

Areas for Focus in Dissertations

The following areas of focus have been identified following a review of the Dean's comments made upon initial review of completed dissertations, submitted for her approval, during the first two quarters of Fiscal Year 2008 (September 2007 through February 2008). These items represent issues identified in multiple dissertations. Whereas the areas of focus below should not be mistaken for an exhaustive list of the features of a comprehensive, well-prepared dissertation, attention to these items should help to ensure the clarity, usefulness, and impact of a dissertation.

Clarity and Precision in Writing

- The author has ensured that comments provided in previous reviews (ARB, Dean) are addressed in a meaningful fashion.
- The writing style is clear, precise, and succinct by utilizing the third person with declarative statements and avoiding wordiness, run-on sentences, excessive use of pronouns, and undefined terms. The author is especially encouraged to review the document for excessive use of "this", "that", "of," and "and".
- The author refers to the dissertation research using some version of the phrase "the current research study" instead of the less precise and ambiguous term "this study".
- The author avoids personalization of the dissertation by removing unnecessary self-references (i.e. a density of references to "the researcher"). The focus of the dissertation should be on the research, not the researcher.
- The writing style is appropriately and consistently scientific in tone and avoids the use of colloquial language, slang, jargon, trite expressions, anthropomorphic statements (See APA Manual, p. 38), the author's opinion, and hyperbole.
- The author provides appropriate documentation and scholarly citations for all factual statements.
- The author's paragraph development (e.g., length [3-5 sentences], complexity, and comprehensibility) is appropriate and centered around a central concept.
- The author consistently avoids the use of unnecessary contractions, acronyms, and abbreviations. (Authors should consult the APA manual for guidance on these issues.)
- The author consistently avoids the use of terms with unintended statistical connotations (e.g., "correlation"; "covariate"; "significant", "relationship", "trend", etc.).
- The author should ensure that the definitions provided in chapter 1 are for unique connotations or terms in the study. Those definitions that do not carry any unique connotation should be removed.
- The author is selective in the use of direct quotes. Direct quotes should be used to support the intellectual content of the author, not replace it.
- The author invokes "as cited in" references only when clearly necessary, and not for purposes of artificially inflating one's frequency of recently dated references.

- The author uses appropriate grammar throughout the manuscript, including the consistent and correct:
 - ✓ use of the terms "affect" and "effect";
 - ✓ use of the terms "which" and "that";
 - ✓ agreement of subjects and verbs;
 - ✓ use of the terms data (plural) and datum (singular) and the verbs used in conjunction with the terms.
 - ✓ verb tense throughout the document;
 - ✓ use of apostrophes, especially as related to possessive and plural possessive nouns.
 - ✓ use of the terms "since" and "because" (APA, p. 57);

Adherence to APA Publication Manual Guidelines

- As prescribed by APA, the author consistently and correctly:
 - ✓ formats the title and title page, the abstract, and the Table of Contents
 - ✓ utilizes capitalization (e.g., does not capitalize mid-sentence nouns that denote common parts of books, including chapters and paragraphs) (APA Publication Manual, section 3.15);
 - ✓ presents numbered lists (section 3.33);
 - ✓ formats direct quotes both above and below 40 words (sections 3.34-3.38);
 - ✓ does not use contractions unless the contractions were part of the quoted source (section 3.35);
 - ✓ uses numbers in written out and numeric form (sections 3.42-3.49);
 - ✓ uses the terms "participants" and "subjects";
 - ✓ notes that permission had been secured for the use of copyrighted material;
 - ✓ makes reference to, and places appropriately, figures and tables (sections, 3.62 - 3.74 and 3.75 - 3.86);
 - ✓ formats and makes reference to appendices;
 - ✓ formats and presents notation of descriptive statistics and inferential statistical analyses (section 3.57 – 3.58);
 - ✓ uses "and", "&", and "et al." when citing multiple authors in the body of the document
 - ✓ cites a study when both a volume and issue number are provided;

Methods, Description, Analysis, and Discussion

- The author consistently and correctly:
 - ✓ describes the design and methodology throughout document;
 - ✓ does not cite work from popular or text books in support of fundamental methodological decisions when more appropriate foundational sources exist;
 - ✓ presents sample size, explicitly states the process used to obtain the sample, and notes any deviations from the original sample size (i.e., loss of participants);
 - ✓ uses the terms sample, population, and group and avoids using the term "sample population";
 - ✓ uses the terms data (plural) and datum (singular);
 - ✓ uses the terms *independent* and *dependent variable* given the nature of the design, recognizing that in some designs there is not a true independent variable;
 - ✓ uses language (e.g., relationship, difference, prediction) having a statistical connotation (i.e., correlation, ANOVA, regression, respectively) that is consistent with the analyses that were conducted;
 - ✓ appropriately distinguishes between the related concepts of correlation and regression.

- ✓ uses a standardized research vocabulary to increase academic readability;
- ✓ uses and reports statistical analyses that are explicitly linked to the research questions, hypotheses, and research design;
- ✓ states explicitly the data (including level and unit of analysis) that are being analyzed (e.g., participants' average scores on the instrument or median job tenure), the type of analysis being conducted (e.g., between subjects t-test, or a 2x3 mixed ANOVA with the variables of...) and ensures the analysis is appropriate for the data collected;
- ✓ states *a priori* on what basis the null hypothesis will be rejected, if numerous analyses are conducted to evaluate the hypothesis. The author should be cognizant of, and address, Type I error rate when multiple analyses are conducted;
- ✓ presents illustrative participant responses or data in the results section instead of every response or data point;
- ✓ uses full variable names when discussing or displaying analyses rather than computer-generated abbreviations or codes;
- ✓ presents the coding criteria used to categorize data in a qualitative design;
- ✓ presents the results of statistical analyses that are accurate, succinctly reported, and in a format consistent with APA guidelines (e.g., number of decimal places, statistical terms);
- ✓ presents probability values according to APA format, even though statistical packages might provide probabilities in an inappropriate format (e.g., SPSS might report $p = .000$ which should be presented as $p < .001$);
- ✓ uses the appropriate statistical terms to describe the outcome of a statistical test (e.g., "significant," "not significant," "statistically significant," "not statistically significant," "marginally significant," etc);
- ✓ formats data in figures, charts, and tables (e.g., a figure plotting results for a continuous variable should be a line chart or histogram, while for a discrete variable a bar chart is appropriate).
- ✓ presents all information including figures and tables of appropriate size that follow APA format and are presented in black and white (or grayscale) in order to accommodate subsequent processing by ProQuest;
- ✓ presents results in a format (i.e., in text, table, or figure) to efficiently convey the results to the reader while avoiding unnecessary duplication with the results presented in the text of the document;
- ✓ provides the reader information to understand esoteric analyses while avoiding tutorials on standard analyses (e.g., t-test, Pearson r, ANOVA, etc)
- ✓ assesses the issues of internal and external validity as well as reliability (if applicable);
- ✓ references specific analyses to support recommendations and conclusions, and does not draw conclusions without support of, or that contradict, results of analyses

Logical Flow throughout the Dissertation

- The author consistently substantiates statements, methods, and data analyses throughout the dissertation with citations and references to the literature where appropriate.
- The author consistently numbers each research question (i.e. R1, R2) and addresses those as such in the text in all chapters.
- The author aligns language describing the effect under investigation (e.g., associations, relationships, differences, etc) with the appropriate design and analyses (e.g., chi-square, correlation, ANOVA, etc)

- The author creates an overall alignment throughout the dissertation, inclusive of the central problem of the dissertation, the purpose, research questions, data, analysis, findings, conclusions, and recommendations. The author also establishes a purposeful, cascading flow that allows the reader to gain a perspective in chapter 5 of the overall research study and the alignment therein. Finally, the author avoids the inclusion of tangentially related material and redundant information.
- In chapter 4, the author avoids placing information that is more appropriately placed in chapter 3 (methodology related) or chapter 5 (interpretation of the results).
- In chapter 5, the author describes the implications of the results and how they relate to the stated purpose and significance. The author should also use chapter 5 to describe the implications, provide recommendations, and convey the contribution of the study to the field.
- The author incorporates chapter transitions, as well as transitions between disparate paragraphs, sentences, or ideas to enhance the alignment, readability, and flow of the overall document. However, the author should be cognizant of the overuse of unnecessary transition terms.
- Conclusions the author proposes are supported by the data and results, and are central to, and within, the scope of the study.

Attention to Detail

- The author has removed all editing artifacts, including the following:
 - ✓ extra spaces, letters, characters;
 - ✓ font inconsistencies (e.g., inexplicable bold, color, size, etc);
 - ✓ orphaned quotation marks;
 - ✓ highlighting for no apparent reason;
 - ✓ inappropriate pagination or page breaks;
 - ✓ incorrect or varying margins;
 - ✓ tracked changes and inserted comments;
 - ✓ correct hyphenation for hyphenated words (e.g., nonissue *non-issue*; prestamped *pre-stamped*)
 - ✓ correct page numbering throughout the document
- The author has reviewed the document to ensure spelling and appropriate use of terms that an automated spell checker may not identify (e.g., from/form; paring/pairing; forty/forth; principle/principal; intend/intent, count/account; he/the; synthesized/sympathesized; compilation/compellation, etc).
- The author has appropriately formatted the signature page including the use of mixed case of the mentor's and committee members' names. A signature page template is available from the learner's website via the following path: publications → university documents → program handbooks →(choose program) →program criteria →signature page
- The author has appropriately formatted the table of contents including the List of Tables and List of Figures.

- The author has reviewed the document ensuring that all references used in the dissertation appear in the reference section and all references in the reference section appear in the dissertation.
- The author has removed any personal information from the document (especially in the appendices) including their phone number, email address, and/or street address.
- With an assurance of confidentiality to participants, participating organizations, etc., the author has removed any information that would identify those participants, particularly in appendices (e.g. permission forms) that may have been artifacts of one's proposal document.