

# Dissertation and Thesis Writing Bootcamp

Spring 2025

# Today's Agenda

- Introductions
- Office of Graduate & Professional Studies - Process and Format
- Developing Research Questions
- Before You Begin
- Dissecting the Dissertation and Thesis
- Helpful Tips
- Resources

# Introductions

In chat, please share:

- Name and preferred pronouns
- Degree and anticipated graduation date
- One thing you hope to learn today

Introduction of Presenters: Brittany Blanchard, Alana Kuhlman, Debbie Mariage

# **Office of Graduate & Professional Studies**

## **Process and Format**



**Debbie Mariage**

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& Professional Studies**

**Electronic Thesis & Dissertation Coordinator (ETD)**  
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**928-523-8254**

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# Thesis & Dissertation Processes

## Thesis-track Masters' and Doctoral Students

- Confirm enrollment in at least 1 unit of 699 or 799, thesis or dissertation units.
- Complete and submit a Graduation Application for the appropriate term.
- **NEW** - Canvas Thesis Format & Dissertation Format Courses. A zero-credit course to be completed in the semester a student plans to defend. Completion of the course notifies the ETD Coordinator of a student's defense date and fulfills the NAU format check requirement.
- *Oral Defense Part 1 form* is due to the ETD Coordinator within 48 hours of a defense.  
Known as the voting form and details the required revisions requested by the committee.
- *Oral Defense Part 2 form* is due to the ETD Coordinator by the last day of the term.  
Known as the verification form confirming revisions have been completed.
- All students are required to upload the final version of their thesis or dissertation to ProQuest.
- Confirmation email will be sent to your NAU email address via ProQuest.



# NAU Formatting Guidelines

- NAU Format Checklist & Guide
- Document Sequence
- TITLE page
- ABSTRACT page
- ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
- TABLE OF CONTENTS, LIST OF TABLES, LIST OF FIGURES
- DEDICATION
- Main text - Introduction/Chapter 1
- REFERENCES
- APPENDICES



- Margins – top, bottom, right & left set at 1”
- Font/Text – Black, same font size (12 pt) & type
- Page headers - Centered at the top 1” margin
- Refrain from excessive use of bold, italics, or underlines
- Pagination – ABSTRACT begins Roman numeral “ii” through DEDICATION; Main text - Intro/Chapter 1, begins Arabic numeral “1”
- Page numbers - Centered at the bottom 1” margin
- No running headers
- Text - double spaced

# Graduate & Professional Studies Resources



- OGPS Webpage - Resources, Thesis & Dissertation  
<https://nau.edu/graduate-college/thesis-and-dissertation/>
- NAU Format Checklist & Guide
- Canvas Thesis & Dissertation Format Courses
- Cline Library
- The Lumberjack Writing Center

## ETD Information and Guidelines

- [ETD Processes & Deadlines Departments](#)
- [ETD Committee Policy & Guidelines](#)
- [ETD Information](#)
- [ProQuest contact information](#)

## ProQuest Copyright Resources

- [Copyright and Your Dissertation or Thesis](#)
- [Copyright Laws Around the World](#)



Graduate Electronic  
**THESIS**  
Format Course

Graduate Electronic  
**DISSERTATION**  
Format Course



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# Important Dates & Deadlines

Academic Year 2024-2025	Spring 2025	Summer 2025	Fall 2025
Last Day for Dissertation Defense	Friday, April 25	Tuesday, July 22	Wednesday, November 26
Last day for Thesis Defense	Friday, May 2	Tuesday, July 29	Friday, December 5
Submit Thesis or Dissertation for a Format Check via Canvas Thesis Format or Dissertation Format Course at least <u>10</u> business days <u>PRIOR</u> to defense date	Masters & Doctoral students	Masters & Doctoral students	Masters & Doctoral students
Dissertation Defense Scheduling Forms must be submitted <u>10</u> business days <u>PRIOR</u> to defense date	Doctoral students only	Doctoral students only	Doctoral students only
Students are responsible for uploading the final version of their thesis or dissertation to ProQuest by 11:59 pm MST on the last day of term. (This deadline is not flexible; students who upload their thesis or dissertation to ProQuest after the deadline will not be approved to confer their degree in the term).	Friday, May 9 Last day of term	Tuesday, August 5 Last day of term	Friday, December 12 Last day of term

# Developing Research Questions

**Presented by:**

**Andy Koppisch, PhD**

**Associate Vice President, Research  
Associate Professor, Chemistry & Biochemistry**



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# Institutional Review Board

# Institutional Review Board

The IRB is an independent committee made up of faculty, staff, and community members that ensures NAU human research complies with federal regulations, ethical principles, and university policies.

- It is there to protect participants in human research.
- Includes: recruitment, consenting process, study intervention(s)/procedures, identifiable data analysis
- Specific populations (minors, immigrants, international research & more) have additional considerations
- Need to have approval BEFORE you start your research

# Institutional Review Board

Submissions to the IRB are processed and reviewed on a first-come, first served basis. Timelines for approvals varies based on category, number of submissions, revisions need and quality of submission. In general, investigators should plan to submit a complete application for IRB review at least 30-45 days prior to beginning studies.

## Review level – timeframe

- Exempt – 1 to 3 weeks
- Expedited – 2 to 4 weeks
- Full Committee – 1 to 2 months

More information: <https://in.nau.edu/human-research-protection-program/irbnet/>

Contact: [IRB@nau.edu](mailto:IRB@nau.edu) with questions or for additional help

# Other things to consider before you begin

- Do you need approval from elsewhere? [international](#), [conflicts of interest](#), [biological safety](#), [radiation safety](#), [HIPAA](#), [FERPA](#), [FDA](#), data repositories, listserv permission, [conducting University surveys](#), [data security](#), [sponsor approval](#), [clinicaltrials.gov](#), [tribal consultation](#), or [school approval](#).
- Tests/measurements fall under copyrighted materials and may require permission for use or a fee in order to use. Make sure you know the permissions for any you are using and have received permission where applicable.
- If using secondary data make sure it is useful for the question you are asking

# Break

# Dissecting the Dissertation and Thesis

- Organizing your dissertation or thesis
- How to write your abstract and introduction
- How to write your literature review
- How to write your methodology and results/findings
- How to write your discussion
- How to write your conclusion

With the exception of the Literature Review slides, the upcoming slides were designed with the support of:

**Cindy Browder, PhD**

Professor, Organic Chemistry

**Jennifer Kim, PhD**

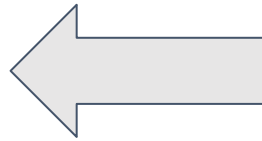
Assistant Teaching Professor, Department of Sociology



# Organizing Your Dissertation or Thesis

## Typical Content Includes:

- Front Matter (Abstract, etc.)
- Introduction
- Literature Review
- Methodology
- Results/Findings
- Discussion
- Conclusion
- Back Matter



Traditional dissertations will closely follow this organization.

Some dissertations/theses may be organized in article-style/more topically; talk with your chair about whether this is appropriate for you. Article-style dissertations/theses include overall introductions and conclusions with articles in between.

# How to Write Your Abstract and Introduction

**ABSTRACT PURPOSE:** Lets a prospective know if your document is relevant to their research.

Types of abstracts:

- Descriptive – tells your reader what type of information they will find in the article but does not provide results or conclusions.
- Informative – more comprehensive than descriptive abstracts, providing some detail about results and conclusions that allow other researchers to determine whether the article is relevant to their research.

**INTRODUCTION PURPOSE:** Introduces your reader to your study.

Introductions should:

- State the purpose/problem and significance of the study
- Introduce the theoretical framework
- Provide necessary background information
- Provide the research questions
- Offer a structural overview of the dissertation or thesis

## HELPFUL TIPS!

- Read several theses, dissertations, and other publications in your discipline to use as models.
- Your research questions may be stated in multiple sections.

# Dissecting the Literature Review

Presented by:

Brittany Blanchard ([Brittany.Blanchard@nau.edu](mailto:Brittany.Blanchard@nau.edu))

# Not all literature reviews are the same

- Literature reviews for an article
  - Shorter
  - Highlights, not exhaustive
- Literature reviews that are articles
  - Several pages long, more encompassing
- Systematic reviews
  - Exhaustive
  - Specific inclusion/exclusion
- Literature reviews for traditional theses/dissertations
  - Generally longer, chapter length
  - Not exhaustive but more than highlights

# What is a literature review?

## **It is not:**

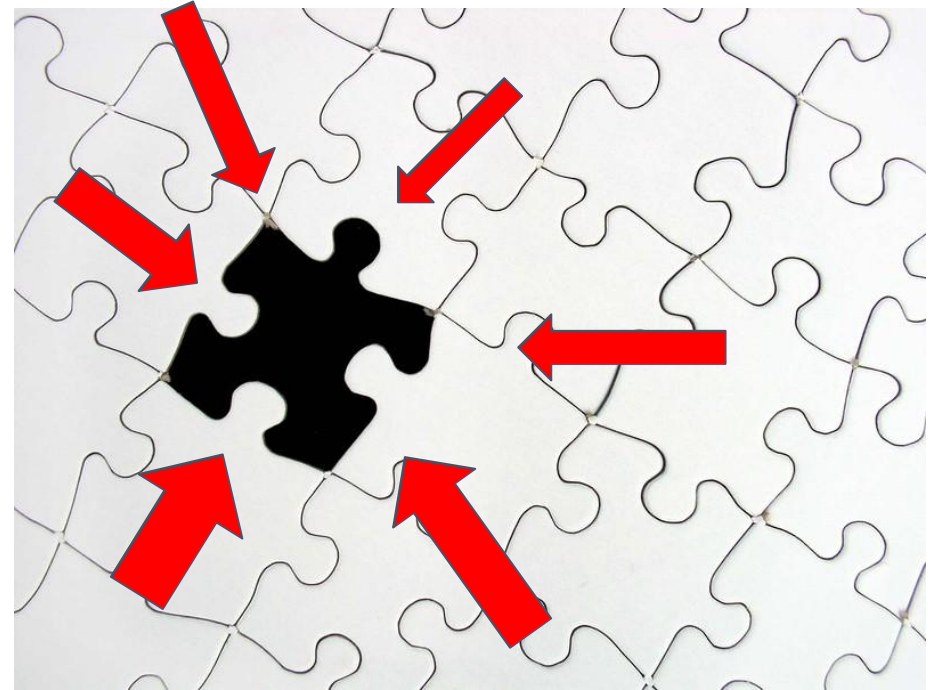
- A list of articles
- Annotated bibliography
- Just a summary

## **It is a(n):**

- Examination of extant research on a defined topic/question
- Synthesis
- Critique
- Analysis
- Argument

# Why do one?

- Shows that you have a firm grasp of the topic, surrounding issues/controversies
- Places your research within the larger academic narrative.
- Demonstrates the importance of your research
- Proves that there are knowledge gaps in your field that merit investigation
- Shows that you are adding new knowledge to your field
- Creates an intellectual, historical, and theoretical framework for your thesis/dissertation



Adapted from "Puzzle 2" cc-by Willi Heidelberg  
[flickr](#).

# Where to begin?

Brainstorm your topic and breakdown your question into parts that need to explained or that you need to find evidence for.

What are your inclusion & exclusion criteria?

- Date, type of study, intervention or application, demographics?
  - This can help guide your research by eliminating results that are not applicable

Some strategies: talk it through out loud, write down a list, try mind mapping or spider diagrams

# Where to begin?

Ask yourself:

- What do you already have?
  - Articles from classes, readings you've already done etc.
- If this information exists where would I find it?
  - What fields/subjects would that topic fall under?
  - Is this information that would be in data sets?
  - Not everything will be in a journal article
- Which questions/sections are more important/easiest to tackle?
  - Piecemeal approach
  - Write what you have
- Create keywords & search strings



# Starting the search

Has someone done some of the work for you?

- Other dissertations/theses (Dissertations & Theses – ProQuest)
- Review articles & systematic reviews

Big names/studies

- Who is everyone else citing?
  - Utilize forward citation searches
- Talk with your advisor, people in your field

Start with broad searches then assess and narrow as needed

# Get familiar with where you're searching

- How can you import citations to your citation manager?
- Is there a way to set up alerts?
- How fancy can you get with your searches? Some databases allow you to use truncation, wildcards, near searching, etc.
  - Music\*, wom?n, oil N5 pollution
- Does it use controlled vocabularies (subject terms) & is there a thesaurus that allows you to search for terms?
- Can you use NOT or - to exclude things from your search?
- For Google Scholar, make sure you link the library

# Tips

- Adapt as you go: This is an iterative process that takes time. You may need to search multiple places in multiple ways to find the articles you need.
- Pause to weed, skim & evaluate
- Keep track of where/when/what you are searching for ease of reference
- Save money by requesting articles from Document Delivery Services
- Searching off-campus? Login to the VPN

# You + Your Librarian = Awesome

**MEET WITH  
YOUR  
LIBRARIAN**



[nau.edu/library/  
contact-your-subject-librarian](https://nau.edu/library/contact-your-subject-librarian)

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# Staying organized with your lit review

- Use a bibliographic management tool
  - Zotero (open source, free)
  - Mendeley (institutional account available through Cline Library)
- Save, save, save
  - Take pictures of the non-digital
- Consider using a synthesis matrix or the notes tool in Zotero & Mendeley to keep track of what you've read
- Find ways to stop yourself from going down rabbit holes

Themes in research about PhD students	Humbug et al (2009)	Mewburn (2012)	Whathisname (2013)
Reasons for undertaking a higher degree	Argues that this varies by discipline	Argues that there is a clear gender division in the discipline enrolments - but older people less so.	Doesn't mention this – many people don't actually. Is this a problem with the literature?
Completion rates.	Shows that men drop out more than women in almost all disciplines.	Shows that older people who are enrolled part time are more persistent than those who enrol part time	Shows that attrition varies by institution and that the 'richer' institutions lose less students
Social learning in PhD student communities	Doesn't mention this	Shows examples of conversations to show that older people have more complex discussions about 'meta' issues in PhD study than younger students	Suggests the community in richer institutions is better than that in poorer institutions.
Relationships with supervisor - how important is it?	Argues that the relationship with supervisor is a key determinant of success	Argues that older people deal with poor supervision better than younger people	Suggests that poorer institutions have a 'younger' supervisor profile

“We can better understand problems like attrition if we know why people choose to undertake a PhD in the first place, however scholars do not pay attention to the reasons why students are motivated to enroll in a PhD. Two notable exceptions are Humbug et al (2009) and Mewburn (2012). Humbug et al noted that different disciplines report very different reasons for beginning a PhD. Mewburn further developed this work in her studies of older students, claiming that gender further complicated the picture of motivation.”

Mewburn, Inger “Using a matrix to organize your notes”  
<https://sites.google.com/site/twblacklinemasters/using-a-matrix-to-organise-your-notes-for-faster-writing>



	Year	Purpose	Life style addressed	Intervention	Sampling	Number of participants	Results
A randomized controlled trial of a health promotion education programme for people with multiple sclerosis. Ennis M. <i>et al.</i> Clinical rehabilitation 2006 20;783-792	2006	Evaluate effectiveness of a health promotion education programme for people with multiple sclerosis	Exercise, fatigue, stress, nutrition	Group based eight weekly sessions of 3 hours, "Optimize"	Patients attending a multiple sclerosis clinic at a regional neuroscience center	61 patients randomised, 31 in intervention, 30 in control	Significant higher levels of health promotion activity undertaken.
Education in stroke prevention: Efficacy of an educational counselling intervention to increase knowledge in stroke survivors. Green T. <i>et al.</i> Canadian Journal of Neuroscience Nursing 2007 29(2);13-20	2007	Examine impact of one-to-one brief nurse-patient interview on acquisition of knowledge of stroke and influence on lifestyle behaviour change	Smoking, exercise, alcohol	Nurse consultation and lifestyle class	Patients consulting an ambulatory stroke prevention clinic	200 patients randomised, 100 in intervention, 100 in control	No significant difference between groups on the identified risk factors
A quasi-experimental study on a community-based stroke prevention programme for clients with minor stroke. Sit JWH <i>et al.</i> Journal of clinical nursing 2007(16)272-281	2007	Determine the effectiveness of a community stroke-prevention programme	Stroke prevention issues, food, smoking, blood pressure	Nursing consultation (nurses as facilitators), 8 weekly 2 hours sessions	Participants who have had a minor stroke	190 patients, 107 in intervention, 83 in control (randomized by time slots)	No significant improvement in smoking or drinking alcohol, maintaining exercise in intervention group



- How do I know when I'm finished?
  - Do you have a good understanding of the research landscape and are you able to convey it to your reader?
  - Did you run it by your advisor?
- What if I can't find anything?
  - Take a step back from your question
    - Find similar populations or break-up the question and make the connections yourself (the research tells us \_\_\_\_ about X population and \_\_\_\_ about Y population but little research has been done on what it means for populations with both X & Y)
  - Citations are your friend.
  - Talk to your librarian.
- Beware of ghost citations



# Writing it up

Look back at your matrix/think about your readings

- What are the themes?
- What are the major agreements/disagreements/controversies?
- How do they relate to your research?
- How is your study situated within the existing research? What gap does it fill?

Write what you have, you can always move things around

Structure it...

- Chronologically
- Topically/thematic
- Methodology/theory

# How to Write Your Methodology and Results/Findings

METHODOLOGY PURPOSE: To tell your reader what you did and how you did it.

- Varies significantly by type of research (quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods), research design, and discipline.
- You'll typically provide information about the context, data collection methods, data analysis techniques, and more depending on your discipline and type of study.
- Work with your advisor/chair to determine how to best approach your methodology section.

RESULTS/FINDINGS PURPOSE: To share your data with your reader.

- You may report your data and save analysis for your discussion.
- You may blend your data and analyses into multiple chapters.
- Work with your advisor/chair to determine how to best present your results/findings.

## Helpful Tips!

- **Offer rationale for methodology used.**
- **Both describe and illustrate your results/findings.**

# How to Write Your Discussion

DISCUSSION PURPOSE: To contextualize your results/findings within your field.

- Connect your results/findings to your research questions.
- Approach as a discussion with your literature review.
- Provide analysis.
- Decide where to focus/where your stories are.
- Consider your discussion as an interplay of your different sections; where your roads connect.

## **Helpful Tip!**

- **Show how your study is an example of the application of your underlying theory.**

# How to Write Your Conclusion

CONCLUSION PURPOSE: Provides your reader a summary that offers insight for future practice and research

- Restate major highlights/findings and results and connect back to your research questions.
- Discuss limitations of your research (may be in discussion).
- Discuss implications for future research and for practice (may be in discussion).

## **Helpful Tip!**

**Do not introduce  
new information.**

# Questions

# Break

# Helpful Tips

- Read other dissertations in your area: ProQuest
- Choose your committee wisely (work with chair, interview potential faculty, consider expertise)
- Involve your full committee as much as possible; be patient and work closely with chair about any confusion
- Make sure your underlying theory is strong
- Identify your research interests early in your program
- Just write something - every day
- Set reasonable long and short term goals; reward yourself along the way
- Form or join a writing group
- Visit the Lumberjack Writing Center for feedback
- Attend presentations and workshops on campus: Cline, OGPS, TLC, CHER, etc.
- Recognize and accept when it is “good enough”

# Resources

## Lumberjack Writing Center

- Dissertation and Thesis Assistance Appointments (5 weeks)
- Individual (or small group) writing support appointments in person or online
- Drop in support (online and at Cline) 9-11am on Wednesdays

## Cline Library

- Discipline specific research support
- Proquest

## Office of Graduate and Professional Studies

- Graduate student roadmaps
- Canvas thesis and dissertation format courses

## University Ombuds Office

- Offers support to graduate students to address concerns that impact their work, life, or study at NAU



# Questions