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GEARING UP

There Is Method in the Madness

CHAPTER 2 OBJECTIVES

- Discuss the significance regarding identification and choice of topic so that students can begin to think about areas of interest in relation to potential researchable topics.
- Clarify expectations and issues regarding appropriate advisor–student collegial relationship and mutual responsibility.
- Introduce the mindset that is required to create the physical and mental “space” that is necessary to begin the dissertation process in as methodical and organized a manner as possible.
- Offer practical and actionable strategies for embarking on the research and writing process including organizational, managerial, and data security tips.
- Begin to develop the skills involved in establishing and managing a realistic and doable timeline.
- Offer a comprehensive set of guidelines regarding academic writing skills with a strong focus on clarity and inclusivity.
- Clarify expectations and issues regarding academic integrity.
- Provide an overview of guidelines regarding institutional review board (IRB) certification and approval.

OVERVIEW

Undoubtedly, if you are reading this book, you are a continuous learner; it is the reason you decided to pursue a doctoral degree in the first place. It takes a certain amount of courage to take on this work because in many ways it is fraught with uncertainty. For those of you who are just starting out and for those who need to restart and continue, it can seem an overwhelming process. Truth be told, everyone who has ever embarked on this journey most

likely has experienced a certain amount of anxiety, if not downright fear. Will I know how to do this work? Will I be up to the task? What if I fail? Ah, what if I succeed? Will it meet my expectations? These are some of the cobwebs that cloud our vision and stand in our way. It is okay to feel anxiety and fear. These feelings are natural as long as they do not debilitate you. This chapter is titled “There is Method in the Madness.” As the author, I am apt to rethink this and instead refer to the idea of “More Methods, Less Madness.” These methods and strategies are what constitute this chapter; the intention is to provide you with *workable ways* that will enable you to become organized, stay focused, plan ahead, and position yourself for success!

At the completion of her dissertation, one of my students recently wrote: “This was about completing one of the most rewarding, time consuming things, and challenging years that I ever endured thus far.” A dissertation is certainly a monumental piece of work! However, right at the very start, one way to avoid becoming overwhelmed by the magnitude of the project is to look at the entire process of completing a dissertation as an incremental one. It is like the novice skier, who recognizes that a good way not to be overwhelmed by the sheer size of the mountain is to traverse it—going from side to side, conquering it bit by bit. Completing your dissertation is a matter of taking one step at a time and finding out what is needed at each step along the way. That is what this book is all about—providing you with the information you need and helping you to develop the skills required along the way to complete this work.

So let us take up our journey and begin by getting yourself energized and organized mentally and physically. Begin by adopting a reflective stance. Think about those things, personal and professional, that have caused you to procrastinate, get stuck, or even abandon the work. Attempt to come to terms with those obstacles. Persistence and determination are what it takes to finish. Develop a sense of urgency about completing your dissertation. No matter how talented you are, if you don’t have a sense of urgency, develop it now! Make plans to deal with the real challenges that you face, and determine to move beyond your own self-imposed obstacles by taking action. Commit to acting despite your apprehensions, and commit to developing an “I can do this” attitude; become your best friend and not your own worst enemy. This is of paramount importance. Once you have taken on an achievement-oriented mindset and attitude, you can begin to get yourself organized.

IDENTIFYING AND DEVELOPING A RESEARCHABLE TOPIC

The starting point for any research project, and indeed the first major challenge in conducting research, is coming to some decision about a sound researchable topic. The topic is the subject of inquiry around a particular research problem that your study will address. For some, choosing a topic can be an exciting process; finally, you have the opportunity to pursue an area in which you have long been interested. For others, generating and selecting a topic can be a frustrating and somewhat overwhelming experience. Commonly, students consider a few potential topics before finally settling on one. Being able to identify a general topic area early in your program provides you time to become well-versed on the topic, making it easier to identify potential areas

of research as you move toward establishing a viable research problem. Finding a research topic that is interesting, relevant, and worthy of your time may take substantial effort, so you should be prepared to invest your time accordingly.

The notion of feasibility was discussed in Chapter 1 where we addressed the components of a dissertation proposal and how to go about developing the proposal. We will circle back again to the concept of feasibility in Chapter 6 where you will learn more about developing the introductory chapter of your dissertation manuscript. What you do need to know is that the criterion of feasibility is especially important when choosing a dissertation topic. You don't want to settle on a topic and then find out that the study you were imagining cannot be done, or the survey or assessment instrument you need, for some reason, cannot be accessed or used. If you select a topic that you have worked closely on for many years, make sure you are still open to new information, even if that information runs counter to what you believe to be true about the topic. It is very important to think about these considerations beforehand so that you don't get stuck during the dissertation process. As such, carefully considering your options, doing some background work on each potential option, and ultimately settling on a topic that is both feasible and manageable will spare you many of the frustrations that come from attempting research on a topic that, for whatever reason, may not be appropriate or doable.

As Tracy (2010) describes it, "Good qualitative research is relevant, timely, significant, interesting, or evocative. Worthy topics often emerge from disciplinary priorities and, therefore, are theoretically or conceptually compelling. However, worthy topics just as easily grow from timely societal or personal events" (p. 840). When judging the significance of a study's contribution, researchers gauge the current climate of knowledge, practice, and politics and ask questions such as "Does the study expand knowledge and insight?" "Deepen understanding?" "Improve practice?" "Generate ongoing research?" "Liberate or empower?" Tracy (2010) explains that the significance of qualitative research can be conceptualized in various ways: Theoretically significant research builds theory or extends or problematizes current theoretical assumptions. Such contributions offer new and unique understandings that emerge from the data analysis—conceptualizations—that help explain social life in unique ways and may be transferred to other contexts. In doing so, the study builds on past research but provides new conceptual understandings that can be used by future researchers. Heuristic significance moves people to further explore, research, or act on the research in the future. Research is heuristically significant when it develops curiosity in the reader, inspiring the need for new discoveries. Heuristic significance also implies an influence on audiences, including policy makers, research participants, or the lay public, to engage in action or change—in this way creating an overlap with practical significance. Practically significant research asks whether the knowledge derived by the research is useful in shedding light on or framing a contemporary issue. Does the knowledge produced by the research empower participants to become more critically reflective, thereby challenging assumptions and perspectives and viewing society in new ways? Does the research provide a story that might liberate individuals from injustice or in some way transform their lives? Another means toward achieving significance is through engaging in research methodology in novel, creative, or insightful ways, thereby yielding methodological significance.

A research project that incorporates methodologically significant approaches may not only lead to theoretical insights and practical usefulness but also contribute to future researchers' practice of methodological skills.

In seeking a topic, you should remember that the key objective of doing a dissertation is to obtain the credentials by demonstrating that you understand and can therefore conduct good research. In selecting a topic, most students focus on trying to be original and exhibiting the desire to contribute to the existing knowledge base. Most academic institutions require that a dissertation be an original piece of research and should make a significant contribution to the field. At the outset, it is important to remember, however, that making an original contribution does not imply that there need be an enormous "breakthrough." In social science research, the discovery of new facts is rarely an important or even challenging criterion. Rather, research is a process of searching or re-searching for new insights; it is about advancing knowledge or understanding of a practice or phenomenon. In fact, it is perfectly acceptable to model your research on a previous study and develop some aspect of it or even replicate it. Replicating a previous study or aspects of a previous study is appropriate because knowledge accumulates through studies that build on each other over time. When thinking of selecting a researchable topic, there are some search strategies that may be helpful:

- Begin by completing a cursory review of available scholarly sources. This is a necessary step that will provide you with an understanding of the availability of literature on the proposed topic or topics you may have in mind. Looking at previously published dissertations is another good way to gauge the level of research and involvement that is generally expected at the dissertation level. Previously published dissertations can also be good sources of inspiration for your own dissertation study. The literature review of a dissertation contains a wealth of information. Not only can the literature review provide topic ideas by showing some of the major research that has been done on a topic but it can also help you evaluate any topics that you are tentatively considering. From your examination of literature reviews, you can determine to what extent your research ideas are relevant to the current state of the discipline.
- Another way to begin developing a researchable topic is to look around you at the activities in which you are involved and to draw on your own personal and professional experiences. Most students find that they can best access areas in which they already have some expertise or familiarity with practice in the field. Once you have identified an area of interest, you can then begin to examine and become familiar with the available literature related to your topic. Especially useful are reviews of literature found in journals specifically committed to publishing extensive review articles, as well as policy-oriented publications that discuss current and emerging issues. In addition, all discipline areas have their own encyclopedias, yearbooks, and handbooks, most of which can be accessed on the internet. You also might take time to look over earlier dissertations and seek previous studies that in some respects mirror your own interests and topic.

- In addition to seeking out relevant literature, engage in conversation with colleagues and peers to hear different perspectives about pertinent issues and to begin to sharpen your topical focus. Generating and selecting a viable topic is a complex process that involves various competing factors. As you may notice throughout this book, our predisposition toward research and writing is that both are highly interactive processes. Seeking the feedback and critique of academic advisors, faculty committee members, and colleagues is, in our experience, an integral part of the dissertation process.

Undertaking a dissertation is a rigorous and long-term engagement in terms of both conducting the fieldwork and working with the data. Although the dissertation need not necessarily be one's "life's work," caring about the topic at hand and having a compelling interest to learn what is not yet known are critical to sustaining motivation and commitment, and hence momentum. The sooner you can begin to narrow your research interests and identify and develop a topical focus, the better. Having a fairly good idea of the area in which you will be situated, you will most productively be able to utilize your time to refine your topic, and so further the dissertation objectives. Once you have identified a general area of interest, you will then need to begin narrowing your topic. A topic is typically complex and broad, and includes many disparate aspects, but your research will need to be focused very narrowly in order to be manageable. Instead of asking yourself "will that be interesting?," ask "what does the field not yet know?" Ultimately, you will need to winnow down your broad topic to a problem that is in need of resolution. Your study will need a specific and clear focus. This becomes your research problem. The process of developing a researchable topic is a process of idea generation—the movement from a general interest toward a more clearly refined idea around a researchable problem. This is discussed more fully in Chapter 6 of this book. Ultimately, your readers will want to know why the topic of study and the specific research problem are both relevant and warranted. Significant research asks whether the knowledge derived from the study is useful in shedding light on or framing a contemporary issue. When judging the significance of a study's contribution, researchers ask questions such as:

- Does the research expand knowledge and insight?
- Does the research deepen understanding?
- Does the research improve practice and/or policy?

SELECTING AND FORMING YOUR DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

One of the most important tasks of a doctoral candidate is finding a suitable advisement team. Each university has a different system in this regard, and you need to make sure of your institution's and/or program's policies and procedures. At some universities, the doctoral committee structure is based on an apprenticeship model and is used as a vehicle to guide the student from course work through the dissertation defense. The dissertation committee in effect becomes the

group of faculty responsible for your progress right from the beginning of the process, with all members contributing to the development of an acceptable dissertation. The committee is usually a hierarchical organization, with each member of the committee having a different responsibility vis-à-vis your research.

Most institutions refer to the lead advisor or supervisor as the chair (or sponsor), who is the dissertation process expert first and foremost. The second reader is usually considered the subject matter expert, who will have deep content expertise with regard to the topic area. There is often also at least one member of the committee who is an expert in the selected design and methodology. It is imperative that doctoral students understand committee members' roles and processes based on their institutions, as these roles and processes can vary to some extent. In some institutions, the chair has the ultimate approval power throughout the dissertation stages and processes. At other institutions, there are "gatekeepers" that can block a chapter, proposal, or even dissertation manuscript from moving to the next phase. This needs to be clear, and so students are advised to inquire as to their institutions' expectations and exact processes.

Ideally, the doctoral committee is composed of faculty with different areas of expertise and whose resources you will be able to tap in the process of working on your dissertation. Again, this is a matter of institutional difference. In some instances (but not always), you can select your committee from among those in your department and related departments, those whose courses you have taken and/or those whose work bears some relation to the focus of your dissertation. Some faculty may be members of other programs or other schools within your university. In other instances, choice of committee may be more tightly constrained. In some cases (but not always), subject matter experts beyond your university are chosen. It is strongly advised that you be clear about your own institutional requirements so you can follow the necessary protocol and take into account acceptable policy and procedures. Additional details regarding forming your dissertation committee are included in Part III of this book.

Remember that your advisor or dissertation chair will hopefully be your mentor, principal guide, and primary resource throughout the dissertation process. Therefore, to the extent possible, given your institution's process and requirements, you need to spend time looking for the kind of authentic educator you feel confident can help you throughout the process. Take the time to do some research, ask others about their experiences, and find out as much as you can about the faculty at your institution and their areas of interest. Considerations in seeking the right advisor, sponsor, or dissertation chair include the following:

Advisement Skills and Experience

Part of being experienced and interested in advisement, a key quality of an ideal advisor, is having a complete understanding of the requirements and process of completing a dissertation. In addition, students value advisors who consider the diverse needs of particular subgroups of the student population, including vulnerable or marginalized communities, international students, those with children or dependants, those with disabilities, and those with cultural differences. It is indeed critical that advisors are attentive to diversity and inclusivity, and that they recognize and address the individual needs of each student. These needs vary greatly between students and between different stages of their studies.

Support and Direction

Supportiveness is the quality that doctoral students value highly. This involves advisors being encouraging, serving as mentors, and remaining aware that students' lives extend beyond the doctoral program. Supportive advisors make an effort to understand how their student prefers to work and will guide them accordingly. In addition, they will attend to the student as a whole person, rather than purely as a research student, which implies providing support both academically and emotionally throughout the dissertation journey to instill motivation and a growth academic mindset. Support is based on good listening skills, the tendency to maintain open dialogue about the dissertation study, its progress and problems; the ability to communicate in an open, honest, and fair manner about issues that arise (and as soon as they arise); and setting clear expectations with regard to all matters inherent to the process of successfully completing the dissertation.

Availability and Accessibility

Students greatly value when their advisors are available and accessible. The ideal advisor is approachable and works to establish a good rapport with their students. This involves meeting with students regularly, setting aside adequate time to work alongside them and provide support as needed. This means being prompt in responding to any concerns that students may have, being prompt in returning feedback and grading, and being willing to be flexible with students' school/work schedules. Availability and accessibility is also enhanced by being contactable through several media (e.g., email, phone)—particularly if faculty and students are not physically present as is typical of online or hybrid programs.

Structured and Constructive Feedback

The ideal advisor is perceived to be one who provides an appropriate amount of direction and structure to the student's research project. They are prepared to create deadlines, set writing goals to help the student stay on track, and constructively challenge or push the student beyond boundaries when required. Such an advisor is informative and helpful when it comes to areas of uncertainty or confusion, helping to encourage good work habits in order to achieve the desired outcomes from their research. Advisors should also provide substantive feedback and constructive critique of student work that is consistent across time; an indication that the advisor and student are "on the same page" and share the same focus regarding the project.

Interest in Student's Career

Advisors are interested and enthusiastic about their student's work by being positive, empowering, motivational, and committed. Moreover, ideal advisors will also show an interest in their student's career path and professional trajectory. Toward this end, they may help to provide support for the establishment of the student's career in several ways, including developing useful contacts and support groups, introducing students to their network of colleagues, looking out for and informing students of conferences and seminars that are relevant to their research and

career, and encouraging and facilitating the publication and/or presentation of the student's research.

Right from the very start, build a supportive network so you never feel alone! Once you have been assigned an advisor, sponsor, or dissertation chair, be proactive in establishing and maintaining a good working relationship. Keep them apprised of your status along the way by regularly sending progress reports and updates. This communication serves to maintain contact throughout and is a strategy for gaining the necessary support and feedback as you proceed to tackle the chapters of your dissertation.

STAKEHOLDER RESPONSIBILITY AND STANDARDS OF GOOD PRACTICE

As a graduate research student, and key stakeholder in the process, you have a right to expect the following:

- Orientation dealing with the dissertation process and requirements and policies that are entailed.
- Identification of a doctoral committee with a designated doctoral advisor and second reader.
- A graduate handbook that outlines and explains all departmental policies, expectations, and deadlines pertaining to supervision of doctoral students. This handbook might include rights and responsibilities of doctoral candidates as well as procedures for changing advisors and/or filing grievances.
- Verbally communicated or written documentation from your advisor regarding expectations, recommendations for best practices, and deadlines for deliverables.

Supervision or advisement has become increasingly recognized as a professional skill that requires training and monitoring. In addition to committee chairs, most university departments have faculty members who serve as dissertation advisors and who are responsible for ongoing guidance and support throughout the research process. This includes informing students about institutional and departmental regulations, requirements, and policies (and changes and updates when these occur); keeping students updated about responsibilities, deliverables, and deadlines; and assisting students with completing and timeously submitting all official documentation. Attaining a doctorate cannot be achieved without the necessary institutional support, structure, and guidance. Qualitative research itself poses additional potential dangers posed by inherent lack of structure, and so regular and structured supervision becomes increasingly critical. As a student, you would not want to spend months or even years in the field only to realize that you have not collected appropriate and relevant amounts of material and/or conducted appropriate and relevant analytic procedures to qualify for a grounded and defensible dissertation. As such, *you* need to take the initiative to (a) become familiar with the structure

and policies of your department and (b) consult with your advisor on a regular and consistent basis about your progress as well as the challenges you may encounter. As you advance through the process, you will certainly come to realize that there is no substitute for self-discipline and orderly thinking, and that your professional and collegial working relationship with your advisor is a key factor in this process.

In addition, your institution will provide you with access to multiple resources to support you, and these become part of the road map for your doctoral journey. Become familiar with your program handbook that outlines the dissertation process, including milestones, deliverables, deadlines, and policies. This will ensure that you are consistently meeting your program's requirements and criteria. What is important too is that you familiarize yourself with any templates that are provided as these will serve as a guide regarding what is required for each chapter of the dissertation. Rubrics or checklists will also help you stay on track, check yourself, and maintain a record of your activities throughout the process.

The Feedback Factor

Feedback can be one of the most powerful influences on learning, and in the dissertation process, it is essential to improving your writing and helping you move forward step-by-step. Effective feedback allows you to meet expectations and requirements, and make productive gains on closing the gap to achieve success. Effective faculty feedback means that it is sufficiently detailed, understandable, and actionable. The iterative nature of the dissertation process places you on a revision-cycle loop, which may feel as though you are constantly taking one step forward and two steps back. This can certainly become frustrating and overwhelming, sometimes even bringing to the fore a sense of the imposter syndrome. The expectation is that you will address all feedback, so be sure to ask for clarification if you do not understand any part of the feedback provided. Don't ignore feedback! Remember, substantial and comprehensive feedback does not imply failure! Feedback is of value in helping you succeed, and the ability and willingness to embrace feedback is an ideal mindset.

In working on your dissertation chapters you should look forward to receiving directive feedback which is focused on the future, clearly indicating the steps you can take to improve or enhance your work. Of course the healthiest and most productive response to constructive critique is receptivity, whereby you actively engage, make sense of the feedback provided, and use the suggestions and recommendations to improve your work. Remember, you are more likely to engage in feedback when it comes from someone you trust and believe is a credible authority; one who serves as a mentor by genuinely seeking to help you progress your work and successfully complete all requirements. As such, the student–faculty relationship is key.

Students and faculty are, essentially, partner stakeholders in the dissertation process. Producing a quality dissertation is expected to require creation, review, feedback, and revision of numerous successive drafts. Each draft submitted for review to the dissertation advisor and/or committee members should reflect the student's best efforts in light of accumulating knowledge, experience, and feedback. In turn, the final product and the quality thereof are a reflection, too, of the guidance and support of faculty. As such, both student and faculty have a stake in the process and its final outcome: a successful defense and a quality product that has

contributed new knowledge and insights to the field and that is hopefully worthy of enhancing practice and/or prompting further research.

Advisors expect doctoral candidates to engage in the following activities:

- Work independently.
- Think critically and conceptually.
- Submit drafts as needed.
- Be available for regular meetings or conversations at mutually convenient times.
- Be honest about their progress.
- Choose to follow advice and guidelines, or offer valid or reasonable reasons for not choosing to do so.
- Complete all Institutional Review Board (IRB) and Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) requirements.

Student Responsibilities

Receiving supervision and support on the dissertation journey does not preclude students' taking responsibility for their own learning and progress, and the importance of exercising self-directed learning skills cannot be emphasized enough. While students receive guidance from their dissertation chairs and committee members, they are ultimately responsible for the timely completion and successful defense of a high-quality (i.e., defensible and publishable) dissertation. The following guidelines will assist students in accomplishing this goal:

1. Establish and sustain a collegial working relationship with your advisor.
2. Carefully consider feedback from the advisor. Initiate and engage in conversation to better understand and evaluate feedback. Explain to the advisor any decision made to adapt or reject feedback, and remain open to further feedback.
3. Create, revise as needed, and adhere to a dissertation project plan (including timeline). The project plan should be developed and revised in close consultation with the advisor.
4. When writing the dissertation, enable the advisor to provide timely and helpful review and feedback by submitting quality work at each revision.
5. If a conflict with the advisor arises, first address the conflict directly with the advisor. If the conflict remains unresolved, arrange a meeting with the chair (or committee member) and the program director or another appropriate third party.
6. Assure and appropriately evidence compliance with all relevant IRB research regulations (e.g., federal and institutional) regarding human participants, and be sure to complete all required CITI training modules.

7. Understand that hired assistance is acceptable under certain circumstances. An editor may be hired to provide aid during the writing process; however, the help received should be limited to editing assistance for narrative already created and revised.
8. Prepare for and defend the dissertation proposal and demonstrate capacity to successfully complete and defend the dissertation according to the proposed timeline.
9. Defend the dissertation to the satisfaction of the dissertation committee and in accordance with established program and institutional procedures.
10. Assuming successful defense, present the final written dissertation with proper paper, binding, style, and format, according to program and institutional guidelines.

Doctoral candidates expect their advisors to engage in the following activities:

- Supervise, advise, mentor, and coach.
- Provide ongoing feedback and support (written and verbal).
- Read work in advance of meetings.
- Be available when needed at mutually suitable times.
- Be both supportive and constructively critical.
- Have thorough knowledge of the field of qualitative research and the chosen research design (genre or tradition).
- Be somewhat proficient regarding the research topic.
- Be genuinely interested in the topic and/or the contribution that the research study may potentially make to the field.

Faculty Responsibilities

While students are ultimately responsible for the timely completion and successful defense of a high-quality (i.e., defensible and publishable) dissertation, dissertation faculty members are responsible for providing support and critical feedback throughout this dissertation process. The following guidelines will assist students' understanding and expectations regarding faculty's responsibility in providing support and guidance:

1. Engage dissertation students in extensive conversations to explore and eventually focus on a meaningful and significant dissertation topic. Through focused conversations, students should broaden and deepen their thinking and understanding around potential contribution to their topic of choice.
2. Assure that the dissertation progresses, with the following characteristics in place:
 - (a) The dissertation topic holds personal and professional meaning for the student as well as significance and value to the field; (b) research and/or guiding questions are

developed in relation to both the dissertation topic and the theoretical or conceptual framework; (c) research design (qualitative genre or tradition) and research methods (data collection and analysis) are appropriately aligned with the research problem, purpose, and research questions and support qualitative research principles; (d) the research is conducted ethically, and that rigor, trustworthiness, and reflexivity remain central throughout the process; (e) dissertation findings, analyses, and conclusions are credible, and consistent with collected data; (f) limitations and delimitations of the study are explicitly recognized and explained, including transparency regarding researcher positionality; (g) research and writing style are appropriately scholarly; and (h) the final dissertation product is scholarly and worthy of peer-reviewed publication.

3. Assure appropriate compliance with all relevant human subjects research regulations as per IRB requirements (e.g., federal and institutional), and also ensure that all CITI training requirements have been completed. Note that both faculty and doctoral candidates are required to be current with this training both at the time of the student applying for IRB approval as well as throughout the ongoing dissertation process.
4. Provide students with timely written and/or oral review and feedback on submitted dissertation drafts with a view toward guiding successful and timely completions of a high-quality (i.e., defensible and publishable) dissertation and defense.
5. Provide guidance to students' development of the dissertation project plan—slowing or accelerating the timeline as required to assure timely completion of a high-quality (i.e., defensible and publishable) dissertation.
6. Ensure adequate preparation for proposal-related hearing or qualifying exam and dissertation defense by guiding and challenging student thinking and writing throughout their dissertation work and by asking fundamental and challenging questions throughout the dissertation process.
7. Conduct the dissertation defense and notify the student and program chair of results according to established program procedures.

ORGANIZING AND MANAGING YOUR PROJECT

Your dissertation is an iterative (and often messy) project that will extend over a period of time. Therefore, successful completion requires not just careful organization and planning, but actually being proactive! To begin the process of getting started, you need to create a “workspace” for your dissertation—a physical as well as a mental and intellectual space. You will also begin to create a system for organizing and managing your work on this project by developing a writing routine and by starting to keep records of information as well as of your thinking. Find quality

time for school in your already busy life so that you can *work smarter* and navigate your doctoral program toward successful dissertation completion!

Creating a Dedicated-to-Dissertation Workspace

Find a place where the dissertation is the only thing that you do. Find a space that works for you. A space where you can minimize distractions is key. You will have many competing interests (personally and professionally) that will assuredly invade most inconveniently, at the times you are most trying to study and/or write. Hold these competing interests at bay by finding a place that is comfortable and quiet to study—perhaps you could consider it your “study sanctuary.” Once you have a safe place, create safe space by creating chunks of time that are quiet and guarded. Once you enter your study sanctuary, be off limits for a chunk of time. That might be only 1–2 hours, but be sure to maximize your hour(s) through intentional and complete focus. Your “dedicated-to-dissertation” space might be a coffee shop, the library, or an empty office at your workplace. What is important is to find a space that for the time you dedicate to writing, only your dissertation exists. Having done this, you can then begin to plan time dedicated to writing and make this a concrete commitment by structuring time for writing. Remember, making specific plans to block off time for writing is a mental and emotional commitment. And alerting people to your plans and taking concrete steps to structure your time builds in a social and physical commitment. You are then certainly more likely to write! And that’s the goal! Even when advisors are away or unavailable, set a deadline for yourself to complete a certain number of sections, and keep to this deadline! You can even make a compact with a peer or mentor and hold yourself accountable to these deadlines. Never leave your desk without a roadmap for the next writing session. This means that you will be able to hit the ground running rather than spending your first hour of work rereading and reorienting yourself. A useful tip is to develop a road map, outlining a skeleton of the next three hours of writing when leaving your work for the day.

Creating your new workspace also means that you also should begin identifying writing resources. In addition to purchasing the relevant textbooks, become familiar with online library databases, as they will become invaluable as well. Your computer, in connection with your university library system, is a literature searching and bibliographic management tool. An ongoing literature review begins right from the beginning stages of topic identification; continues with reviews of research methodologies, specific methods of data collection, and issues of trustworthiness; and carries through to the final stages of analysis and synthesis. In addition, you have to produce a bibliography or reference list that is formatted correctly and in perfect synchronization with the materials referenced in the body of your dissertation. This ongoing literature review can indeed be one of the most time consuming of all the dissertation challenges. It is certainly worth taking the time to become familiar with using your library’s literature search engines and databases, as well as with the variety of software programs that allow you to efficiently perform the tasks of referencing your materials. This is mentioned just briefly here so that you can start adding these thoughts to your new mental workspace.

Managing the Data

As you begin your research and as you live with your study, you will begin to gather and accumulate a diverse and vast array of material that has potential relevance, all of which becomes your dissertation research “toolbox,” a very valuable resource that you will add to as you continue to move forward. As you become immersed in your work, you will undoubtedly be inundated with large amounts of information, including formal documents, correspondence, photocopies of articles, pieces of reflective writing, class notes, reading notes, discussion notes, handouts, and memos, as well as other miscellaneous scraps of paper. All of this information is the raw material of the inquiry that will be of use later. You certainly do not want to lose any of your material, nor do you want to drown in it. Organizing and managing dissertation-related “stuff” right from the beginning is therefore essential to getting on track and staying focused. In this regard, you will need to make sure that all dissertation-related materials are sorted systematically and stored safely and securely and will be easily retrievable when you need to access these.

There are various systems for handling information at a practical level, and based on your learning style preference, different methods will seem more appealing. Those of us who are more visual and tactile like to print hard copies of everything and have the physical “evidence” in our hands. Some people “file” material in stacks or neatly labeled files or folders. Still others are less inclined to file manually, preferring to set up electronic folders in which to store information by way of emerging topics or chapters. Regardless of which method you choose, organizing your material well and in a way that works best for you is a crucial step in the overall research process. By organizing your material, you will be able to easily retrieve your sources now and in the future, group similar sources together, and possibly identify potential patterns or links within your research topic. Note that formal and appropriate naming of documents is not only professional but it also greatly assists with storage and retrieval, both for you and your advisory review team.

In addition to storing various forms of information, you also should make sure that you keep the various drafts of your dissertation. During the process of writing your dissertation, drafts will need to be edited and refined. As you make revisions and update earlier versions, you will find yourself continually writing and rewriting. These drafts are important and should not be discarded. It is possible that you may want to revisit some text of an earlier version to check on something you have written. In addition, as your research and writing progress, by comparing drafts you can keep a check on your progress, as well as note any developments in your understanding of certain issues and phenomena. Therefore, before making revisions, original drafts should be kept intact, and each revised version should be labeled, dated, and stored in a designated file or folder for easy retrieval.

Whatever methods work best for you and whatever strategy of information management you choose, your computer will become your best friend throughout the dissertation process. Using your computer, you can catalog, record, and manage multiple forms of information, including references. RefWorks is one way to collect, manage, and efficiently organize research papers and documents. The drag-and-drop capability along with smart document recognition makes it easy and fast to upload documents and metadata into your account. The resource

allows you to import citations directly and indirectly from library databases, capture research from websites like *Google Scholar*, *PubMed*, and *WorldCat*, and create American Psychological Association (APA) reference lists. With this resource, you can annotate, organize, and cite your research, as well as collaborate with friends and colleagues by sharing collections of citations. Becoming familiar with your computer and technological resources before you start your research will save you much time and frustration. Developing computer literacy and mastering the appropriate software programs does add another layer of learning to an already intensive experience, but one that is well worth the effort. If you feel overwhelmed in this regard, you might want to seek technical assistance.

Finally, no matter what kind of computer system or software package you are working with, a necessary and, in fact, absolutely essential consideration is that you are—right from the beginning—vigilant in saving information. This goal can be accomplished by regularly and frequently backing up your files by way of copying them to your hard drive, as well as to an external disk or flash drive, or by saving them to an online storage system such as Dropbox, Google Drive, or one of the many other technologies or tools that are currently available. You can never back up too much! Many people recommend printing out hard copies of completed sections in addition to saving electronic copies. As useful as they are, computers are not infallible. They can and do crash, and losing material can be a devastating setback in the dissertation process.

Data Security

A few words regarding data security is called for in light of the emergence of new challenges to anonymity and confidentiality that have been brought about by the advent and pervasiveness of social media and new technologies, including various forms of publicly accessible visual, audio, and virtual materials and data. While data storage and management have always been a concern, new cloud technology and transcription services, as well as the mobility of data by way of e-mail and electronic storage devices, create a new set of ethical concerns for researchers. Data management and data security are central and ongoing concerns with regard to protecting anonymity and/or confidentiality. There are significant debates in the field about how to consider and approach technology-mediated data collection methods and how, from an ethically responsible perspective, to treat and manage the kind of data that a researcher can access online or virtually. While there are no established guidelines for how to treat these data, and given the prevalence of online data collection and the associated ethical implications, it is recommended that you conduct a thorough examination of literature related to the role of social media and the internet more broadly and also specifically with respect to your particular study design and context. Indeed, in planning and conducting your study you should carefully consider all possible ways that data security can be breached or compromised, including who might have access to your data and why. All necessary safeguards and precautions regarding how you will securely store your data must be implemented at the outset of the study. Additionally, all strategies used must also be explicitly addressed in your research proposal, IRB application material, and final dissertation manuscript.

Tracking Your Thinking

Up to this point, much of the discussion has focused on the practical details of the organization and management of dissertation-related material. Aside from keeping track of information, you need to keep track of your thinking. Just as it is important to have the relevant material on file, so it is important to keep a record of your changing thoughts about the literature and its relevance to your emerging research topic, as well as about the research process in general. One way to ensure that you preserve your reasoning and thinking and are able to spell out the development of your ideas is to keep a research journal. Recording your thinking means that you will accumulate material that can be revisited and drawn on and that can form a substantial part of the methodology and analysis chapters of your dissertation. Keeping careful records also implies an open-minded and critical approach, and provides ideas for future directions of your work. In addition, by making your reasoning transparent, you contribute to what Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to as an “audit trail,” which provides useful material for making trustworthiness claims for your study.

Journaling allows you to be meticulous about keeping an orderly record of your research activities and your productivity. Journaling also engenders a reflective stance, which offers the opportunity to create a record of your experiences—your insights, speculations, hunches, questions, methodological and analytical concerns, tentative interpretations, and so on. In the qualitative inquiry process, you, as the researcher and writer, are the main instrument of data collection and data analysis. It is your task to provide personal insight into the experience under study. Integral to the notion of *self as instrument* is a capacity for reflection. The act of reflection, as John Dewey (1916) suggests, affords the potential for reconstructing the meaning of experience that actually yields learning. In effect, a journal provides a solid link to and keeps track of the many levels of experience that are involved in the dissertation process, including your own positionality as the researcher and how and in what ways you impact the research itself. In the qualitative dissertation, what you bring to the inquiry is as important as what you discover as you live with your project. The quality, credibility, and integrity of the dissertation indeed rests on your capacity for authentic, insightful, and meaningful reflection.

Developing a Collegial Support System

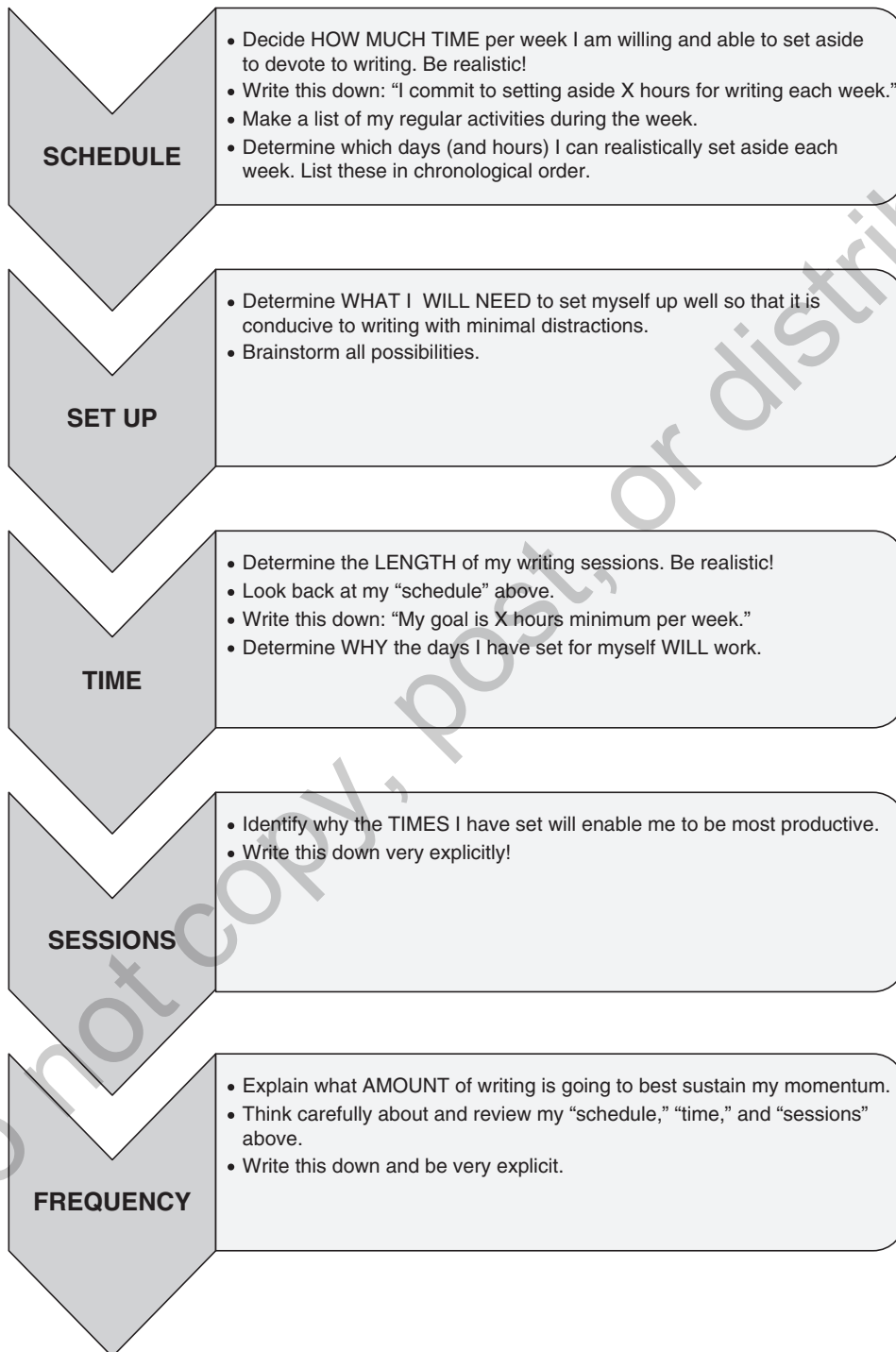
After course completion, much of the study process is independent, solo, and often lonely. Moreover, many students are currently engaged in online doctoral programs with little or no contact with classmates or peers. This is especially so in online and hybrid learning environment, which has significantly expanded since the onset of the pandemic and is likely to remain prevalent in the post-pandemic world. As such, maintaining a strong and continual connective link to your dissertation chair and other members of your committee is a vital component of successful doctoral completion. Although much of the work involved in the dissertation process—in both the researching and writing phases—is done independently, you need not feel you must “go this alone,” and you should not isolate yourself. As a resourceful doctoral candidate, it would be in your best interests to create a dissertation support system of some kind

that contributes to your success by providing emotional and academic support. Support systems include various options such as dissertation groups, a dissertation “buddy” (someone with whom you are compatible and who has a similar work ethic to your own and who you feel might be more efficient than a larger group), and virtual support groups (operated through online chat rooms, online editorial critiques, and professional online coaching and/or mentoring services). There are many people who have the potential to promote your progress. The graduate student network is a particularly valuable resource, and this might be part of your own institution or can be accessed through various social media sites such as LinkedIn, Facebook, and others. It is to your advantage to reach out to graduates and other professionals and colleagues who you believe might be helpful to you in this regard. This becomes especially important in the burgeoning online environment where students are working outside the parameters of a traditional classroom, a context where isolation and lack of connection might be particularly prevalent. Building community early and staying engaged often is one of the best ways to start this new and exciting journey. Never feel you have to go it alone. Reach out to your committee members and supportive peers early and often!

Planning Your Time

You might finally be ready to write your dissertation, but every time you sit down to work, you’re seized with “writer’s block.” Most people have a romantic image of a writer as someone who writes during spontaneous bursts of creativity. Unfortunately, few writers write only when they feel inspired, and waiting for inspiration is impractical when you are working on a long-term project such as a dissertation. If you work on your dissertation only when you feel like it, the project will never be completed. It certainly requires self-discipline to always be ready to write on certain days whether you feel inspired or not and to stick to self-imposed deadlines. Yet the right plans and routines can make self-discipline an extremely easy thing to establish. Effective planning is key to gaining better control over one’s writing. Organizing our time makes writing far less stressful and helps us actually accomplish goals we might otherwise consider out of our reach. When thinking about planning time and establishing realistic timelines, you should be thinking of continuing the same approach to time management as when completing your course work, which was an essential step in the doctoral process, and which enabled you to reach the point of embarking on your dissertation. Similarly, after completing the course work, you will now need to develop a system of planning your writing times and adhering to the schedule. Figure 2.1, *Schedule Planning Tool*, is an example of a planning tool that you can develop for yourself to manage and organize your work.

Setting aside quality time dedicated to your dissertation allows you to *work smarter*. The importance of blocking significant amounts of uninterrupted time therefore cannot be emphasized enough. By providing this essentially amorphous and iterative process with some structure, a structured timetable makes writing more predictable, and therefore less intimidating, and allows you to pace yourself. Schedules help reduce the pressure associated with deadlines as well as the tendency to procrastinate. Moreover, setting a schedule also helps integrate your

FIGURE 2.1 ■ **Schedule Planning Tool**

writing into the rest of your life, which is important. There are some basic principles for developing an effective writing schedule:

- Make a list of your regular activities, and within that context, decide how much time you hope to devote to your writing. If you've never tried a weekly schedule before, be open to adjustment. Try to create a balance between writing and other activities.
- Identify the times and days when you are most productive and least likely to be interrupted. For example, if you know you are tired in the afternoon, don't schedule your writing times then. Find your ideal time slots that can become sacred for writing.
- Working on a dissertation entails ample opportunities to doubt whether you can actually complete the task. Intimidated by and frustrated with the great distance from their goal, many doctoral students may never complete their dissertations. Yet even the most "impossible" tasks can be managed if broken into several smaller (and less intimidating) tasks or "batched." Setting smaller benchmarks or "chunks" along the road to your ultimate goal helps you proceed one step at a time while alleviating the tremendous pressure of having to constantly grapple with your entire project. Having divided your dissertation into smaller segments also allows you to plan how long you need to spend on each segment and project when you might complete your entire manuscript.
- It is important to set a comfortable and relaxed pace that allows you to avoid pressure. The best way to maximize your sense of accomplishment and minimize your experience of disappointment is to set goals that are within your reach. You also need to build into your timetable some slack time for when you are sick or overburdened with unanticipated commitments. Moving along slowly should not prevent you from being prolific. Even days when you write only one page ultimately add up. The secrets are perseverance and persistence, which are much more important than speed.
- Be proactive in maintaining your momentum. Be sensitive to the "flow" of your writing. With a large project such as a dissertation, try to minimize the number of times when you have to interrupt your writing for more than a day at a time, as this serves to disrupt the necessary momentum.
- Finally, be sure to have in your mind a realistic deadline for your dissertation. Setting deadlines is the most effective way of closing open-ended tasks. Indeed, in helping overcome indefinitely receding horizons, a firm deadline is a writer's best friend.

Establishing a Realistic Timeline

One of the major challenges of completing the dissertation is developing and honing the habit of thinking critically. Another challenge is the practical application of ideas, including the need to systematically plan the study, collect and analyze the data, and write up the dissertation. The ability to focus, problem-solve, and make informed decisions at every step of the way will bring

your study to completion. Time is part of the equation, and as mentioned earlier, thoughtfully planning your time and establishing firm deadlines contribute to successful completion.

Clearly, the more time you devote to carefully thinking about, planning, and completing your study, the more effective your discipline will be. Because the time commitment required of an individual doing qualitative research is substantial, you need to pace yourself from the beginning. Be sure to keep your goals realistic, or you will set yourself up for failure. As such, be honest about the time that particular tasks might take to complete and what other life demands are competing with the dissertation demands. Aside from time constraints, you also need to plan carefully for what can be achieved given your available resources (e.g., personal and financial support). Finally, you must consider developing realistic deadlines with regard to institutional constraints. For example, many university departments are typically understaffed during the summer months and over winter break and holidays. Expecting feedback from advisors, gaining approval from review boards, or even attempting to set meeting times with research participants at these particular times of the year would be somewhat unrealistic. In addition, always be sure to inquire about your institution's IRB process, and be aware of all deadlines for submissions as well as time frames regarding the application and review process so that you can plan your time accordingly and appropriately. Becoming familiar with the expectations and requirements of your institution's IRB process is an essential component of effectively planning and executing your timeline.

A timetable for work may or may not be formally required by your committee, but it is an effective way to manage your time and keep you on track. In line with the ski metaphor mentioned earlier, it is important that you set yourself a time frame within which to complete each section of the dissertation. Just as the experienced skier traverses the terrain, benchmarking is fundamental to success in the dissertation process, too. In developing realistic deadlines, it is highly recommended that students “chunk” the tasks in conjunction with a multiyear calendar. Create a system whereby you work on parts that contribute to the whole—chapter-by-chapter or even one part of a chapter at a time. The dissertation journey is essentially about achieving milestones one step at a time.

A useful guiding principle is to always intentionally be one step ahead by having a sense of your next step. Identifying the various stages in the process, pacing yourself, and documenting your achievement of goals and subgoals along the way are important and will contribute to keeping you task-oriented and focused. Having a good sense of how your progress is moving you closer and closer to completion will help to keep you motivated. In this regard, it is recommended that you mark your progress on a checklist that you create for yourself. Activities involved in completing a dissertation include iterations of thinking, writing, and action. The dissertation journey is about achieving milestones one step at a time. Therefore, plan ahead, pace yourself, and also be sure to reward yourself as you move from one activity to the next. It is especially critical that you do not lose momentum once formal course work has ended. At this moment of being out there on their own, many students experience overwhelming feelings and are unsure of how to proceed. The longer they remain fixed and unmoving, the more their inclination to start on the dissertation wanes; the longer this continues, the more difficult it becomes to get going again.

You also should bear in mind that, in most institutions, once a student is certified and becomes a doctoral “candidate,” they usually has a designated number of years in which to complete the dissertation, or else he or she will have to be recertified (which involves retaking the “certification” or “candidacy” exam—a most unappealing thought). In any event, although extensions may be granted for extenuating circumstances, to get an extension, a student usually has to demonstrate that they have been making significant progress. This is all the more reason to take the time to develop a timeline, stay on task, and set realistic, appropriate, and reasonable goals. After all, this doctoral program is a once-in-a-lifetime venture, and you surely want to succeed!

Table 2.1 outlines the steps necessary to embark on the dissertation process in a methodical and organized manner, thereby positioning yourself for success. Once you have your mental and physical house in order, and with strong personal commitment and the will to succeed in completing your dissertation, you are ready to take the first step or resume wherever you may have left off in the process.

TABLE 2.1 ■ Guidelines for Organizing and Managing Your Project: An Overview

Task	Why?	Action Steps
Create your own “dedicated-to-dissertation space.”	Successful completion requires careful organization and planning. Structure is important so you can in effect <i>work smarter</i> . To begin, you should create a physical and mental “space.”	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Set aside a physical workspace that is dedicated to your dissertation. Find a place where the dissertation is the only thing that you do. 2. Set aside times to work on your dissertation. 3. Create your mental workspace; develop an “I can do this!” attitude.
Create a <i>system</i> for organizing and managing your work.	As you become immersed in your work, you will continue to be inundated with large amounts of information. Carefully consider issues of data security (confidentiality and anonymity with regard to your study’s design and context). You do not want to lose any material nor do you want to drown in it. Organizing and managing dissertation-related “stuff” right from the beginning is essential to getting on track and staying focused. Develop a system that works best for you to organize and manage the ongoing accumulation of data. A workable and reliable system will help you feel more in control and less overwhelmed.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Start collecting and storing all material that is potentially related to your topic. This will become your dissertation research “toolbox.” 2. Keep records of all relevant information. 3. Make sure all information is securely stored to maintain confidentiality and anonymity of research sites and participants. 4. Make sure that all material is sorted systematically and stored so it will be easily retrievable. 5. Choose the storage method that works best for you. File all information manually and/or electronically.

(Continued)

TABLE 2.1 ■ Guidelines for Organizing and Managing Your Project: An Overview (Continued)

Task	Why?	Action Steps
Save all drafts.	As you make revisions and update earlier versions, you will be continually rewriting. Drafts should not be discarded. You may want to revisit earlier versions in order to check on previous thinking and strategies.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Keep clear records of all drafts. 2. Be vigilant in saving all drafts systematically and methodically. Be consistent in your labeling of documents and filing!
Keep track of your thinking.	The quality and credibility of the dissertation rests upon your capacity for insightful conceptual reflection. Just as it is important to have relevant material on file, so is it important to keep a record of your changing thoughts about the research process. Journaling engenders a critically reflective stance, a key characteristic of qualitative research. Recorded reflection provides ideas for future directions of your work and also contributes to an "audit trail," providing useful material for making validity claims. Keeping careful records makes your reasoning transparent—both to yourself and to your readers. What happens throughout the research process is a vital source of data: A research diary contributes significantly toward a substantial part of the methodology chapter of your dissertation.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Keep track of your thinking by way of journaling, writing memos, or keeping a research diary. 2. Keep a running log of all conversations you have with colleagues and advisors. This log should include important details and suggestions, as well as your reflections, reactions, and ideas.
Track your productivity as a way to motivate you to write.	Goal setting can be hard: Our goals can be too big. Or they can be too small. We set goals that are just right when we set them, and then life happens and we might miss our targets. This can be very frustrating and demotivating.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Record what you do each day or part of the day. In a week, you will have a list of things you've done, rather than a list of near and entire misses. So much more motivating! 2. Pay attention to what you're tracking, as this might reveal useful patterns about where and when you were most productive. You can then try and do more of that!

**TABLE 2.1 ■ Guidelines for Organizing and Managing Your Project:
An Overview (Continued)**

Task	Why?	Action Steps
<p>Forgive yourself! Understand and accept the necessity of slow movement and messiness as groundwork for productivity.</p>	<p>The research and writing process is iterative, recursive, and messy, with challenges (detours and roadblocks) along the way that can impede—or even stall—our progress. We tend to become discouraged if we move slowly and are not so productive in some parts of our writing. Being discouraged leads to frustration, and frustration takes away energy, and lack of energy depletes motivation. And so productivity suffers.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Change the way you think and you will change the effect on your writing. The slow and messy parts are all part of building a foundation of thinking and writing. 2. Pay attention to the patterns of your writing process. This will help prevent you from feeling demotivated when writing slows down. 3. Trust that you will gather momentum and accelerate if you can shift your thinking to understand and accept this iterative and often messy process. 4. Take some time off periodically for self-care and reflection. Times you step away from work are valuable on many levels and provide renewed energy and inspiration.
<p>Save, save, save!</p>	<p>The importance of saving material cannot be underestimated. Loss of information and data can be extremely stressful and time consuming, not to mention detrimental to your final product. Develop the habit of saving!</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Be vigilant and methodical with regard to file naming. 2. Regularly and frequently back up all your files by way of copying them to an external hard drive, disk, flash drive, or backup web location. 3. Make sure that your computer is set up for consistent autosave and backup.
<p>Identify and store all writing resources.</p>	<p>Ongoing literature review begins from the beginning stages of topic identification and carries through to the final stages of analysis and synthesis. In addition, you will have to produce a bibliography or reference list that is formatted correctly and that is in perfect synchronization with the materials referenced in the body of your dissertation. Making notes on your reading should be an active and critical process.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Make sure that you refer to the APA Manual (7th ed) often! 2. Maintain clear records of relevant resources, including books and journals. 3. Keep track of all your reading, making critical notes as well as being very careful to accurately list all references and citations. 4. Become familiar with online library databases. The university library system is an essential literature search and bibliographic management tool. 5. Explore different software program options that allow efficient referencing of your materials.

TABLE 2.1 ■ Guidelines for Organizing and Managing Your Project: An Overview (Continued)

Task	Why?	Action Steps
Develop a collegial support system.	While much of the work in the dissertation process will be done independently, you do not need to “go this alone,” nor do you have to work in isolation. This becomes especially significant in the online and hybrid learning environments. Research is essentially a collaborative endeavor rather than a solo process. As a resourceful doctoral candidate try to create a reliable and accessible support system that will contribute to your success. The graduate student network is a valuable and supportive resource for dialogue, collaboration, and sharing of resources.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students should always be encouraged to build support systems and seek guidance from committee members and peers. 2. In addition, be sure to reach out to graduates and other professionals and colleagues who you believe might be helpful to you as you navigate the lengthy dissertation process.
Familiarize yourself with all relevant IRB and CITI requirements.	Planning ahead is essential. Forearmed is forewarned! Make sure you understand all necessary requirements, expectations, policies, protocols, and procedures, and be sure to ask questions as needed!	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Become familiar with the graduate school and its policies, procedures, and timelines. 2. Be sure you understand what types of communications you will need to sign up to receive all necessary information about the doctoral process at your institution. 3. Always make sure you stay up to date and informed about where you currently are in the dissertation process. 4. Be knowledgeable and aware of what are all the steps that are vital to moving forward efficiently.
Overall proactivity	Always be open to reviewing examples and learning from others!	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Take the opportunity to review the dissertations your advisor and other students may have recommended. 2. If no dissertations have been recommended, reach out and ask for some examples to review. 3. Make time to attend some dissertation hearings at your institution. This will provide you with greater understanding of the expectations and procedures involved.

In following up with my students as to their progress, I often hear, “I’m still reading.” Reading widely indeed allows you to become knowledgeable and proficient in a specific domain. Although reading is essential, it can sometimes be an avoidance mechanism when it is time to write. It is now time to start *writing* your dissertation. Action leads to progress, and progress leads to increasing levels of confidence, which is vital to maintaining momentum. Therefore, the sooner you begin writing, the easier it is to continue writing and the more rapidly your dissertation is likely to progress. Overcome your anxieties and frustrations by viewing and tackling your work in increments. View the dissertation as a process of achieving milestones, one at a time. In this way you will work piece by piece, and step by step. Be proactive. Adopt a do-it-now mindset and get started! As you embrace this mindset, let us address the expectations regarding academic writing skills.

GUIDELINES FOR ACADEMIC WRITING

A dissertation is the combination of performing research and writing about your research to describe and explain it. As a researcher and writer, knowing how to best express your ideas in written form to convey them to the reader becomes an essential skill. The impact of any research is likely to be enhanced if you are able to write well about your work. The dissertation requires a high level of scholarly writing. Although not everyone enjoys scholarly writing, nor is everyone good at it, you have to get into the mode of writing for a particular audience—the academic community. Academic or scholarly writing is, in essence, writing that is clear, concise, precise, and, very importantly, inclusive. Above all, good writing is a function of good thinking.

Clarity, Coherence, and Cohesiveness

Whatever chapter of your dissertation you are busy with, it is important that you spend time planning not only *what* you will write but also *how* you will write. Creating an outline or “mind map” that traces the path of your argument is one way to begin thinking about this. Creating outlines is an effective way to organize your thinking and sequentially guide your writing. In writing your dissertation, your intention is not only to demonstrate your knowledge of the topic but also to capture the interest of and guide the reader throughout so that they understand and can follow your train of thought. To ensure that your paper is user-friendly, aim for clarity and logic:

- In your introductory section, write a paragraph that describes your chapter outline. This paragraph lets readers know where you will take them. A strong introduction as well as a strong conclusion (described further on) will help readers to see the significance of your work.
- Make use of headings and subheadings to provide structure to your writing. These are useful in communicating the key ideas to the reader. Crowding makes reading difficult and unpleasant.
- Resist jargon. Jargon excludes and mystifies the reader. Do not assume that all readers understand specialized language. If you must use a specialized term, be sure to explain it.

- Build coherence through connecting sentences. Every sentence should be a logical sequel to the one that preceded it.
- Use transitions or segues to trace the path of your argument and to guide the reader. Transitions are “bridge sentences” between paragraphs and help make your discussion easy to follow.

Following are a few pointers regarding paragraph content and structure:

- Organize your thoughts in coherent, well-constructed paragraphs. A paragraph is a collection of related sentences dealing with a single topic. Good paragraphing also greatly assists your readers in following a piece of writing. The basic rule of thumb with paragraphing is to **keep one idea to one paragraph**. If you begin to transition to a new idea, it belongs in a new paragraph. There are some simple ways to tell if you are on the same topic or a new one. You can have one idea and several bits of supporting evidence within a paragraph. You can also have several points as long as they relate to the main idea of the paragraph. If a paragraph cannot be summarized easily in a sentence or two and there are multiple ideas, then the paragraph drifts to another topic and needs to be broken into two (or maybe more) paragraphs.
- To be as effective as possible, a paragraph should contain each of the following interconnected elements: unity, coherence, topic sentence, and adequate development.

Unity: The entire paragraph should concern itself with a single focus. If the paragraph begins with one focus or major point of discussion it should not end with another or wander within different ideas.

Coherence: This ensures that the paragraph is easily understandable to the reader. You can help create coherence in your paragraphs by creating logical bridges and verbal bridges. This includes carrying the same topic over from sentence to sentence, using key words in several sentences, synonyms can be repeated in several sentences, pronouns can refer to nouns in previous sentences, and transition words can be used to link ideas from different sentences.

Topic sentence: This sentence indicates in a general way what idea the paragraph is going to cover or address. One way to make sure the reader understands the topic of a paragraph is to include your topic sentence near the beginning of the paragraph, and ask yourself, “Will my reader be able to easily summarize what the paragraph is about?”

Adequate development: The topic, which is introduced by the topic sentence, should be discussed fully and adequately. Begin each paragraph with a topic sentence, followed by supporting sentences that illustrate, elaborate, explain, and clarify your main idea.

- Each paragraph should logically and sequentially lead to the next. Remember to pay particular attention to the last sentence of each paragraph because this is the springboard to the subsequent paragraph.

- Each paragraph must include at least three sentences. Be aware that if a paragraph only has two or three sentences then there is a good chance that the paragraph is not fully developed. If you notice a paragraph that contains fewer than three sentences, incorporate these sentences into an existing paragraph.
- Paragraphs should not be overly long because this overwhelms the reader and the content can come across as too dense. If a paragraph is one page or more, break it into two or more paragraphs.
- Make sure that each section and/or chapter ends by summarizing and integrating the main points and themes. A strong and organized summary allows the reader to come away with a clear understanding of what you have written and what will follow.

After writing each paragraph, it is helpful to read it aloud. In this way, you can check for syntax as well as for coherence and flow. In academic writing, it is essential that you are clear and precise. In reviewing your work, ask yourself, “Is what I am reading really what I intended to write? Does it say what I mean it to say?” If a written passage sounds awkward, you might need to add new words, phrases, or sentences to establish clearer connections. You also should watch out for sharp breaks where the reader is left “hanging”; in these cases, you should consider restructuring the sentence or phrase.

In reading aloud, watch for any assumptions and unsupported statements. In these cases, the reader might ask, “Who says so?” You must provide evidence to support what you say. In dissertation writing, you have to get in the habit of writing defensively. In other words, you need to stop after each paragraph and ask yourself, “Have I provoked any questions in the reader’s mind?” This step is important because the process in the defense of a qualitative dissertation is one of questioning and challenging any assumptions you may have made. As soon as you provoke questions in the reader’s mind, they begin to lose confidence in your argument and may even go looking for more questions. That is the last thing you want to happen!

Reading aloud also allows you to check for grammatical errors:

- Make sure that you use complete sentences, not fragmented ones.
- Do not use unwieldy, run-on sentences. Long or complicated sentences force the reader to decide which of the points you are making should be emphasized. Each sentence should contain one thought only. Aim for short, clear, and crisp sentences.
- Check for incorrect use of punctuation, which can affect meaning.
- Be consistent in your tenses.
- Place descriptive words and phrases as close as possible to the words they describe, or they may inadvertently describe the wrong word.
- Be careful not to end a sentence with a preposition (*to, from, with, etc.*).
- Whenever possible, use the active rather than the passive voice. The active voice reduces wordiness and is more direct, giving vitality and force to your writing.

- Look for unnecessary adjectives and delete vague qualifications such as *very*.
- Remember that academic writing is formal writing. As such, slang expressions, colloquialisms, idioms, and casual language are inappropriate.

A note regarding use of first-person *I* in your writing: Generally, writing in the active voice is recommended. APA has reviewed the reasons why first person is preferable. First, the phrase “the authors” or “the researchers” when used to indicate in third person the authors of the current work (your dissertation) can be confused with the authors and/or researchers of the literature that is being referenced. Second, anthropomorphism, while an important part of creative literature, becomes an unavoidable prop for the third-person and “objective” voice in third-person research writing, leading to wordings such as “studies demonstrate” and “research finds,” instead of “we demonstrated” or “I found”. Traditionally, researchers have been taught to write in the third person in order to be objective. This is the primary reason why qualitative researchers should write in the first person! Qualitative research is based on a rejection of the false sense of objectivity, and toward this end, qualitative researchers actively attempt to engage with our biases, understanding that people cannot be objective. We seek deep and reflexive engagement with our biases and assumptions, and so writing in the first person allows our readers to access the research in active ways that help deepen their understanding of the contexts and phenomena being explored. In qualitative research, in particular, the researcher is the main research tool or instrument. The unique style and narration of the researcher is an integral part of the study, and as such, the first-person *I* is correct protocol. As stated on page 120, section 4.16 of the APA 7 manual: “To avoid ambiguity in attribution, use the first person rather than the third person when describing the work you did as part of your research and when expressing your own views. If you are writing a paper by yourself, use the pronoun ‘I’. Do not refer to yourself or your coauthors in the third person as ‘the author(s)’ or ‘the researcher.’” You may want to review the following resource: <https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/grammar/first-person-pronouns>

Inclusivity

For the first time, in 2021, APA is systematically and institutionally examining, acknowledging, and charting a path forward to address its role in racism and other forms of destructive social hierarchies including, but not limited to, sexism, ableism, ageism, heterosexism, classism, and religious bigotry by avoiding language that perpetuates harm or offense toward members of marginalized communities through our communications. These guidelines are written for those working to champion and advocate for equity, diversity, and inclusion in the spaces in which they learn, teach, work, or conduct research. The guidelines aim to raise awareness, guide learning, and support the use of culturally sensitive terminology that centers the voices and perspectives of those who are often marginalized or stereotyped, and also explain the origins for problematic terms and phrases and offer suitable alternatives or more contemporary replacements. This document will be flexible and iterative in nature, continuing to evolve as new terminology emerges or current language becomes obsolete. You may want to review the following resource: <https://www.apa.org/about/apa/equity-diversity-inclusion/language-guidelines.pdf>

- To avoid unintended racism, sexism, or any form of stereotypical reference, be acutely aware of terminology and writing styles that are in any way non-inclusive, exclusionary, discriminatory, or stereotypical.
- The accepted or correct use of pronouns is also changing and evolving, and this carries important implications for theory, research, and practice. It is also a factor to consider when describing your study's population and sample. Review the APA guidelines regarding the correct use of gender and the way to describe a sample or population. To review gender pronouns, refer to the following resource: <https://www.mypronouns.org/she-her>

Format and Style Requirements

An academic research report must consistently follow a selected system for format and style. Format refers to the general pattern of organization and arrangement of the report. Style refers to appropriate writing conventions and includes rules of grammar, spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and use of abbreviations and acronyms to be followed in preparing the research report. Most colleges and universities require the use of a specific style that is published in a style manual, and you will need to make inquiries regarding your particular department's recommended style preference. Typically, in the social sciences the APA Manual, which is currently in its seventh edition, is the most widely used, although there are others too.

There are very specific criteria for formatting the reference entries, including use of capitalization or not, use of plain text or italics or not, specific punctuation, sequence of the entries, spacing, and so on. Regardless of which manual you use, you are expected to adhere to its rules meticulously. Early on in the dissertation process, you should become familiar with your required manual and use it consistently throughout. Mastering the manual's technical nuances early on (including the use of headings, footnotes, tables, and figures) will save you considerable time and effort in the long run. Manuscripts with errors are significantly less likely to be accepted for publication in journals, so attention to detail is very important. The publication manuals provide extensive guidelines and should be referred to as necessary, as you are writing each chapter.

Be especially careful to follow the manual's guidelines regarding citation of references as it is imperative that all citations be completely accurate. The two most commonly used attribution systems—APA and *Modern Language Association* (MLA)—consist of two parts: (a) a reference or works cited list at the end of the document, giving precise information about how to find a source, and (b) parenthetical citations immediately following the material you are citing. Both attribution systems uses the *author–date citation* system for citing sources. In this way, the writer includes the author and date within the body of the paper and includes a corresponding reference in the reference list. This citation system allows readers to identify sources used in the paper by reviewing the author and date within the text of the paper, and then easily locate the corresponding reference in the alphabetical reference list. Note that there are two types of in-text citations: *narrative citations* and *parenthetical citations*. A narrative citation is a type of citation where the author's name is used within the text of the sentence, whereas a parenthetical citation is a type of citation where the author and date are included in parentheses at the end

of the sentence. Multiple resources in this book's companion website will be very useful as you prepare to write and are indeed handy resources that you should refer to throughout the process!

Especially important is that, right from the beginning, you remain vigilant in updating your reference list each time you add a citation. Do not imagine that you will remember to do so later. Searching for "lost" references is time consuming and very frustrating. Some useful pointers regarding references include the following:

- Create your reference list as you develop each section. As each citation is included in the paper, record the reference in your list.
- The reference list must be accurately alphabetized.
- All references must be complete and accurate and not contain any missing, misspelled, or incorrect details.
- Use the writing manual to format each reference correctly. There are very specific criteria for formatting reference entries, including use of capitalization, plain text or italics, sequence of entries, spacing, and so on. Also note how information must be included, such as multiple authors, volumes of journal articles, chapters in edited books, online sources, and so on.
- All references must exist, and all links must be working properly.
- If using a citation software, ensure all information is included and properly formatted. Although such programs can be helpful, they are not always correct.
- The references within citations should be alphabetized by the last name of the first author.
- Make sure that for each reference that is listed, there is at least one corresponding citation within the body of the text and vice versa. In your reference list, include only sources that are cited in your text. The reference list is not a bibliography. The latter would include everything you may have read or researched, and not necessarily what you refer to in your text.
- As a rule of thumb, at least 85% of your references should be less than five years old. This is to ensure that your study remains current and relevant.

Although different style manuals emphasize different rules of writing, several rules are common to most. The most commonly accepted rules include the following:

- Do not use contractions.
- Avoid being too colloquial or too informal.
- Avoid overuse of sophisticated vocabulary. Communicate complex ideas in the simplest way possible.

- Italicize all statistical symbols and abbreviations.
- Spell out all numbers from one to nine and use numerals for those 10 and above.
- Spell all Latin abbreviations correctly.
- Use lists selectively and sparsely. Too many lists appear as an attempt to avoid writing.
- Refer to your writing manual for correct ways to list items. Whatever way you select must remain consistent throughout your document.
- Double-space your work throughout.

Tables and figures are often included in a dissertation to augment the narrative, thereby enabling the reader to more clearly understand the issues being discussed. These graphic organizers are somewhat distinguished from one another:

- Tables are typeset, rather than photographed, from artwork supplied by the author. Tables consist of text only and are frequently used to present quantitative data. Tables offer precise details, including percentages and whole numbers and should always include group size (i.e., $N = . . .$).
- Figures are typically used to convey structural or pictorial concepts. Figures can be line graphs, bar graphs, pie graphs, maps, drawings, and photographs. Choose a figure if you want to reinforce the point you are making by way of a strong image.

Tables and figures are used to present material in visual summary form and should add clarity to the overall presentation of information. Readers of dissertations are often drawn to graphic displays which provides them with a useful “at-a-glance” overview of information. Tables and figures must follow their related textual discussion and must be referred to by number. If you choose to use displays of any sort, make sure that they are appropriately included and do not unnecessarily disrupt the flow of the text. The potential usefulness and importance of visual displays suggest a need to dedicate time and care in creating them. Tables and figures should be uncluttered and self-explanatory; it is better to use two tables (or figures) than a single overcrowded one. The examples presented throughout this book are not meant to illustrate a set of rules for how tables should be created, but should be viewed rather as a blank canvas to populate appropriately. The examples provided should serve as guidance regarding the wide range of ways in which graphic displays can be used creatively throughout the various stages of the qualitative research process. If you choose to include tables and figures, be sure to consult your style manual for correct format and usage.

Proofreading and Editing

Always proofread your work. The goal of proofreading is to enable you to find and correct your own errors in thought and organization. After writing each section, examine your sentences for clarity and grammar. In an effort to present an organized, logical, and coherent argument, be

prepared to spend time editing and reediting as you “polish” your narrative, correct sentence structure, and trim excess wordiness and redundancy. You will find yourself writing and rewriting throughout the process of doing your dissertation. Writing multiple drafts of a manuscript is part of the writing process and is standard practice for most writers.

If you feel that you need assistance with writing, be sure to contact your instructor for additional resources and guidance. It should be obvious that the expectations for correctness and accuracy in academic writing are high. If you feel that you are unable to meet these demands at your current level of writing proficiency, you may need to seek outside assistance. It is quite acceptable to hire an editor or a proofreader to help meet academic writing expectations. In addition, most universities offer writing classes and/or workshops.

A dissertation is indeed a “creation” or “construction” that takes effort and time. Constructing a dissertation is both an art and a science, and it takes thoughtful and careful planning. A good dissertation is built on solid outlines and is constructed logically and sequentially, paragraph by paragraph. This process includes paying close attention to style, format, and precise language. Most importantly, your writing should flow logically and smoothly. You do not want to lose the reader.

INTEGRITY MATTERS

The strength of your writing rests on your ability to refer to and incorporate the work of others. It is imperative, however, that you attribute recognition to all and any sources of information that you use. There are few intellectual offenses more serious than plagiarism in academic and professional contexts. A charge of plagiarism can have severe consequences, including expulsion from a university or loss of a job, not to mention a writer’s loss of credibility and professional standing.

Plagiarism is commonly defined as submitting material that in part or whole is not entirely one’s own work without attributing those same portions to their correct source; that is, plagiarism is the uncredited use (both intentional and unintentional) of somebody else’s words or ideas. Plagiarism is presenting someone else’s words or ideas as your own. The following are *all* examples of plagiarism:

- Quoting or paraphrasing material without citing the source of that material. Sources can include websites, magazines, newspapers, textbooks, journals, TV and radio programs, movies and videos, photographs and drawings, and charts and graphs—that is, any information or ideas that are not your own.
- Quoting a source without using quotation marks—even if you do cite it.

Deliberate plagiarism—that is, copying the work of others and turning it in as your own or falsifying data—is considered cheating. But there is also another kind of plagiarism—accidental plagiarism. This occurs by carelessly and/or inadequately citing ideas and words borrowed from another source.

In all academic work, and especially in our writing, we are building upon the insights and words of others. A conscientious writer always distinguishes clearly between what has been learned from others and what they are personally contributing to the reader's understanding. To avoid plagiarism, it is important to understand how to attribute words and ideas you use to their proper source. In this regard you must be certain to give credit whenever you make use of any of the following:

- Another person's idea, opinion, or theory.
- Any facts, statistics, graphs, or drawings—any pieces of information—that are not common knowledge.
- Quotations of another person's actual spoken or written words.
- Paraphrase of another person's spoken or written words.

Strategies for Avoiding Plagiarism

Note Taking

- Read the entire text and summarize it in your own words. Then paraphrase important points and copy usable quotes. Enclose quotes in quotation marks.
- Make sure to always carefully distinguish between material that is quoted, material that is paraphrased, material that is summarized, and your own words and ideas.
- As you paraphrase, make sure you are not just rearranging or replacing a few words.
- Check your paraphrasing against the original text to be certain that you have not accidentally used the same phrases or words and that the information is accurate.
- Include in your notes all the information you will need to cite your sources.
- Copy all source information into your working bibliography.
- Print any web pages you use. Write the URL and the date on the webpage if it is not included on the printout.

Citing Sources

You must cite the source of every quote, every paraphrased passage, and every summarized idea you use in a research paper. Commonly known facts, such as dates or definitions, do not need to be cited unless you take those facts directly from a specific reference source. If you're not sure whether a source should be cited, include it just in case. Sources must be cited throughout the body of the paper:

- Copy quoted material exactly, enclose it in quotations marks, and name the author immediately before or after the quote.
- Cite the source information (title, publisher, date, etc.) for the quote or paraphrased or summarized information either in parentheses within the text or in a footnote.
- List on a reference page at the end of your paper the information for all the sources you have cited. (Remember, the reference list is not the same as a bibliography. A bibliography is a list of all the sources you used—both those you cited and those you used for research but did not cite directly. In a dissertation, a bibliography is not required.)

Generally, knowledge that is common to all of us, or ideas that have been in the public domain and are found in a number of sources, does not need to be cited. Likewise, facts that are accepted by most authorities do not require a citation. It is often wrongly assumed that if one finds material on the web, that material is in the public domain and does not need to be cited. However, the same guidelines apply to all sources you use in your work: electronic or print, signed or unsigned.

If you are in doubt, err on the side of overdocumentation. For proper use of quotations, refer to your style manual. There is no fixed rule regarding when and how much to quote and paraphrase. If you quote and cite too often, you may seem to offer too little of your own thinking. If you quote too little, readers may think that your claims lack support, or they may not be able to see how your work relates to that of others. However, there are some general rules of thumb: Use direct quotations when you are using the work of others as primary data or when the specific words of your source are of particular significance. Paraphrase sources when you can say the same thing more clearly or when you are more interested in conveying the general idea than in how it is expressed by a particular source. Do not quote because you think it is easier or you think you lack the authority to speak for your sources. Make your own argument with your own claims, reasons, and evidence.

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

The IRB is concerned with studies desiring to implement research development, evaluation, and testing characterized as a systematic investigation to develop or contribute to generalized knowledge of research or the public (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2005). Any research designed to research human subjects, interact with human subjects, provide interventions for human subjects, obtain identifiable information about living subjects, or observe and record private behavior of human subjects must come under the jurisdiction of the governing board of institutional research. Interviews, observations, surveys, and all other forms of data collection methods that do not use data previously collected or archived will need to undergo review and approval by the IRB.

The IRB assures compliance with federal laws regarding the protection of human subjects from harm; ensures the right to informed consent to research procedures; and prevents

violations of confidentiality and/or anonymity, violations of rights to privacy, and deception. The logic and necessity of protecting the dignity and personal and/or professional safety of research participants is widely accepted among social scientists today (although this was not always the case historically). During the course of the 1990s, issues arose that brought increased scrutiny and sensitivity to the process, including concerns regarding privacy and violations of appropriate informed consent procedures that apprise subjects fully of the risks involved in participating in research. Abuse of research subjects in the name of science has led to the establishment of commonly agreed-upon codes of research ethics. While there are some variations across disciplines and national boundaries, key principles are fundamental. These include (a) voluntary participation, (b) identity protection of research participants and locations, (c) disclosure to participants of potential risks and benefits associated with the research, and (d) obtaining informed consent. All studies conducted under the auspices of federally funded educational and research institutions are required to receive IRB approval. As such, IRBs have emerged in accredited academic institutions of higher education as bureaucratic entities responsible for the regulation, governance, and enforcement of significant research ethics.

IRB approval is sought after one successfully defends a proposal. IRB approval requires that the researcher obtain proof of certification for the use of human subjects in research. This certification is obtained by completing an online course offered by the CITI Program for most institutions. CITI serves the compliance training needs of colleges and universities, healthcare institutions, technology and research organizations, and governmental agencies, as they foster integrity and professional advancement of their learners. The program involves the certification of faculty and students in general research and ethics for working with human subjects. As a doctoral candidate you are strongly advised to review your institution's policy on IRB certification for the use of human subjects in research to determine the required modules of the online CITI course that must be completed for certification.

Undergoing and successfully completing an IRB certification and approval accomplishes two key tasks: First, the student benefits from the advice of several academics who are trained to detect any potential flaws in terms of research design and methodology that could pose a threat to participants. Second, IRB approval is a stamp of credibility backed by a legitimate academic institution. This credibility is valuable both for the researcher and for the research participants. The application for IRB approval requires detailed information regarding the researcher, the research proposal, the research population, any projected funding, any requests for protocol review, and a description of the protocol. It is essential to include a detailed description of the recruitment process, confidentiality procedures, any potential research risks and benefits to the subjects, informed consent procedures, and the location of the research site, if applicable. An IRB guidebook, published by the US Department of Health and Human Services (Penslar, 1993), explicitly makes note of the difficulties confronting qualitative researchers where informed consent is concerned:

Fieldwork or ethnographic research involves observation or interaction with the persons or group being studied in the group's own environment, often for long periods of time. Since fieldwork is a research process that gains shape and substance as the study progresses, it is difficult, if not impossible, to specify detailed contents and objectives in a

protocol. . . . Therefore, while the idea of consent is not inapplicable in fieldwork, IRBs and researchers need to adapt prevailing notions of acceptable protocols and consent procedures to the realities of fieldwork.

Submitting the IRB form to the college's IRB office for approval requires inclusion of the following supplementary documents: an informed consent form, interview transcripts, data collection and analysis tools, recruitment materials and permission letters (as appropriate), a certificate of having completed the required CITI training modules, and a research site approval letter, if necessary. The following key considerations can help facilitate an efficient application process:

1. Become familiar with the IRB guidelines of your academic institution by obtaining relevant documentation from the IRB office or the office of doctoral studies and also visiting the appropriate website. Where possible, attend relevant workshops or seminars.
2. Describe your research in simple terms, clarifying all technical terminology where applicable. You cannot assume that your application will necessarily be reviewed by somebody wholly familiar with qualitative research.
3. Prior to submitting your application, contact the IRB office for clarification regarding informed consent procedures. In some instances, as mentioned, research may be exempt from the requirement of written informed consent.
4. In your application, be very clear and transparent regarding how you intend to address privacy, as well as any issues concerning potential harm to research participants.
5. Expect some delay with the IRB approval process. The application may take an extended period of time, particularly in those studies that propose the use of vulnerable populations (discussed more fully in chapter 4). Being required to revise and resubmit your initial application several times before your research complies with IRB standards and procedures is commonplace.
6. It is important to note that data collection involving human subjects generally cannot begin until final IRB approval of the proposal is issued. In some instances, data collection begins with pilot studies. Application to gather such data, as well as incorporation of such data in the research study needs to be clearly explained and outlined in your IRB application process.

Following are some recommended resources that you might consider perusing regarding development of the various structural elements needed for the first three chapters, which comprise the dissertation's proposal.

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER READING AND EXPLORATION

American Psychological Association. (2019). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association*, (7th ed.). <https://doi.org/10.1037/0000165-000>.

This is the style manual of choice for writers, editors, students, educators, and professionals in psychology, sociology, business, economics, nursing, social work, justice administration, and other disciplines in which effective communication with words and data is fundamental. In addition to providing clear guidance on grammar, the mechanics of writing, and APA style, the manual offers an authoritative and easy-to-use reference and citation system and comprehensive coverage of the treatment of numbers, metrication, statistical and mathematical data, tables, and figures for use in writing, reports, or presentations.

Goodson, P. (2017). *Becoming an academic writer: Fifty exercises for paced, productive, and powerful writing*, (2nd ed.). Sage.

This practical guide covers general academic writing skills to be developed and/or improved which include establishing a writing mindset, building academic vocabulary, improving grammar, editing, and proofreading. Specific skill building is also addressed, including writing introductions, writing problem statements, writing a methods section, writing up research findings, writing a conclusions section, and developing an abstract.

Inoue, Asao B. (2015). *Antiracist Writing Assessment Ecologies: Teaching and Assessing Writing for a Socially Just Future*, Parlor Press.

This text is exceptionally relevant, in fact focusing on antiracist cultural responsiveness. It is highly conscious of race (and other axes of oppression) and committed to social justice writing pedagogy.

Schwandt, T. A. (2016). *The Sage dictionary of qualitative inquiry*, (4th ed.). Sage.

This guide includes current and seminal terms and phrases that have shaped and continue to shape the origins, purposes, rationales, logic, meaning, and methods of the practices that characterize the broad field of qualitative inquiry. Right up front, you will need to begin familiarizing yourself with the very fabric of qualitative inquiry, and this book provides the threads of this fabric in a usable and accessible manner.

Strunk, W., & White, E. B. (2014). *The elements of style* (4th ed.). Pearson.

This timeless book clarifies the rules and principles of grammar and composition, emphasizing the power of words and the clear expression of thoughts and feelings. In addition to general format and style requirements, the book addresses the rules and principles of writing, and offers useful suggestions regarding sentence construction and word choice. Published for the first time in 1919, the current edition is only modestly updated. This classic book is a gem and is small enough and important enough to carry around in your pocket!

Additional resources and downloadable materials, including the book's appendixes, that relate to this chapter can be accessed through the book's companion website at <https://edge.sagepub.com/bloomberg-qualitative-5e>. The companion website offers multiple materials related to some of the issues discussed in Chapter 2, including resources that address APA 7 format and style guidelines, bias free language, inclusive language guidelines, grammar and punctuation, citation assistance, avoiding plagiarism, and IRB requirements. Be sure to access these helpful resources early and often as you prepare to enhance and perfect your academic writing skills!

Do not copy, post, or distribute