

STEPS TO COMPLETE YOUR DISSERTATION

CGU Psychology Department 2/98

1. Prepare a short (e.g., 3 to 5 pages) prospectus of your plan for dissertation research. Be as explicit as you can about the issues you wish to pursue and why they are important. Include some background to motivate the research issues including a very brief summary of previous work, information on your proposed source of data, potential limitations, and the expected value of your study.
2. Submit the prospectus to the faculty member you would like to chair your committee.
3. When you have a faculty member who agrees to be your chairperson, you should revise the dissertation prospectus until you are both satisfied with it.
4. Your chairperson, in consultation with you, will select two other Graduate Faculty in Psychology members as possible members of your committee. Submit the prospectus to them and ask if they would be willing to serve on your committee. Ask them to give you feedback on the prospectus. It may be useful to have a meeting of your committee after they have all reviewed your prospectus.
5. To establish your dissertation committee formally, your dissertation chairperson will make the recommendation of membership on an official form and submit it to the department chairperson, who will sign and forward it to the Registrar and the Dean of Faculty.
6. Develop a detailed proposal for your dissertation (usually 20-40 pages). The proposal should include a thorough review of the relevant literature, a clear statement of your research issues and hypotheses, and details of your planned procedure and analyses. You should work with your chairperson to revise the proposal until you are both satisfied with it. You should not send early drafts to all members of your committee, although you may wish to consult with individual committee members on specific issues. You should write your proposal so that you will be able to use much of it in your dissertation with little modification.

After your chairperson has indicated approval of the proposal, submit the full proposal to your other two committee members for their feedback. Your chairperson may wish to schedule a committee meeting after the committee has reviewed your proposal.

8. Advancement to Candidacy. When your committee is satisfied with your proposal, they will sign an official form that will be submitted to the Dean along with a brief summary of your proposal (no more than 350 words). When the Dean signs this form, you are officially advanced to candidacy. Note that you can be advanced to candidacy only after you have passed your oral qualifying examination and you must be advanced to candidacy at least six months before your final oral examination.
9. You should work closely with your chairperson as you conduct your research and write your dissertation. Specifically, you should keep your chairperson informed of your schedule and any major problems that you encounter.

10. If your research involves collaborative teamwork or you have gotten assistance from others with any phase of it, you should explicitly acknowledge all such help. In addition, you should scrupulously ensure that you yourself have carried out, at a minimum, the major share of the conceptualization, the planning and supervision of the data analysis, and all of the writing. It is essential that you are thorough in your citation of all sources of ideas, quotations, and other information.
11. In general you should use APA style to write your dissertation although there are some exceptions. The dissertation will have an index, lists of figures and tables, it is divided into chapters, and the tables, figures, and footnotes are placed in the text rather than at the end. There is a list available from the Psychology office of some specific requirements for dissertations, such as proper margins, quality of paper, typing, etc.
12. Your top priorities as you write should be accuracy and clarity. Be liberal with subheadings and summations, avoid idiosyncratic acronyms, define technical terms, keep the reader in touch with the overall flow of your paper, etc.
13. Be sure to proofread your work before you submit it for review. For revisions, ask your chairperson if you should return the previous draft (with the old comments on it) along with the new draft.
14. After your chairperson is satisfied with your dissertation draft you can circulate it to the other two Claremont committee members for their feedback. Your final oral exam should not be scheduled until all three committee members are satisfied with your dissertation.
15. Your chairperson, in consultation with you and others, will select a final committee member from outside of the Claremont Colleges. This person must have a Ph.D., and will usually have special expertise in the area of your dissertation.
16. Your chairperson will schedule your final oral examination. It is essential that the CGU Psychology Department office be informed of an impending oral examination at least three weeks in advance. At that same time you should give the department secretary a 350-word carefully phrased abstract of the dissertation (including results and implications). This abstract is given to the Dean and is circulated among the faculty. It can also be used at the final abstract to be sent to Dissertation Abstracts International. Since this abstract is the first information that most readers will have about your dissertation, you should plan its contents very carefully. Be sure to include keywords people are likely to use when searching for your dissertation. It is also important that your committee members be given a final copy of your dissertation at least one week before the oral examination. You should plan to print the final version of your dissertation after your orals, so that you can incorporate any changes that may be raised during your orals.
17. Note deadlines carefully so that you do not need to rush at the end. It would be prudent to check with your committee to identify any periods where they may be on sabbatical or otherwise unavailable. Faculty may not be able to review your dissertation as quickly as deadlines approach. You should realize that your dissertation will almost certainly take longer to complete than you first expect.