

Doctoral Dissertation Chapters*

It is important that each doctoral student meet with his or her committee to discuss the doctoral student's dissertation research. When doing this, it is important for the student to have a guide for writing the three-chapter proposal that must be submitted and approved before the final two chapters are written.

Consequently, the attached outline should serve as a guide for writing a brief synopsis of the first three chapters. The attached guide includes chapters four and five, but it is not necessary for that information to be included in the subsequent research proposal. Keep in mind that YOUR outline may look slightly different because no two dissertations are exactly alike. Your outline serves as a general guide and checklist of components that should be used when speaking with your committee.

After you have met with your dissertation committee and made any revisions, you are eligible to complete and submit the Proposal Research Application. Upon approval of your Proposal Research Application, complete the proposal – chapters one through three – and with committee approval, submit the proposal to the doctoral office for review by an outside reader.

If you have any questions, please contact the doctoral office.

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CHAPTER I: Introduction to the Study

This chapter makes a case for the significance of the problem, contextualizes the study, and provides an introduction to its basic components.

- Introduction: Overview of purpose and focus of the study, why it is significant, how it was conducted, and how it will contribute to professional knowledge and practice.
- Problem Statement: Describes the issue or problem to be studied and situates it in a broader educational or social context at the state, regional, or national levels.
- Purpose and Significance: Describes study purpose in a logical, explicit manner. Provides full rationale for why study is important and how it will contribute to professional knowledge and practice.
- Research Question(s) and Hypotheses (if relevant): Lists research questions, briefly describes variables (if relevant).
- Limitations and Delimitations: Identifies potential weaknesses of the study and the scope of the study.
- Researcher Assumptions: Reflects important issues surrounding the topic that the researcher believes to be true as the research begins.
- Definition of Terms: Defines/explains key terms used in the study that do not have a commonly understood meaning.
- Summary: Ties together all the elements presented in the chapter and delineates the contents of the remaining chapters in the Dissertation.

CHAPTER II: Review of the Literature

This chapter situates the study in the context of previous research, presents a critical synthesis of empirical literature according to relevant themes or variables, justifies how the study addresses a gap or problem in the literature, and outlines the theoretical or conceptual framework of the study.

- Introduction: Describes the content, scope, and organization of the review as well as the strategy used in the literature search.
- Review of Literature:
 - Clearly related to the problem statement, research questions and/or hypotheses.
 - Reviews primary sources that are mostly recent empirical studies from scholarly journals.
 - Logically organized by theme, subtopic, or variable from broad to narrow (funnel design).

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- Synthesizes findings across studies; compares/contrasts different research outcomes, perspectives, or methods.
- Notes gaps, debates, or shortcomings in the literature and provides a rationale for the study.
- Theoretical/Conceptual Framework: Outlines theory that is tested in study or conceptual framework that informs the study.
- Summary

CHAPTER III: Methodology

This chapter situates the study in a particular methodological tradition, provides a rationale for that approach, describes the research setting and sample, and describes data collection and analysis methods.

- Introduction: Restates research questions, hypotheses, and variables (if relevant). Describes organization of chapter.
- Research Design: Describes research approach used with rationale for its suitability for addressing the research questions, citing appropriate methodological literature.
- Research Setting/Context: Describes and justifies selection of the research setting, with background information on program, school, district, or community college, such as demographics and student achievement data.
- Research Sample and Data Sources:
 - Explains and justifies type of sample used and how participants were selected (including population, sampling frame, and sampling procedures for quantitative or mixed methods studies).
 - Describes characteristics and size of sample (quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods) and/or data set (quantitative/mixed methods only, if applicable).
 - Describes how the rights of participants were protected, with reference to conventions of research ethics and the IRB process.
- Instruments and Procedures:
 - Quantitative and Mixed Methods: Describes and justifies type of instrument(s), gives name/source if “off the shelf”, explains concepts measured, calculation of scores/values, pilot test if applicable, and instrument reliability and validity, with reference to appendices.
 - Qualitative: Describes and justifies any instruments used, such as interview, focus group or observation protocols, with reference to appendices.
- Treatment (if applicable): If a treatment is used, it is described clearly and in detail.
- Data Collection: Describes and justifies data collection methods and procedures, including how, when, where, and by whom data were collected.

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- **Data Analysis:** Describes and justifies methods and statistical tools (if applicable) used for analysis. Discusses measures taken to enhance study validity. Summarizes results of pilot studies, if applicable.
- **Role of the Researcher:** Explains the role of the researcher in planning and conducting the study; makes explicit relevant researcher assumptions, beliefs, and biases (if applicable).
- **Summary:** Highlights all the important points in the chapter.

CHAPTER IV: Results (quantitative and mixed methods) or Findings (qualitative)

This chapter organizes and reports the study's main results or findings, including the presentation of relevant quantitative (statistical) and/or qualitative (narrative) data.

- **Introduction:** Provides a brief summary of and rationale for how data were analyzed. Describes organization of chapter according to research questions/hypotheses, theoretical/conceptual framework, or thematic scheme.
- **Quantitative:**
 - Measures obtained are reported clearly and accurately, following standard procedures.
 - Descriptive statistics are provided on the study sample and results prior to presenting further statistical analysis. Where appropriate, outcomes of hypothesis-testing procedures are clearly reported.
 - Results are presented in a logical manner in both statistical form (through tables and figures) and narrative form that reports and explains the statistical results. Some tables and figures may be deferred to the appendices.
 - Headings are used to guide the reader through the results according to research questions, variables, or other appropriate organizational scheme.
- **Qualitative:**
 - Findings build logically from the problem, research questions, and design.
 - Findings are presented in clear narrative form using plentiful quotes, stories, and “thick description”. Narrative data are connected and synthesized through substantive explanatory text and visual displays (charts), if applicable, not simply compiled.
 - Headings are used to guide the reader through the results according to research questions, themes, or other appropriate organizational scheme.
- **Inconsistent, discrepant, or unexpected data** are noted with discussion of possible alternative explanations.
- **Summary**

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CHAPTER V: Discussion and Conclusions

This chapter interprets and discusses the results in light of the study's research questions, literature review, and conceptual framework, concluding with recommendations for policy and practice, such as action planning for educational improvement.

- **Introduction:** Provides an overview of the chapter's organization and content.
- **Summary of the Study:** Provides a “stand alone” description of the study to include a brief overview of the problem, purpose statement, research questions/hypotheses, methodology, and summary of major findings, with an emphasis on answering the research questions.
- **Discussion:** Provides an in-depth interpretation, analysis, and synthesis of the results/findings.
 - Relates the results/findings to the larger body of literature and the conceptual/theoretical framework from Chapter II, as well as interpretive themes or patterns that emerged from analysis (qualitative). Reflects on study's contribution to the field.
 - Restates the study's limitations and discusses generalizability of the findings to broader populations or other settings and conditions (if applicable).
- **Implications for Policy and Practice:** Recommendations for change in educational policy and practice based on the results/findings. Recommendations for specific action planning and next steps, if applicable.
- **Recommendations for Future Research:** Describes topics that may need closer examination and may generate a new round of research questions for further study.
- **Concluding Statement:** Ends the Dissertation with strong, clear, concise “take-away message” for the reader.

*Compilation from various universities and textbooks