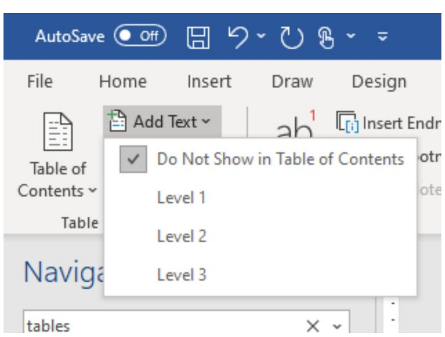
Some helpful hints: When including your tables, it is advisable to keep the font at a size 10 font (APA recommends between 8-12). Any table you include MUST fit on one page. You cannot have a table that is broken between pages. It is recommended to use the “Insert Table” selection from the “Table” dropdown in order to ensure that the table appears in your “List of Tables”. Again, look to other dissertations published by your university for more guidance on their expectations.



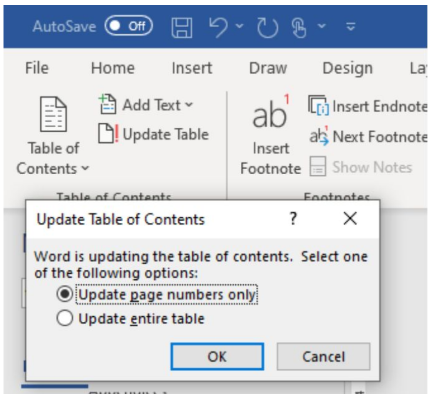
When including a figure in your dissertation, include a clean, clear pdf/screenshot that is free of errors. You will go to the “References” tab in Word and select “Insert Caption” and follow the prompts. This will enable the “List of Figures” to populate correctly as you go.



If your headers become messed up for any reason, you can correct them in the “References” tab in Word. You need to make sure the line that is incorrect is selected (make sure to click on the line, anywhere is fine), select “Add Text” and select one of the options. The most common error is that a header line is automatically generated and needs to be removed. Simply click on the line, even if it’s blank, and select “Do Not Show in Table of Contents” and it will be removed.



Any time you make changes to your Table of Contents, List of Tables, or List of Figures, you will need to update the appropriate table. To update the Table of Contents, you can select “Update Table” from the “References” tab and select whether to update just the page numbers (note: this will NOT update the table to include or remove any headers) or to update the entire table (this WILL update the table to include or remove any headers).



You can also update the Table of Contents by going directly to the TOC and right-clicking once in the table and selecting the “Update Table” option from the dropdown. This option is how I typically updated my TOC, List of Tables, and List of Figures to ensure nothing was wrong within each. One common error occurs within the Table of Contents with the “References” header. It may appear as “References187” (or whatever your page number is). When that occurs, click on the word “References” in the actual Table of Contents, go the end of the word, between the word and the numbers, and click the “tab” button on your keyboard. That should solve the problem.

Summary. Your summary of Chapter 4 should be a minimum of one to two pages and should provide a concise summary of what your study found. This should briefly restate the essential data and analysis presented, helping the reader understand the relevance of the data and analysis as it pertains to the research questions and/or hypotheses. All research presented needs to be based on scholarly, topic-related and obtained from respected academic, professional, original sources. In-text citations should be accurate and included in the reference page.

Qualitative researchers will need to summarize the data and analysis in relation to the research and across the research question(s). Quantitative researchers will need to summarize the statistical data and results for each research question and hypothesis. You must briefly discuss the limitations and how data interpretation may be affected (these also need to be added into your Chapters 1, 3, and 5 as appropriate). You should also include a concluding section that provides a transition to Chapter 5.

Writing Chapter 5

Introduction and Summary of Study. This section introduces your Chapter 5, your final Chapter! Feel free to give yourself a pat on the back and know that you are really almost done.

This section will introduce your chapter and remind the reader of the importance of your topic and how the study intended to contribute to the existing knowledge on the topic. This section will inform the reader that the conclusions, implications, and recommendations will be presented. This section should be no less than two to four paragraphs, or one page.

You will need to provide a comprehensive summary of the framework of your study while reminding the reader of the research questions and how the reported data align to answering them. You will need to provide an overview of the importance of the study and how the study design contributes to the understanding of the topic. You must include an explanation of what will be discussed in the chapter while reminding the reader of how the study was conducted.

Summary of Findings and Conclusions. This section needs to be no less than three to five pages and is organized with the same section titles as Chapter 4. Significant themes or findings are compared. They should further be synthesized and discussed considering the existing body of knowledge as reported in Chapter 2. You will summarize the findings providing a logical and comprehensive discussion on the alignment to the topic and/or advances to the research. You need to illustrate that the findings are bound by the research design presented in your Chapters 1, 2, and 3. You must also illustrate how said findings are supported by the data and theory and how the align to respond to the research question(s). Discuss significance or non-significance of findings and how they relate to the Significance of the Study and Advancing Scientific Knowledge sections from your Chapter 1. You need to refrain from including unrelated or speculative information. You must provide a conclusion summary of the findings that directly referring back to Chapter 1, serving to tie your study together.

Implications. This section gives you the opportunity to describe what could happen as a result of this study. This further implies theoretical, practical, and future research. This section should be no less than one to four pages. You should organize this section by Theoretical Implications, Practical Implications, Future Implications, and Strength and Weaknesses of the Study.

The theoretical implications section needs to provide an examination of the theoretical foundation that you used for your study. You need to provide how your study contributes to the theoretical foundation and specify how the application of theoretical foundation can be furthered by your study. If you used more than one theoretical foundation (this may occur in quantitative studies), you will need to really isolate one and articulate how your study can inform future use of that theory.

The practical and future implications sections serve to connect the findings to prior research while developing practical and future opportunities to apply the information from the results in research or in practice. You should include at least one paragraph for each section and provide in-text citations for support within the practical implications subsection. Within the practical implications section, you will want to identify what your study supported or didn’t support that is significant and how organizations or people can use that information to make improvements. The future implications should make recommendations regarding future research based on your findings and any limitations within your results.

The strengths and weaknesses should indicate all the limitations of your study (i.e. failure to meet minimum sample size, homogeneity of sample, etc.). You are to critically evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of your study. You need to provide how credible your conclusions are based on the methodology, design, and analysis and results. It may be beneficial to write a paragraph on the strengths, a paragraph on the weaknesses, and a paragraph on the limitations.

Recommendations for Future Research. In this section you are to provide between four to six recommendations for future research. In this, you will identify and discuss the areas that further research is warranted. This may be through the use of another theory. Additionally, you will want to identify any gaps or needs you found in your study, and these can be provided as areas for future research. These recommendations should relate back to the significance of the study, advancing scientific knowledge, and the theoretical foundation sections in your proposal. Be specific about the gap you found and one potential way to research that and how that may contribute to research on the topic.

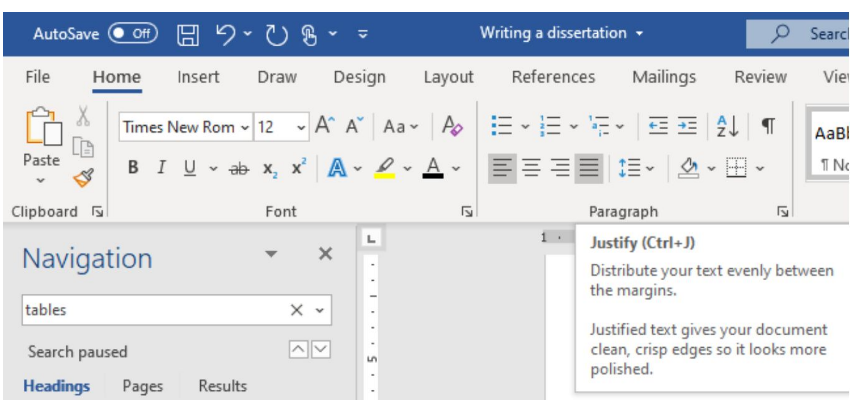
Recommendations for Future Practice. In this section, you will need to list between two to five recommendations for future practice. Include who will benefit from reading and implementing the results of your study, and discuss ideas based on the results that professionals can implement in their field. Be careful not to include anything that is unrelated or speculative. Further, you will need to ensure that you do not include anything that is not supported by data. All research you present in this section is scholarly, topic-related, and from academic, peer-reviewed journals. You may find yourself conducting some additional research here to support your recommendations. Please ensure that any research you include here is current (within the last 5 years is a great recommendation, within the last 2 years would be ideal). You will need to provide recommendations as they relate to the significance of the study section in Chapter 1.

References

Your reference list will be exhaustive. It is imperative that you ensure it is accurate. It must be in proper APA format. It must be alphabetized. It must not contain any errors. That's the bad news. The good news is that there is a valuable free (at the time of this writing) resource to assist with this. Reciteworks.com is an incredibly useful resource to assist you with ensuring there are no errors in your reference list OR throughout your dissertation with in-text citations. Make sure you put your dissertation through that, or another similar program, to ensure no errors. A few notes here – any author whose name includes non-English characters (i.e. á, è, ñ, ö, œ, etc.) must have their name correctly included in your reference list and throughout in your citations. Reciteworks is also fallible; furthermore, it is up to you to make sure that any errors it identifies you examine each one and ensure accuracy.

Abstract

Once you are done writing your dissertation and have completed your reference check, you get to write your Abstract! Your abstract is to be NO MORE THAN 250 words and CANNOT exceed 1 page. This includes your Keywords (yes, you must include keywords). This is the most frustrating part. You will need to include all pertinent information regarding your study. This includes your Purpose Statement, Theoretical Foundation, Research Questions in narrative form, sample, location, methodology, design, data sources, data analysis, results, and valid conclusion. This is fully justified. To ensure that the justification for the Abstract is correct, you can click in the Abstract and use the Keyboard combination "Ctrl+J" or use the appropriate selection from the "Home" tab in Word (see below).



Yes, it is challenging. Yes, you will do it.

Dedication

This page is an optional page where you can dedicate your work to a person, group of people, or whoever or whatever you would like. This is usually less than five sentences.

Acknowledgement

This section is also optional; however, it gives you the opportunity to thank those who have helped you along the way. This should include your committee members, any mentors, advisors, or even classmates who really stood out and helped you along the way. You should also include anyone who gave you permission to use their instruments (if you’re quantitative) and for answering any questions. Most people also thank their family and close friends (where appropriate) for their support. This is really the time to think of and write a personalized “thank you” to each person. They’ve been there throughout your journey, helping you; this is one small token to show your appreciation.

Dissertation Defense

Congratulations!! You have completely written your dissertation! You are done! I’m kidding. You will have to submit your dissertation manuscript to your committee for approval and make any changes and/or edits as needed. Additionally, you will be looking to conduct your defense. This will be similar to your Proposal Defense. There may be a separate template you have to follow for your Dissertation Defense, which will ensure that you include the necessary information. It may be in-person or via a video conference. Please make sure to follow all proper protocols.

Again, try not to be nervous. I know you will be anyway, but, I promise, you will do amazing! Remember, you don’t need to remember every little detail about your dissertation, but you should be well versed to answer questions on the fly. Yes, you may have a committee member throw you a couple of questions that you are unprepared for, or you may prepare to answer questions you THINK will be asked, and they won’t. It really depends on your committee. But these people have guided you this entire way, they aren’t there to watch you fail. You will be fine.

Wrapping Up

Once that whole god-awful process is over, you will have a few other things to resolve. These may include things like ensuring your dissertation is properly formatted for publication, having it sent for the Dean's read and signature, and closing out your study in IRB. Once these are completed, you will send your manuscript (a clean copy, free of any comments or markings) for publication. Mine went to ProQuest. Yes, there is a process for that. Yes, it costs money. You have the option here to purchase a physical copy of your dissertation. Spend the money on it. It may take 6-8 weeks for publication to be final, be patient.

Finally, congratulations Doctor!! You made it!

Appendix A. Annotated Bibliography Examples

Mazerolle, S.M. & Goodman, A. (2013). Fulfillment of work-life balance from the organizational perspective: A case study. *Journal of Athletic Training, 48*(5), 668-677. Retrieved from https://lopes.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login. aspx?direct=true&db=s3h&AN=90429836&site=eds-live&scope=site

Mazerolle and Goodman (2013) utilized a qualitative study to research work-life balance in a family-friendly work environment. The purpose of the study was to investigate the factors that influences work-life balance from the perspective of an athletic training staff. The research indicated that factors, including, organizational structure, flex-time, and on-site childcare, assist in reducing potential work-life conflict. The authors developed a descriptive, single-case study design to explore the role of organizational structure and culture on the successful balance between professional and personal lives. The participants involved in the study included a total of eight athletic trainers (five men, three women) with an average age of 38. Each member had been certified for an average of 16 years and employed at the university for an average of 11 years.

The authors conducted two separate questionnaires and these were divided into two sections: initial demographic information and open-ended questions designed to investigate organizational structure, workplace policies, and personal strategies employed to promote a positive work-life balance. A data triangulation, multiple-analyst triangulation, and peer review were utilized to ensure data trustworthiness. Based on the results found, the themes of family-oriented and supportive work environment, nonwork outlets, and individualistic strategies emerged. The results from the participants support the need for productive teamwork, support networks, and a positive supervisor; however, it was noted that the data supported the need for individualized plans for fulfillment of these factors. This illustrates that there is not a one-size-fits-all approach in determining life satisfaction or job satisfaction.

Tait, M., Padgett, M.Y., & Baldwin, T.T. (1988). Job and life satisfaction: A reevaluation of the strength of the relationship and gender effects as a function of the date of the study.

Journal of Applied Psychology, 74(3), 502-507. Retrieved from https://lopes.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=bth&AN=5112904&site=eds-live&scope=site

Tait, Padgett, and Baldwin (1989) presented a reevaluation of the assessment of the relationship between job and life satisfaction based on gender. The article sought to reevaluate the magnitude of influence between job satisfaction and life satisfaction. The authors sought to address the inconsistent findings regarding the relationship job and life satisfaction while considering the changing workforce with greater numbers of women in gainful employment positions. The authors used a meta-analysis to analyze information gleaned from available literature. They used 22 journals from the years of 1955 to the early 1980s. Through the research, the authors used 57 correlations with a sample size of 19,811.

The authors used the year of 1974 to compare the pre- and post- results as there had been a significant shift in the workforce by that time, and the authors noted that in 1974, much of the research illustrated an approximate equal number of men and women in the workforce after that time. The authors confirmed that a relationship between the two constructs, job and life satisfaction, exists; however, they were unable to determine the cause of this relationship. The authors further found that this relationship was greater for men than women in the pre-1974 sample; however, in the post-1974 sample, this effect had disappeared. The authors contended that further research is needed to determine the causes of this relationship.

Appendix B. Literature Review Examples

Quantitative Example:

Mazerolle and Goodman (2013) investigated factors that influence work/life balance from the perspective of an athletic training staff. Factors such as organizational structure, flextime, and on-site childcare were implicated in reducing work/life conflict. A descriptive, single-case study design was used to explore the perception of organizational structure and culture on successful balance between professional and personal lives. There were eight participants, with an average age of 38 and had an average of 11 years tenure at the university. The themes of family-oriented and supportive work environment, nonwork outlets, and individualistic strategies were found. The results indicated that individualized plans for work/life balance were needed and there is no one-size-fits-all plan that will work with everyone.

Qualitative Example:

Pollock, Noser, Holden, and Zeigler-Hill (2016) explored the observed phenomena that some people experience higher levels of subjective well-being than others do. Three constructs of subjective well-being were measured: life satisfaction, positive affect, and negative affect. This was explored through the examination of personality traits in conjunction with factors that contribute to well-being (physical health, social relationships, goal fulfillment, social contact, wealth, self-esteem, and longevity) and the cognitive strategies used to seek happiness (pleasure, engagement, and meaning). A sample of 153 participants completed the HEXACO-60, Orientations to Happiness Questionnaire, Satisfaction with Life Scale, and the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule. The results supported the importance of cognitive strategies to seek happiness on subjective well-being. The relationship between extraversion and positive affect was partially mediated by meaning, pleasure, and engagement. The findings suggest that cognitive mechanisms may contribute to higher responsivity to positive stimuli in persons with higher levels of extraversion. These results indicate that there are many components to life satisfaction that are needed to be considered when exploring life satisfaction, even when personality traits are included.

Appendix C. Instrumentation Overview in Literature Review Sample

Shukla and Srivastava (2016) to identify and measure psychosocial stressors that affect a modern workforce developed the New Job Stress Scale. This scale identifies nine common stressors that are reported by employees: job characteristics, organizational structure, climate and information flow, role conflict, coworker support, and work/life balance. Therefore, this scale serves to measure psychosocial work environment and related stress. The New Job Stress Scale consists of five subscales with a total of 22 items to measure time stress, anxiety, role expectation conflict, coworker support, and work/life balance. Cronbach's α was .81, supporting internal consistency reliability. Test-retest reliability was supported by an intra-class correlation coefficient of greater than .50 for all scales. Construct validity was supported via exploratory factor analysis, with scores ranging from .60 to .88, with five factors accounting for 78.4% of total variance (Shukla & Srivastava, 2016). This scale provides the opportunity to better understand the dimensions and factors that contribute to work/life balance issues and provides insight into how the factors contribute to challenges faced with overall balance and stress related to work. For the purpose of this study, the individual evaluations of multiple components of overall job stress is not appropriate as this study is examining work/life balance.

Finally, the most commonly used instrument in the research presented in the review of the literature is the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS). The PSS is a self-reported questionnaire that serves to measure the degree that people believe events to be stressful. There are three versions of the PSS, a 14-item scale, a 10-item scale, and a 4-item scale, each version having been translated into 25 languages other than English (Lee, 2012). Cronbach's α was consistently found to be >.70 for the PSS-14 and the PSS-10; however, it was inconsistent in regard to the PSS-4. This shows that internal consistency for both the PSS-14 and PSS 10 as established, while the PSS-4 was marginally acceptable (Lee, 2012). The PSS demonstrates a satisfactory correlation with depression and anxiety, an overlap that is known as these can often coexist. Furthermore, the PSS has been shown to be a short and easy method to measure perceived stress, with the PSS-10 proving to be the most effective version of the three (Lee, 2012).