

Dissertation Format

A dissertation may take one of two formats. The first, the *traditional format*, has at least four sections, including at least five chapters (see table). The second option is the *manuscript format*, which has at least four sections (see table). The manuscript option also requires the student's committee to approve the refereed journals that will be targeted for submission and the number of manuscripts that will be included in the dissertation. If you choose this option, the faculty prefer that one paper be accepted by a peer-reviewed journal, and the other one or two are submitted to peer-reviewed journals by the time you graduate. However, if your dissertation only results in two publishable manuscripts, this is also acceptable if approved by the student's doctoral committee.

Table 1 shows requirements for the traditional format dissertation.

Table 1.		
Part	Chapter	Content
I		<u>Preliminary Pages</u>
		Title Page
		Note to Reader (if applicable)
		Dedication (optional page)
		Acknowledgments (optional page)
		Table of Contents (with pagination)
		List of Tables (if applicable)
		List of Figures (if applicable)
		Abstract
II		Main Text
	1	Introduction
	2	Literature Review
	3	Methods
	4	Results
	5	Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations
III		References/ Bibliography

		Appendices Title Page
		Appendix Sections (i.e., instruments, etc; if applicable)
IV		About the Author (required)

Table 2 shows requirements for the manuscript format dissertation.

Part	Section	Content
I		<u>Preliminary Pages</u>
		Title Page
		Note to Reader (if applicable)
		Dedication (optional page)
		Acknowledgments (optional page)
		Table of Contents
		List of Tables (if applicable)
		List of Figures (if applicable)
		Abstract
II		Main Text
	1	Introduction (including theoretical framework if relevant)
	2	First manuscript
	3	Second manuscript
	4	Third manuscript
	5	Conclusions and recommendations
III		References/ Bibliography (comprehensive list)
		Appendices Title Page
		Appendix Sections (this section <u>must</u> include a literature review,

		and may include instruments, etc.)
IV		About the Author (required)

Writing the Dissertation –Traditional Format

The Ph.D. candidate, with the approval of the doctoral committee, will agree upon a dissertation topic and develop a proposal, consisting of three chapters: Introduction/Statement of the Problem, Review of the Literature, and Methods. The remaining chapters will be completed before the defense of the doctoral dissertation.

Chapter 1. Introduction and Statement of the Problem

The Introduction should describe the nature and purpose of the study, and explain the significance of and justification for conducting the study. This chapter should also present the *specific aims and hypotheses* to be addressed by the dissertation project, clearly relating these to lines of investigation and in the context of the current literature. A page detailing all annotations made in the dissertation should be placed at the end of the Introduction as its own separate page(s) ("Annotations").

Chapter 2. Review of the Literature

Literature reviews should be thorough and systematic. Chapter 2 presents a *critical* analysis of prior scholarship related to the central questions of the dissertation. Although the degree of completion of the literature review at the proposal stage is a matter of deliberation with the committee, in most cases it is important that the literature review in a proposal:

1. Demonstrates a thorough understanding of the subject of the dissertation, through review and analysis of previous research;
2. Identifies chief researchers and documents in the community of scholars to which the dissertation is meant to contribute;
3. Identifies areas of consensus, dispute, and lack of knowledge in the scholarship of the field and evaluates the nature and quality of support for various contentions;
4. Draws new insights or new questions from the literature to offer a conceptual or theoretical framework in which the dissertation should be understood; and
5. Examines and weighs previous and potential methods for investigating the hypotheses or research questions to be addressed in the dissertation.
6. Prepares the reader to appreciate how the dissertation will contribute significant new understanding to this framework.

*Note: Citation of and specific credit to relevant earlier works is part of the author's scientific and scholarly responsibility. The review should focus only on literature and conclusions directly pertinent to the subject and the problem addressed in the dissertation.

Chapter 3. Methods

This chapter is typically divided into labeled subsections. Subsections specific to epidemiologic work include (but are not limited to): Study population, Case ascertainment and control ascertainment (or identification and enumeration of the cohort), exposure ascertainment (including instruments used with citations), assessment of confounders and potential effect-modifiers, Data Collection and Statistical Analyses (often with subsections).

Written tense should be appropriate to the situation—since the dissertation is a report of work done, it will usually be in the past tense.

- Study population (Subjects and setting): The characteristics of participants of the study, how they were selected, and the setting of the study should be presented in detail.
- Exposure ascertainment and Instrumentation: Any tools or instruments that might be important for readers to understand (such as, assessment instruments, surveys, interview formats, observation protocols, and data collection devices), should be described in detail. If subjects interacted with special equipment or software, or other materials, a detailed description is essential.
- Data collection procedures: The readers should be given a thorough description of all the steps involved in data collection. Timelines are helpful, either in outline or graphic representation. Efforts to protect the reliability of findings and the validity of inferences should be detailed.
- Data analyses: Regardless of the data collection method used, an analytic *strategy* must be applied to make sense of the observations. Chapter 3 should describe the analytic strategies employed and a rationale for their use. To the degree that readers may be unfamiliar with the strategy, greater detail may be needed. Methods of “data cleaning” and refinement, categorization schemes and how they were developed, data transformations, statistical tests, and checks on the validity and generalizability of conclusions are possible subtopics that belong in this section.

Chapter 4. Results

The fourth chapter summarizes and analyzes the study data with only minimal interpretation. This chapter should bring readers as close as reasonable to the original data and experiences of the study. This involvement with the data gives the reader some chance to form his or her own inferences and match them against conclusions in Chapter 5. It should begin with a brief review of the purpose of the study and the research method employed. The presentation in

Chapter 5 should closely follow the guiding questions or hypotheses articulated earlier in the dissertation. The results should be presented first in their simplest form (such as simple narrative descriptions, simple counts of frequency, and descriptive statistics), and later in more complex forms (2x2 or RxK, Chi-square, correlational analyses, factor analyses, simple and complex regressions or other statistical modeling, including confounders and effect-modifiers identified in the stratified analyses, or other inferential statistics).

Note: Generally, interpretation of findings is reserved for Chapter 5, but if the study is complex, it may become tedious for readers to review page after page of uninterpreted results. Sometimes it is useful to highlight the most important findings both in the text and in accompanying tables and to draw some simple conclusions in anticipation of more developed discussions in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

When completing a **traditional format** dissertation, Chapter 5 will include a discussion of the findings, conclusions, and recommendations for research and practice. It is, perhaps, the most crucial chapter because it presents the contribution to the research literature and because some cursory readers will attend to this chapter only. Therefore, it is typical to give a brief summary of essential points made in the Results (Chapter 4) and to interpret these results in light of the studies already conducted and reviewed in Chapter 2 (Review of the Literature). Findings should be critically appraised in regard to others' findings, and the reader should understand how the dissertation contributes uniquely to the understanding of the problem in light of extant literature.

The remainder of the chapter teases out the implications of the study's findings. These implications can be grouped into: theory or generalization, public health practice, and future research. Theoretical implications involve interpretation of the dissertation findings in terms of the questions and hypotheses that guided the study.

It is essential to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the work, including the degree to which conclusions are credible given the methods used and the data collected.

Practice implications should delineate applications of new insights derived from the dissertation to solve real and significant epidemiologic and public health problems.

Two kinds of implications for future research are possible: one based on the study's actual findings and the other based on its limitations. Generally, future research could look at different settings, interventions with new protocols or dependent measures, or new theoretical issues that may have emerged from the

study. It is appropriate to suggest which of these possibilities are likely to be most fruitful.

The last words should give the "take home message," the enduring ideas or conclusions. This should be presented in the simplest possible form, being sure to preserve the conditional nature of the insights.

Writing the Dissertation –Manuscript Format

The Ph.D. candidate, with the approval of the doctoral committee, will agree upon a dissertation subject and develop a proposal, consisting of three or four sections, depending on whether two or three manuscripts will be in the dissertation [1]. After careful consideration and approval of committee members, candidates will select a minimum of two scientific journals (one primary and one secondary) where they will plan to submit each manuscript for publication. Listed below are essential points to consider:

- This version of the dissertation is formatted in sections instead of chapters. Section 1 is the introduction that includes the statement of the problem and theoretical framework. The Introduction should describe the nature and purpose of the study, and explain the significance of and justification for conducting the study. This section should also present the specific aims and hypotheses or research questions to be addressed by the dissertation, clearly relating these to lines of investigation and conjecture detailed in current literature. Terms likely to be used throughout the proposal should be defined in this section. A thorough review of the conceptual/theoretical framework(s) or models to be used is expected.

- Prior to approval of the proposal, the committee may decide that three or more publications are needed to report results adequately. At least two of the manuscripts must report on the research data. A systematic review of the literature may be considered as a third publication if there is an appropriate scholarly journal that publishes systematic reviews.

In preparation for the proposal defense, students must provide the doctoral committee with the equivalent of the selected format, whether it is the traditional or manuscript format. If using the traditional format, Chapters 1-3 (Introduction and Specific Aims, Review of the Literature, Methods (including ascertainment of variables and data collection as well as a plan for Statistical Analysis)) will be completed. If the student has chosen the manuscript format, these will include the Introduction and Specific Aims, Review of the Literature, Methods (which most likely will be common for the papers but may vary somewhat) and the plan for Statistical Analysis (which may or may not be common to all papers).

Note: For the final doctoral defense, if more than two manuscripts are required by the committee, those manuscripts will be Sections 4 and 5. Each proposed

manuscript will follow the specific manuscript guidelines, and will include the introduction and statement of the problem, literature review, and methods. It is recommended that a copy of the journal's instructions for authors be available to each committee member.

• At the oral defense of the proposal, the student is expected to present items in Section 1, a comprehensive review of the literature [3] as well as an overview of each manuscript's specific aims/hypotheses, methods, and rationale for each journal selection. The manuscripts are to cover the entire dissertation research.

- The final dissertation will include Section 1 (introduction and framework), a section for each completed manuscript (including all components required by the specific journal guidelines), final conclusion and recommendation section, references, and appendices. The last section focuses on conclusions and implications of the entire dissertation. Additionally, it is necessary for this section to cover the items below **if not** covered in the manuscripts.

Theoretical implications involved in interpretation of the dissertation findings and in terms of the questions and hypotheses that guided the study. It also should include a critical, retrospective examination of the framework presented in Section 1 in light of the dissertation's findings.

Practical implications and new insights derived from the dissertation to solve real and significant public health problems.

Implications for future research based on the study's findings and limitations. Generally, future research could look at different settings, interventions with new protocols or dependent measures, or new theoretical issues that emerge from the study. It is appropriate to suggest which of these possibilities are likely to be most fruitful.

A "take home message," the enduring ideas or conclusions that readers need to keep in mind. This should be presented in the simplest possible form, being sure to preserve the conditional nature of the insights.

- The entire dissertation must conform to basic format requirements as required by Graduate School. (see http://www.grad.usf.edu/newsite/manuscript_format.asp) This format includes dissertation abstract, table of contents, acknowledgements, pagination, format style (e.g. APA), table, figure, and appendix numbering, font type and size, margin and spacing requirements and header consistency. Each manuscript in the dissertation will follow *journal*

requirements/standards as to page length, abstract format, and general structural guidelines.

Authorship:

Although co-authors will need to be identified for manuscript submission, co-author's names should not be included in the dissertation itself. In general, it is understood that all doctoral committee members will co-author the manuscripts, with the doctoral student being first author. The doctoral committee shall decide, in collaboration with the student, in what order the co-authors should be listed for each manuscript.

There will be one comprehensive reference list at the end of the dissertation that will conform to Graduate School guidelines. All appendices will be at the end of the dissertation.

There may be situations in which the original publication plan or manuscript structure is not well suited to the dissertation findings. In those cases, students can work with their Major Professor and committee to modify the publication plan prior to the dissertation defense or use the traditional dissertation format.

The acceptance of any of the manuscripts for publication is not a requirement for graduation although the manuscripts must be submitted for publication before graduation. The student and committee should agree to general authorship of the publications *before* the defense of the doctoral proposal and reconfirm and prioritize order of the co-authors prior to the dissertation defense.

In the unlikely situation that a manuscript needs to be published before the dissertation is submitted (e.g., there is a submission deadline for a special issue), the committee must review and approve in writing that the manuscript is ready for publication.

Standard Writing Style

Research is discovery to be shared, and the USF Graduate School sets guidelines to help you display your research results in a consistent and professional manner. As researcher and author, the graduate student has full responsibility for the form and substance of the dissertation. The major professor and the members of the committee are a panel of advisors to oversee the substance, direction, and writing of the research, in addition to providing guidance for the format of the document. The Manuscript Editor of the Graduate School ensures University format guidelines are met. The Graduate School offers workshops to assist graduate students in meeting the goal of consistent and professional presentation. Contact the Graduate School for more information and to find out when the next available workshop will be held.

Choice of Style Manual

The Graduate School does not prescribe any single style for dissertations as formats differ across disciplines. Students should select a style manual established by their department or committee and consistently follow the guidelines of that manual throughout the entire manuscript (not only for the reference/bibliography sections).

[1] If additional manuscripts are required by the committee, the section numbers will change. For example, in a dissertation with three manuscripts, the third manuscript will be labeled Section 4 and the “Conclusions and Recommendations” will be labeled Section 5. In a dissertation with four manuscripts, the fourth manuscript will be labeled Section 5 and the “Conclusions and Recommendations” will be labeled Section 6.

Format of Dissertation Manuscript

The format and content of the dissertation must be in compliance with the guidelines set forth on the Graduate Studies website -

http://www.grad.usf.edu/Thesis_and_Dissertations/format.asp.

It is the responsibility of the student to meet with the Manuscript Editor at the Graduate School. The first meeting will be to drop off the final draft of the dissertation. The second meeting will be to discuss, in detail, any corrections needed for final approval by the Graduate School. It is important that you are aware of all Graduate School deadlines during your final semester. These deadlines are announced at the beginning of each semester. When in doubt, call the Graduate School at (813) 974-2846 or check online at

http://www.grad.usf.edu/manuscriptdeadlines_new.asp. Failing to meet the deadlines will delay your graduation. You will then be required to submit a new application for graduation, pay a new manuscript fee, and register for an additional two hours of dissertation during the following semester.

ProQuest Publication and Copyright

Because all dissertations must be submitted to ProQuest for publication via the Graduate School, the student will need to contact ProQuest to request permission for submission to a journal for publication. (ProQuest has indicated they will always give permission). ProQuest publishes, but does not automatically copyright the dissertation. It is best **NOT** to request copyright by ProQuest so that the copyright will not have to be transferred to the publishing journal.

The Graduate School will contact you to verify that all requirements have been met for graduation. The successful completion of this form is a final critical step in meeting the requirements for the Ph.D. degree. Without final approval from the Graduate School, you will not graduate.

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1)

http://www.albany.edu/etap/graduate_programs/doctoral/Dissertation%20guidelines.doc

2) dissertation guidelines from the Department of Community and Family Health, College of Public Health, University of South Florida.