

Kennesaw State University
WellStar School of Nursing
Doctor of Nursing Science
Dissertation Guidelines

The following is the standardized format to be followed in preparing the dissertation. Explanatory notations accompany the prescribed headings to provide insight into the intended content. Variations may be necessary depending upon the paradigm from which the study comes. The research proposal includes Chapters 1-3 and the final dissertation includes all chapters.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Introduce the reader to the area from which the study problem is derived (relatively briefly). Begin with something interesting, like a quote, a story, or a big statistic, to capture the reader's interest. Introduce your question or curiosity. What is it you want to know or understand? How did you get interested in the topic? If your question has evolved since you began thinking about the issue or problem, describe that process. The final paragraph should logically lead into the problem or purpose statement of the study.

Problem of Study or Purpose of Study

This statement (or statements) establishes the specific thrust, essence, and goal of the study. Your reader should be here at least by the top of page 3! The problem of study may be expressed in the interrogative or declarative form. Sub-statements or sub-questions may be used to express the problem/purpose statement more definitively. Use either the declarative or interrogative consistently throughout the dissertation.

Significance of the Study

Tell why there is a need for the study. Give a logical, *documented* argument which convinces/compels the reader that the proposed study is worthwhile to nursing. This section is written after a thorough review of the literature is completed. The gap(s) in the pertinent body of literature which the dissertation will fill is/are thoroughly discussed. Describe how the knowledge gained in the study will be useful. Usefulness to several audiences is generally addressed.

Theoretical Framework

This section speaks to the specific formulation(s) by a given author(s) and how the formulation "frames" the study. Use the specific language of your paradigm and framework and describe how the two are correlated or "fit". (Discussion of similar, rival, or overlapping theories or concepts is reserved for the Review of Literature.)

Assumptions

These are factual or problematic assertions that are situationally relevant. Theoretical assumptions flow from the theoretical framework. Research assumptions are appropriate to the methodology. Explain the assumptions about the nature of knowledge and reality that underlie your research paradigm.

Hypotheses or Research Questions

Either may be used depending on the type of study. Be sure to state the null hypothesis if appropriate. Ground your questions in the chosen theoretical construct(s). Keep in mind what data and analysis techniques will be used to answer each question. You may want to develop a table showing independent and dependent variables and analysis tools that will be used for each. This is not a lengthy discussion but rather a succinct statement of hypothesis(es) or research question(s).

Definition of Terms

A listing of the conceptual definitions is given. Measureable variables are operationally defined.

Limitations

A listing of the factors, to the extent they can be recognized, that diminishes the generalizability and/or conclusions of the study. This section may or may not be appropriate in a qualitative study.

Delimitations

These are variables that are held constant. They define the boundaries within the problems area, and the population of persons or situations to which the findings will apply. This section is not appropriate in a qualitative study.

Summary

The chapter is concluded with a brief recap of its contents.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

In a qualitative study this chapter may be called Literary Context. The subject matter and its organization are described prior to presentation of the literature review. Further subheading of this chapter is necessary. Start by outlining the major topics and subtopics that are relevant to your study and comprise the literature review. The chapter should conclude with an integrative review of the theorists, research findings and writers who agree and the areas of agreement, along with those authors with different points of view and where they diverge. Discuss how your study will extend what is already known. In general this chapter is written in past tense.

Summary

The chapter is concluded with a brief recap of its contents.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Identify and generally describe your research methodology, methods, design, and research procedures. Why is this design the best? The design must be compatible with the type of research and a description of the variable(s) (if applicable) must be incorporated. Plans for the study are written in future tense.

Procedures for Collection and Treatment of Data

Explain how you will select informants and gain entry into the research context (if relevant). Describe the kind(s) of data you will collect. Describe your intended step-by-step data collection procedures and any equipment you will use. Describe how data will be treated, statistical techniques used or other data analysis processes. Address protection of human subjects (if applicable) and procedures to attend to rigor.

Setting

Describe the physical conditions consistently present during application of treatment and measurement of response and/or a description of the environment(s) where the study will be conducted.

Population and Sample

Identify the population from which the sample is drawn; and criteria that must be met for an individual to be an eligible participant; and the method of selection used to obtain the sample. For qualitative studies describe the kind of relationship you intend to have with the informants (neutral, collaborative, objective?).

Instruments

Describe data collection tools and instruments in detail. Results of validity and reliability testing(s) of an instrument and how they were obtained should be described. This section must also offer proof that permission has been obtained for use of the instrument. If multiple instruments are used each is presented individually, following a consistent system of subheadings.

Summary

Recap chapter contents.

*It is absolutely essential that IRB approval is obtained **before collecting any data**. Research involving human beings cannot commence without approval from the IRB.

Note: Once the study is completed the dissertation format may deviate somewhat from these guidelines depending on whether the study is qualitative or quantitative. Generally in a Quantitative Study the methods chapter (3) which is written for the proposal in future tense is changed to past tense and Chapters 4, (Findings), and 5, (Conclusions and Recommendations), are written. Since Qualitative studies are more “emergent” and actual methods may change considerably from what was proposed, Chapter 3 may be re-written in future perfect tense and left as is and a new methods chapter, Chapter 4, may be written describing what actually happened in the conduct of the study. In that case the Findings chapter becomes Chapter 5 and the Conclusions and Recommendations chapter becomes Chapter 6. Once the study is complete, it is referenced in past tense.

Chapter 4

Findings

This chapter reports the results of the study. Findings should be organized according to hypotheses or research questions, or other appropriate formats depending on the type of study.

Description of participants

The demographic descriptions of participants may be in narrative alone or tables may accompany a full written presentation of information in the tables.

Summary of Findings

A condensed recap of all study findings is given.

Chapter 5

Conclusions and Recommendations

This chapter begins with a concise overview of the entire study. Conclusions are drawn and reported. Study findings and meanings are interpreted against the background of the theoretical framework(s), methodology, and related literature. To what extent do findings from this study fill the gap(s) in the body of literature it was intended to fill and further nursing knowledge? Implications for study findings, along with recommendations for future research are included.

Summary

The chapter is concluded with a summary of contents.