



Dissertation How To

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Planning Strategies: Transition to full time dissertation writing:

- 1) immediately on achieving your departments benchmark for ABD status go forth and purchase the most recent University standard software package (e.g. Microsoft Office and EndNote from the Campus Computer Store, at <http://www.campuscomputer.com/>). Also be sure you know about format requirements: see <http://www.utexas.edu/ogs/pdn/>, the page where all Graduate School format time notices can be found.
NB: if your computer cannot handle this Software get a computer upgrade immediately. Do not commence work without this Software.
- 2) purchase a standard program for your bibliography. EndNotes or ProCite are popular states of the art for most fields. Start entering your bibliographic citations, choice quotes or insights, and categorizing them by topic and subtopic as you read. Never read a source and postpone entry, relying on handwritten notes alone. Handwritten notes rarely facilitate access to information unless you know where you are going from the outset and have a hypertext mind. Data resist reorganization to accommodate inevitable changes down the line.
- 3) do NOT postpone the writing process. “Read a little, write a little” must be your mantra. Entering notes is not enough. You must put yourself and your thesis in the driver's seat. Information alone doth not a dissertation make. Information is valuable only insofar as it supports or modifies your thesis --a task distinct from entry of data in note-taking.
- 4) set up (demand) regular meetings with your dissertation advisor, particularly at the early stages of your work. No fewer than one monthly.
For each session you must
 - in consultation with the advisor, set up a schedule for your progress--the big and the small increments written in for all weeks of your projected year(s) toward completion
 - show something in writing (a single bibliographic search, an introductory statement)
 - do not allow your advisor's group project (if she or he has you meeting regularly on it) to eclipse your need to focus on your project--for at least 15-20 minutes of those or commensurate working sessions.

- 5) work on your introduction or an initial chapter ASAP. If waiting for data (as in the sciences or field studies in anthropology or applied linguistics) get to work on the secondary literature or on describing how the study has been set up plus any pilot studies or other groundwork that precedes it.
- 6) within one year after comps, admission to candidacy, course work completion, or other departmental benchmarks for ABD status present your dissertation proposal or prospectus. Do not delay on peril of losing job opportunities and having a dissertation committee that is not in fundamental agreement with the direction you are working on.
- 7) plan on presenting your work at a conference or a departmental symposium about midway through (well past the prospectus stage). You must get used to talking about your dissertation succinctly, answering questions cogently, and expressing your ideas verbally as well as you do in writing. Success in your campus visit following a job interview will depend largely on the poise and effectiveness with which you present your material on site.
- 8) plan on submitting an article based on a chapter of your dissertation or a seminar paper of merit. Increasingly in many fields a publication gets your foot in the door for a job interview.
- 9) discuss with mentors the relative merit of electronic submission. In Speech Communication and Anthropology, for example, a design that allows you to present video and audio tapes might be very effective. Consider designing on-line if your field is heading in that direction.
- 10) recognize that *Dissertation Abstracts* now uses full text key words searches and hence your abstract must contain all essential code words for the scope of your work.
- 11) FINISH BEFORE YOU LEAVE FOR YOUR JOB

Daily Strategies:

- you must discipline yourself to do some work on the dissertation every day, no matter how trivial (enter data if too tired to do anything else). Small, regular increments (no matter how tired you are, no matter how "sorry" the result seems as the time) get the job done.
- after an initial bibliographic search, initial readings and chapter outlines that should take not more than one month, start writing 1-2 pages daily. You may have to revise but that is infinitely better than starting from scratch after a year of reading other people's versions of your topic.
- make sure any tables, charts, and graphs you produce are consistent with one another and complete. You don't want to spend time making these right in the final stages of your work.
- stay in touch with your department--do not fall off the face of the earth. Show up for lectures, pick up your mail, check your email.
- stay in touch with the graduate school--check with @gstudnt, participate in the Graduate School Job Search Workshop (Fall) and the Grant Workshop (Spring).
- be sure you belong to your main professional organization so that you receive all newsletters, conference announcements, and updated job lists.