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ASSESSMENT 2

A GUIDE FOR ONLINE GRADUATE STUDENTS:
WRITING A GREAT THESIS OR DISSERTATION

Part I: Crafting a Great Proposal

An important skill for any successful doctoral student is writing. Your ability to communicate effectively when writing your thesis/dissertation chapters is crucial to achieving your desired outcome. Crafting a research proposal before you begin your research class or doctoral program is beneficial, but try to be succinct.

Chapter 1, An Introduction to Your Desktop Guide

Printed documents are still very much a part of today's academic environment. As an online student, you will discover that a personal computer, word-processing software such as Microsoft Office suite, and a printer are indispensable tools for preparing a thesis or dissertation in a distance education program.

Chapter 2, Aligning All Your Resources

Of all resources, people are the most important. According to Levačić (2010), effective resource alignment is inextricably linked with making the effort to establish relationships with professors, staff, fellow students and employers. This is not an "adhoc process", but is guided by clear goals and purposes (Robinson, Hohepa, & Lloyd, 2009). These factors help to ensure you obtain a rewarding doctoral educational experience.

Chapter 3, Finding a Topic, Purpose, and Research Question

An interesting thesis/dissertation topic is based on an intellectually challenging line of inquiry and has a clear purpose. Through reflection, refine your personal interest to become a research interest, and then begin to craft your research questions. As you formulate possible questions, make sure that they are appropriate—choose questions that are narrow (not too broad), challenging (not too bland), and grounded (not too speculative).

Chapter 4, Organizing and Writing Review of Literature

Preparing a review of literature is a complex process, especially if you have challenges narrowing your thesis/dissertation topic. The tools needed for writing this section are books, periodicals, and reports about your topic. Learning how to search library databases is a critical step for success in this area. Some online databases allow you to save your search strategy—this is a useful option for the graduate student. As a rule of

thumb, always keep a record of the sources consulted and save them in two places—by email and to a key/hard drive.

Chapter 5, Considerations for Choosing a Research Design

Note to researcher: The design you choose must be appropriate to the question you are asking and the type of evidence that you wish to elicit. It may be that several design approaches are suitable for addressing your research question. In this case, it will be beneficial for you to think carefully about the advantages and disadvantages of each design as well as taking into account the various constraints placed on the research project (such as time and resources needed). Research designs commonly used are: *historical, descriptive, correlation, comparative, experimental, simulation, evaluation, action, ethnological, feminist* and *cultural*. Again, the choice of which design to apply depends on the nature of the problems posed by the research aims.

Chapter 6, Statistics at Your Fingertips (Descriptive, Correlation, t-Test, z-Test)

Z score: A standardized score based on the standard deviation of the distribution (Adams & Lawrence, 2015, p. 175).

The **t-score** is a standard score derived from a z score by multiplying the z score by 10 and adding 50 (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2012, p. 578).

Descriptive statistics − this deals with describing raw data in the form of graphics and sample statistics.

Correlation − As a researcher, you need to be aware of important cautions concerning the interpretation of correlations, especially the effects of outliers, and the effects of grouping data. Kindly make note of this critical point that correlation does not necessarily imply causality.

Chapter 7, Statistics at Your Fingertips (ANOVA & Multiple Linear Regressions)

There are a range of tests that can be applied to discern the variance depending on the number of groups. For a single group, the researcher should use the chi-square or the one-group t-test. For two groups, the researcher should use the two group t-tests. For three or more groups, the researcher should use SPSS to derive at ANOVA (the analysis of variance). Multiple linear regression is a form of statistical analysis that deals with more than two variables at the same time (Brewerton, 2001).

Chapter 8, Creating Data Collection Instruments

When creating your data collection instruments, a novel place to start is to determine what type of data is needed for analysis: primary or secondary. *Primary data* is what we are all faced with daily and it involves anything that is stimulating to the senses. A researcher can face problems when trying to trace, locate or authenticate historical data

(if this is appropriate to your study). Then, there is *secondary data* which is less reliable. However, you will need secondary data to develop the background to your study.

Chapter 9, Time to Write Chapter III

Finding time to write your Chapter III will seem almost impossible if you procrastinate. Using your time unwisely might not be intentional, but find time to write. Put something down on paper and it will eventually begin to take shape. You will not be able to prepare your Chapter III until you start to think seriously about Chapters I and II. Don't forget to edit–it is an important part–of the research process.

Remember—a college course is approximately 16 weeks long. What extra chapters might you add to meet the students' needs and also make the book longer?

We already have 12 chapters. (Remember—we have three chapters that we are ignoring for Assessment 2: Chapter 10, Writing an Introduction; Chapter 11, Organizing and Writing Chapter IV – The Findings; and Chapter 12, The Discussion.)

Extra Chapters for the guide!

Chapter 13, Desktop Publishing Activities

(This is an important task for an online student – update your desktop publishing capabilities by reviewing Microsoft Office tutorials)
1. When working with documents – create your document using a template or design.
2. Format text and pages.
3. Work with objects and images.
4. Enhance your thesis or dissertation by being consistent.
5. Edit your work.
6. Publish the document (once complete).

Chapter 14, Style Guide for Chapter III
The key things to remember shared by my research professor. Posting again because it was useful:
1.   1.5" Left margin THROUGHOUT ALL sections.

2.   1" Right margin THROUGHOUT.

3.   Leave your Top margin at 1". When you need to drop the first page of a new chapter down to 2" from the top, just hit the Enter key a few times. LEAVE THE TOP MARGIN ALONE!

4.   Always leave your bottom margin at 1".

5.   Chapter headings go in ALL CAPS (CHAPTER III, BIBLIOGRAPHY, and APPENDIX G)

Chapter 15, Learning APA Style

Most writing in the social sciences require the use of APA as a style guide. Most social science instructors will ask you to document your sources with the American Psychological Association (APA) system. You will use this for both your in-text citations and for the references that come at the end of your dissertation.

Chapter 16, Avoiding Plagiarism

Your thesis/dissertation is a collaboration between you and your sources. To be fair and ethical, you must acknowledge your debt to the writers/authors/researchers of those sources you consulted. If you don't, you will be guilty of plagiarism, a serious academic offense at all universities. Three different acts are considered plagiarism: (1) failing to cite quotations or borrowed ideas, (2) failing to enclose borrowed language in quotation marks, and (3) failing to put summaries and paraphrases in your own words (Hacker, 2009, p. 107). You will also become familiar with Turnitin.

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