Dissertation Writing Guidelines

The purpose and scope of the Dissertation

Master Dissertation is the qualification paper which serves the purpose of demonstration of appropriate level of knowledge of theory applied research skills in psychology by students. It is supposed to demonstrate the ability of students to carry out a research project independently, though in productive collaboration with Dissertation supervisor.

The skills the Dissertation completion demonstrates include but are not limited to the following:

1. Awareness and understanding of up to date research in the field
2. Ability to design and plan a research activity
3. Ability to apply chosen research methods to answer research questions
4. Ability to analyze the results of the research and draw reasonable conclusions from the research
5. Good academic writing skills
6. Ability to produce research of an appropriate quality for presentation at professional conferences and publication in scholarly journals

Key Milestones

Dissertation is supposed to be completed in several stages during the course of the master program. The following is the timeline of activities related to Dissertation development and writing through the 2 years if the program:

1st semester	Choosing the topic and supervisor	- Find an academic supervisor based on your research interests - The topic of the master Dissertation is defined
2nd semester	Preparation of project proposal, including study design	- The final draft of Research proposal must be submitted to the department during the <u>last week of April</u> - During the <u>first week of May</u> the proposals are presented to faculty
3rd semester	Data collection	- The final Proposal must be presented at Social Sciences Research Symposium on the <u>last week of October</u> - Get the IRB approval in <u>November</u> - Start collecting data in November

4th semester	Data analysis, submission of final dissertation text, getting third reviewers' approvals, defense	- Data collection is finished by March - Results and Discussion sections are completed in March - Final text is submitted on April 30th - Dissertation is sent to reviewers during first week of May - Dissertation is defended after May 20th

Dissertation proposal

Proposal is typically a short research paper which describes what your research is going to be. It serves simultaneously as the first draft of your Dissertation and is supposed to demonstrate good knowledge of the related literature and determine the method for the Dissertation research. All the chapters of the Proposal can be identical to chapters of Dissertation but be somewhat shorter than the Dissertation chapters.
Proposal usually has the following sections, which later turn into chapters of the Dissertation:

- Introduction
- Literature review
- Method
- References
- Appendices

Dissertation proposal is approved by your dissertation supervisor and the teacher of Research and Writing Colloquium course. Proposal serves as qualification paper on the basis of which the student is referred to work with a designated supervisor.

Application to Institutional Review Board (IRB)

After the Proposal of your study is approved by the supervisor and Research and Writing Colloquium course professor, you can proceed to submission of the IRB Application. The IRB Application should be submitted for the research that involves human subjects prior to data collection. IRB reviews all the research on campus and provides ethical clearance prior to start of data collection. Detailed information about IRB can be found at their web-page https://irb.auca.kg/home/main-page/ . The IRB also regularly conduct sessions to explain their role and necessary procedures.
The form for the IRB application can be found at the IRB page (https://irb.auca.kg/home/main-page/).
The deadlines for submission to IRB are posed at the beginning of each month (except of January when IRB starts working after winter holydays in the middle of the month). The reasonable time to submit your proposal is the beginning of September or October of your second year of study. That will allow starting data collection in November. The latest reasonable

time to submit your IRB application is November – a later submission might result into failing to complete your data collection on time.

Consider submission of the IRB application in June after your Proposal is approved, this will put you at a great advantage with your data collection and planning for the next academic year.

Dissertation structure

MAPAP program requires the format of the Dissertation that is consistent with the general writing instructions of the Department of Social Sciences and the Publication Manual of the American Psychology Association (APA). Typically, it contains the following parts:

1. Title Page
2. Abstract
3. (Dedication/Acknowledgments)
4. Table of Contents
5. Tables
6. Figures
7. Introduction
8. Literature Review
9. Methodology
10. Results
11. Discussion (Dissertations using some qualitative methods may have a section of *Results and Discussion* as one, this section can be named *Findings*)
12. Conclusion
13. References
14. Appendix/Appendices

<u>See Dissertation Formatting Appendix for key Dissertation sections.</u>

The following are some key Dissertation sections presented in order:

1. Abstract

Your abstract page should already include the **running head**. On the first line of the abstract page, center the word "Abstract" (no bold, formatting, italics, underlining, or quotation marks). Beginning with the next line, write a concise summary of the key points of your research. (Do not indent.) Your abstract should contain at least your research topic, research questions, participants, methods, results, data analysis, and main conclusions. You may also include possible implications of your research and future work you see connected with your findings. Your abstract should be a single paragraph, double-spaced. Your abstract should be between 150 and 250 words.

You may also want to list keywords from your paper in your abstract. To do this, indent as you would if you were starting a new paragraph, type *Keywords:* (italicized), and then list your keywords. Listing your keywords will help researchers find your work in databases.

2. Introduction

Purpose: Introduction states the objectives of the Dissertation, briefly summarizes the previous literature on the topic, justifies the choice of topic and outlines the research questions.
Length: 6 to 10 pages including definitions of terms list (see below).
Note: It is recommended to rewrite the introduction one last time when the writing is done, to ensure that it connects well with the conclusion

Required components:
  Review of previous research: Introduction starts with a brief review of most relevant previous research, to familiarize the reader with the topic.
  The theoretical framework defines the key concepts and presents the research approach and main theory or theories. Here, theory means the viewpoint from which the topic is examined.
  Purpose of the Study: Introduction should clearly state the purpose of the study in the form of a paragraph or subsection dedicated to the purpose.
  Significance of the Study: As part of the purpose of the study, there should be justification for conducting the project. This section should exhibit a clear understanding of what makes your study significant and why it should be conducted. This section can also contain applications of your results (how you expect your results will be used and by whome).
  Research Questions or Hypotheses: A clear statement(s) that identifies the precise research question should be included. A brief justification of why each question or hypotheses was formulated can be included (e.g., how hypotheses is built on previous studies' findings).
  Definitions: A simple list of definitions of terms that directly pertain to this study should be provided. The list should include definitions of terms that might be unclear to the reader.

3. Literature Review

Purpose: covering all relevant previous research on the subject, including their findings, method where relevant and identifying some gaps in the literature or possibilities for future research. The literature review builds the background and justification for conducting your study.
Length: 15 to 25 pages.
Use of sections: The author may choose to provide materials in sections and subsection, which usually makes it easier for the reader to comprehend the flow of information. Possible sections can include the history of research on the topic (some older theories and research), different relevant views on the topic, literature on the specific variables or concepts that are studied in the dissertation.
Required sections:
    Summary of previous research – provides a summary of all described literature

> Limitations of previous research (can be part of Summary) – provides description of gaps in the previous research and justifies the present study research questions.

Literature sources: Literature review should be based on relevant academic literature. To unsure the quality of the literature you use, refer to academic literature databases (EBSCO, PsychInfo, PsychArticles, JSTOR and others). They can be accessed through AUCA Library. Psychology Department can provide access to additional databased on psychology, please talk to your supervisor.

4. Method

Purpose: The methods section is the section that should clearly present each aspect of the process by which the study will be completed. Every attempt should be made to leave no question as to the procedures used to complete the study. Proper scientific methods should be used for this aspect of the study.
Length: 8-15 pages
Required subsections:
> Participants: This section should identify the process for selection, recruitment, and delineation of the subject pool used for your study. It also includes the description of participants – demographic characteristics and descriptive data.
> Measures: The instrumentation section should identify the tool(s) used for collection of data. How the instrument was acquired or created as well as reliability and validity of the instrument should be presented in this section. In case of translation of instruments, translation procedures should be described.
> Procedures: All aspects pertaining to the entire process conducted should be described. Careful consideration should be paid to approval of methods and treatment of human or animal subjects. All treatments should be carefully described as well as notification of risks for participation.
> Design and Analysis: Provide a clear description of the methods of data analyses that were used: such as statistical tests, types of qualitative data analysis etc.

5. Results

Purpose: Results section is used mostly in the quantitative research papers. This section is meant to describe in detail all the results of statistical tests conducted. *In this section, avoid offering conclusions or interpretations of the results.*
Length: 5-10 pages
Typical subsections:
> Preliminary analysis: this section is optional, it provides some non-demographic descriptions of your participants and data not relevant to your key hypotheses or questions.
> Testing hypotheses: this sections describes in detail the results for each hypothesis you tested. You can provide subsections for each hypothesis, like Testing Hypothesis I, Testing Hypothesis II, etc.

6. Discussion

Purpose: Discussion is meant to compare the findings of the present study with results from previous research (introduced in the literature review), highlight new key findings or findings that support previous research, discuss the limitations of the study, and suggest topics for further research. In discussion possible explanations of why some hypotheses were not supported are provided.
Length: 5-10 pages
Typical sections:

> Main findings: Discussed the key findings in the light of previous research, compares the findings of the present study with what was hypothesized, explains why some hypotheses were not supported.
> Limitations: Discusses limitations of the study.
> Implications: Discusses practical implications (how and by whom the results of the present study can be used).
> Further research: Discusses the possible goals for future research, given the results of the present study.

7. Conclusion

Purpose: This section should offer specific insight to what your findings reveal through synthesis of your findings with the current knowledge in your area of study.
Length: 1-2 pages.

8. Appendices

Purpose: provide all materials, inventories and consent forms that you used. Also, you can use appendices to demonstrate longer tables, figures or pictures that cannot be included into text.
Sample appendices: Informed Consent, Questionnaires, IRB Approval page.

Supervisor Role

Master Dissertation Supervisors must have a PhD degree or higher in psychology or related field and be full time faculty of Psychology Department. In the beginning of the second semester of study, the student and the supervisor specify the topic of the Dissertation and related goals, supervision practices and other details. It is typical that supervisor and student agree on a timeline of Dissertation research completing and on the schedule of supervision meetings.

Students' responsibilities:
  - Be responsible for the entirety of the Dissertation writing process.
  - Be responsible of the timely IRB Application submission.

- Make up schedule for the Dissertation project progress and discuss it with the supervisor.
- Based on the schedule, communicate regularly with the supervisor and report on their progress.
- Submit text to the supervisor to read well before a meeting (typically a week).

Supervisors' responsibilities:
- Help students schedule the work on the different parts of the Dissertation.
- Provide help and guidance at different stages of the project.
- Give well-timed and clear feedback on the Dissertation text in the written form.
- Collect feedback on the supervision process and use it to further develop supervision practices.

Supervision process is based on collaboration and regular communication between the supervisor and the student. The supervisor helps students to define appropriate and timely goals to ensure their progress and success.

Research and Writing Colloquium Course

When students are starting out their Dissertation work, the Dissertation seminar and discussions in the Research and Writing Colloquium group play a crucial role in outlining the Dissertation and formulating research problems. In the seminar group, every student takes responsibility for promoting each other's work and supports each other by discussing and commenting on one another's projects. Students can thus learn not only from their own Dissertation work but from discussing the problems others have. Seminar discussions illustrate the craft-like nature of research; tangible tips from the supervisor and other students help create a sound understanding of how to write a Master's Dissertation. Students should complete or almost complete their theses during the Dissertation seminar. The seminar gives structure to the Dissertation work and it is useful to get feedback from one's peers in the seminar group. The supervisor typically reads a part of the Dissertation at a time, comments on the text, and helps the student revise content and structure. When the Dissertation work has a solid basis, most commenting happens in the Dissertation seminars.

External reviewer

Upon submission of the Dissertation final text on April 30, the student is responsible to send the final version to one external reviewer. Reviewer is selected on the basis of academic and

research interests and has to be an academia-affiliated scientist with a degree in psychology or related field, or having appropriate experience in related research. In exceptional cases, additional reviewer who is a specialist in applied practice, might be contacted for a review, in addition to the main reviewer. External reviewer is supposed to review the Dissertation within two weeks and write a page-length review using the Dissertation Reviewer Form (see Appendix).

Grading

The grade for the Dissertation is comprised of the following components: 67% of the final grade for the Dissertation is comprised of grade on the written thesis and 33% on the basis of the oral defense. The grade for the written Dissertation results from the grade by First Reader (30%) – a faculty member of MAPAP who is not the student's supervisor – and the grade by External Reviewer (37%) (see section below). The grade for the oral defense (33% of the final grade) is given by the State Committee on the basis of the below criteria.

- Novelty of the research topic of approach to research
- Research questions and hypotheses: clarity and coherence
- Clearly stated goals of the study
- Coherent literature review and its critical analysis
- Choice of research method and design
- Depth and coherence of data analysis
- Clearly stated conclusions and discussion of applicability
- Ethical considerations

Dissertation defense

There are 2 steps for Dissertation defense procedure. The first step includes a Mock Defense that is aimed at collecting feedbacks and preliminary assessment of the Dissertation that results into admission to Dissertation defense (permission to undertake Dissertation). The Dissertations that are not approved at Mock Defense are either provided with recommendations for their finalization in a timely manner, or forbidden from being defended in the current academic year. The mock defense is taking place at the beginning of April during the 4th semester of study. The final version of the Dissertation is submitted on 30th of April for external reviewers. The defense is usually scheduled at the third or fourth week of May.

Editing, proof-reading and anti-plagiarism policy

This is student's responsibility to conduct proof-reading of the text, possible with the support of a native speaker having capacity in academic writing in English. The anti-plagiarism policy of MAPAP is consistent with AUCA Code of Conduct.

Dissertation formatting

The MAPAP Dissertation should be written according to APA style. You can consult the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, (6th ed., 2nd printing).

For detailed information on using APA style in your writing, please visit:

1. Purdue OWL guide on APA style with example:

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/apa_style/apa_style_introduction.html

2. General information about APA style:

https://www.apastyle.org/learn/faqs/index

3. Sample Paper in APA style:

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/apa_style/apa_formatting_and_style_guide/apa_sample_paper.html