

Managing Your Dissertation: Practical Tips for a Smooth Dissertation Journey

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“The best dissertation is a done dissertation!” But a done (and high quality) dissertation doesn’t just happen. There must be a plan for it.



Objectives

By the end of the session, each student should be able to develop a personal plan for completing the dissertation by answering the following questions:

1. How will I manage my topic? (Track I)
2. How will I manage time?
3. What will I do to avoid procrastinating?
4. How will I manage stress?
5. How will I manage my dissertation chair?



Life (and your NSU program) can be a juggling act.

Keep the balls in the air!

But, if you should drop one . . .

Be sure it is a rubber ball and not a crystal one.

How is a Dissertation Different?

- It is new, unlike anything else you have done in your academic career.
- It is primarily a self-directed process.
- It is a constantly evolving project. Even once a benchmark is approved, details of the project can change.
- It marks your transition from student to scholar.

Managing My Topic



Tip 1: Imagine Possibilities

- Journals, books, dissertations
- Conferences, workshops, presentations
- Recommendations about future research
- Workplace
- Expert consultations
- Online library services
(e.g., ProQuest)



Tip 2: Narrow Down

- Bounce ideas off a colleague
- Talk with your chair
- Are you interested enough in the topic to work on it over a period of months, years?

Tip 3: Consider Feasibility

Can the study be done?

Do you have access to the research site?

Do you have the time, resources, and skills to carry out the research?

Is it within your range of influence?

Should the study be done?

Does it advance knowledge?

Does it contribute to practice?

Tip 4: Remember Topic is NOT in Stone

You can change your topic (but talk with your chair first)!

- Interest changes
- Research site changes
- Other events occur (e.g., become unemployed)

Managing Time



How will you keep the crystal balls in the air if you are like this?



There are some things
you are going to have to



TIP: Learn to say **NO**



What are 3 things you will STOP doing?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Tip 1: Organize

1. Develop a long range schedule; work backward from graduation.
2. Develop a schedule (daily or weekly) that works for you.
3. Develop an organizational filing system, either digital or physical.
3. Keep the end in mind. (Do you hear “Pomp and Circumstance playing in the background?)

Tip 2: Plan

1. Use your most productive time of day for working on your dissertation.
2. Designate a work space specifically for working on your dissertation; a place where you can leave things out until next time.
3. Create surroundings that encourage your productivity.
4. Be reasonable about writing time. Twelve hours in a day is not realistic for most people!

Tip 3: Execute

1. Stick to your schedule! Establish a routine. Do not let anything but an emergency or crystal ball interfere with your schedule.
2. Take advantage of other times that are NOT on your schedule to work on your dissertation.
3. If you need to quit writing while you're on a roll, write down what you are planning to focus on next so that you can come right back to it during your next writing session.

Managing Procrastination

Procrastination Quotes

You don't have to see the whole staircase, just take the first step.

Martin Luther King JR



Tip 1: Ignore Distractions

1. Close your email or any other distractions on your computer.
2. Remove visual clutter from your workspace.
3. Shut off your phone!
4. Let your loved ones know that you should not be disturbed.
5. Skip what you don't know so that you don't get distracted by the difficult parts. Stay focused on the easier parts and come back to the difficult parts when you have ample time and the momentum to work on them.
6. Schedule your distractions. What's important to you? Schedule time for that and let the small things go.

Tip 2: Get Started

“The art of writing is the art of applying the seat of the pants to the seat of the chair.” (Mary Heaton Vorse)



Tip 3: Break the task into manageable parts.

“You can eat an entire elephant one bite at a time.”

Tip 4: Avoid Perfectionism

- Do not try to get it perfect in your head. You never will.
- "If you want to write, write it. That's the first rule." (Robert Parker)
- "You don't start out writing good stuff. You start out writing crap and thinking it's good stuff, and then gradually you get better at it. That's why I say one of the most valuable traits is persistence." (Octavia Butler)

Managing Stress



Tip 1: EXPECT to go through several drafts of each section

Good writing takes time. The better a writer you become, the more you will see your first thoughts, ideas, and language can be improved.

Tip 2: Back up everything!

Keep copies:

- Hard drive
- Jump drive
- In dropbox
- On a friend's computer

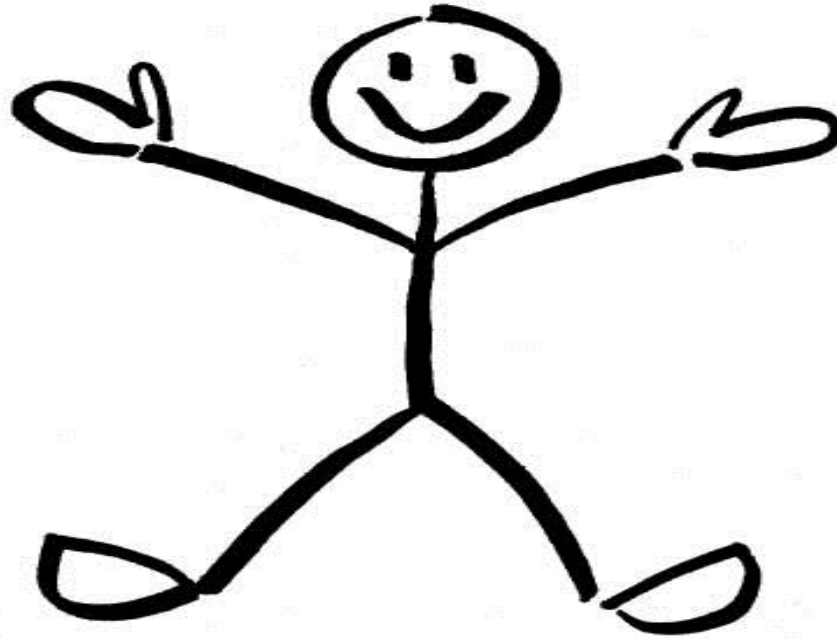
Tip 3: Get a buddy

- Share goals and milestones
- Ask for honest feedback
- Be accountable

Tip 4: Reward Yourself

- Celebrate accomplishments (completing a section, completing a chapter); say “yes” sometimes
- Take a few days away from a completed section; come back with a different perspective

Managing Your Dissertation Chair



Tip 1: COMMUNICATE!

Contact:

1. How often should we be in contact?
2. What is the best method for contacting one another?

Tip 2: COMMUNICATE!

Submissions:

1. Entire drafts?
2. “Pieces”?
3. Polished? Not so polished?

Tip 3: COMMUNICATE!

Feedback:

1. Turnaround time? (for full drafts and for small questions)
2. What kind of feedback is most helpful (written, verbal, or both?; big picture, details, or both)?
3. Let chair know when you are NOT making progress as well as when you are



My Practical Plan to Help Me Keep the Crystal Balls in the Air and Complete My Dissertation

3 ways I will manage my **TOPIC**:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

3 things I will **STOP** doing to better manage **TIME**:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

3 more ways I will manage **TIME**:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

3 ways I will manage **PROCRASTINATION**:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

3 ways I will manage **STRESS**:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

3 ways I will manage working with my **DISSERTATION CHAIR**:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

References

The Writing Center at UNC-Chapel Hill

<http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/dissertations/>