



## Dissertation Format Options

The doctoral dissertation is the culminating experience of the PhD program. The purpose of the dissertation is to document research completed by the student to merit conferral of the PhD degree. The dissertation represent original research for which the PhD student has taken primary responsibility including identification of the research question(s), study design, conduct, analysis, interpretation and dissemination. The work must be judged as making a new contribution to the the nursing knowledge base, or substantial depth, and significant in its importance to the field. The written dissertation document provides evidence that the student has mastered sufficient knowledge and skills to be capable of independent research.

The Graduate School stipulates formatting and style requirements for the dissertation document, including margins; font size; spacing; page numbering; use of equations, superscripts and subscripts; graphics; language use; title page layout; footnotes and endnotes; appendices; and bibliography (<http://grad.wisc.edu/currentstudents/doctoralguide>). Beyond these requirements, the dissertation content and format is at the discretion of the major program. In nursing, students have the option of selecting the traditional 5-chapter dissertation thesis, or a 3-paper dissertation. Students should talk with their faculty advisor (the dissertation chair) to determine the preferred format prior to the dissertation proposal defense. Regardless of format, the work is expected to be of equal rigor and level of scholarship.

### **5-Chapter Dissertation**

Traditionally, PhD students in nursing have written a 5-chapter dissertation thesis, including

- Chapter 1: Introduction
- Chapter 2: Review of literature
- Chapter 3: Methods
- Chapter 4: Results
- Chapter 5: Discussion and conclusions

Chapter content is based on the approved dissertation proposal and presents the data and interpretation of findings from the dissertation research. The document may also include preliminary work completed while the student was in the PhD program. The student is expected to be the sole author of the dissertation thesis. Based on School of Nursing conventions, the dissertation should be prepared in APA format. There are no page limits for individual chapters or appendices, however, students should conduct with their faculty advisor about preferred length of the document.

### **3-Paper Dissertation**

Students may also choose to write a 3-paper dissertation in which publishable manuscripts are prepared in lieu of chapters 2-4. Following are the School of Nursing expectations for the 3-paper dissertation option.

#### **Expectations for the 3-paper dissertation**

All committee members must agree on the focus and aims, the target journal, timeline for submission, and the planned authorship for each manuscript.

- The three manuscripts must be distinct from each other, differing significantly in theoretical perspective, approach, methodology, or sample and dataset. All three manuscripts must combine to coherently describe work toward a focused program of research, not a series of unconnected topics.

- At least one of the manuscripts must be data-based and report new and original findings of the dissertation study.
- Target journals may represent nursing and/or interdisciplinary audiences.
- Students should be the first author on all manuscripts. All authors must meet International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) criteria for authorship. [www.icmje.org](http://www.icmje.org). Co-authors must attest that the student did the majority of the work and most of the writing of the manuscript.
- Manuscripts do not need to be submitted to the selected journals prior to graduation. Students must get approval of all coauthors before submission to the journal (even if this happens after graduation).
- Up to 2 manuscripts already submitted and reviewed / or accepted for publication at the time of the dissertation proposal defense may be allowed, at the discretion of the committee, as long as (1) they are substantive to the dissertation, (2) the work was completed while the student was enrolled in the PhD program, (3) the student is the first author of the manuscript, and (4) all co-authors confirm that the student did the majority of the work. If manuscripts already accepted for publication are to be included, the student must obtain written permission from the copyright holder (the journal) to include the material in the dissertation deposited with the Graduate School.
- A signed agreement should be obtained from all committee members at the dissertation proposal defense meeting. Any changes subsequent to the proposal defense must be reviewed and approved by all committee members. This includes changes as a result of journal review if the manuscript is submitted for publication prior to the dissertation defense (e.g., the journal rejects the manuscript and a new target journal must be selected; reviewers recommend major revisions). Changes that occur after the dissertation defense are at the discretion of the student and his/her co-authors.

Manuscripts must be prepared according to the journal's instructions for authors and should conform to their recommendations for length (word count), style, and organization.

- Students and committee members should expect that journal page restrictions will limit the amount of detail that can be provided in the manuscripts. Instruments, tables, and other relevant documents may be submitted as appendices, but a limit of no more than 50 pages of appendices is recommended. Students should be aware that committee members may not carefully review all appendix documents in detail.
- Committee members are discouraged from asking for lengthier, more detailed descriptions in order to assure that the student is able to prepare publishable quality work in a timely manner, and to prevent asking the student to prepare both forms of the dissertation (i.e., thesis and 3-papers).
- Content and issues that do not fit in the allowable page limit of the manuscripts are appropriate for questions and discussion in the oral portion of the defense.

The final dissertation document must meet Graduate School requirements. The document should include:

- An introductory chapter that provides a brief overview of (1) background and significance of the problem, (2) literature review, (3) theoretical / conceptual framework, as appropriate, (4) study aims, (5) proposed methods, and (6) an introduction to the 3 manuscripts and explanation of how they integrate to represent a cohesive body of work. Any of these sections may be abbreviated if the focus of one of the manuscripts is a detailed review (e.g., systematic review of literature). This chapter should be limited to approximately 20 pages.
- Manuscript 1
- Manuscript 2
- Manuscript 3
- A discussion and conclusions chapter including synthesis of the main findings across manuscripts, integration of findings with current knowledge, limitations, and future directions

The introductory and discussion chapters should be prepared in APA format.

When depositing the dissertation with the Graduate School, the student is encouraged to select “No” to the publishing options question “I want my work to be available in ProQuest as soon as it is published”, and select an embargo period of 6 months, 1 year, or 2 years. The embargo period will allow time for the manuscripts to be accepted by journals without risk of rejection because they have already been published by the University.