

Franklin University
Doctoral Studies

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



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COMMITTEE FORMATION

What is the role of the committee chair?

The committee chair is the single most important faculty for your dissertation work. This faculty will be the first to review and provide feedback on every draft of your proposal and dissertation. The chair will serve as the sounding board for new ideas, coordinate all work of the committee members, and have the final say for decisions affecting your dissertation. The committee chair makes the final determination when there are different opinions about one issue or another in your research or writing. This faculty also decides when your work is ready to be shared with the committee members. You build a strong bond with the committee chair and should enjoy a collegial relationship since this is the person who oversees your growth from a doctoral candidate to a doctor.

What is the role of the methodologist?

Whether original data collection or secondary data analysis, every dissertation is a research study. To complete the task of conducting a research study, you need to design a feasible project, collect data, analyze data, and draw findings. These tasks require the support and critical eye of a methodologist. Many students start their dissertation work with the methodologist during the research proposal stage to identify the study's design and data collection strategy.

What is the role of the subject matter expert?

The subject matter expert is the sounding board on your topic. These are faculty who are experts in the field you are studying, either by having knowledge of the literature on the topic, practical experience on the topic, or both. The subject matter expert will review and give feedback on every single part of your dissertation and provide feedback. Remember that their perspective will often relate to the topic and the subject matter rather than other areas, but they may and will comment on anything else they note in the study.

I was hoping a specific faculty would be my chair, but they denied my request. Am I doing something wrong?

You are not doing anything wrong. It is a lot of work from the faculty to take on the responsibility of being a chair. Work demands or personal circumstances can make a faculty deny requests. More often, however, they deny students because their plate is packed with students they are serving, and they know they will not be able to serve you at their best capacity. By denying you, they are doing you a favor. There are sufficient faculty available, so do not get discouraged from this process. However, faculty are interested in serving on committees where the topic interests them

or they know your quality as a student. You have a better chance of getting the faculty you want if they know your timeline, your qualities, and your topic. Considering these details and showing your best qualities when approaching a faculty is essential. Maybe you are an excellent writer, or very strong in your methodology, or your topic is likely interesting for an individual faculty. Whatever your strength, make sure to put it forward.

What are the characteristics of the faculty that would best serve me? How can I identify that?

You need to study faculty, observe their preferences, and decide who would fit you well. Have a conversation with them after looking at their profiles: schedule a meeting and ask about their work style with students, their expectations, and their timeline. It may be helpful to ask about their workload and how many other students they are currently serving. Some faculty have a lot of students, and that could mean delays and even not their best attention. You need to consider several things, starting with being honest with yourself. What are your strengths and weaknesses? What type of faculty would serve you best? Are you a strong writer, or do you need a lot of help with the writing process? If you need a lot of help, you may be best served by a faculty who pays a lot of attention to writing quality. Is methodology your strength? If not, a strong methodologist would likely keep you on the right track. Are you impatient by nature and need an answer right away? Perhaps a faculty who can keep up with your speed may be the best fit for you. There are a number of these soul-searching questions and answers that you likely need to reflect on before approaching someone.

There is a faculty member that I would like to serve on my committee. How can I encourage them?

Have an honest conversation with them about your quality as a student (not your grades – grades in any doctoral program are often inflated and not a good measure of your performance). Are you a strong writer? Tell them that. Are you a hard worker? Tell them that. Are you someone who has a deadline in mind and would like to work toward that? Be specific and clear on your timeline. Life can happen for everyone, and things can go in different directions, but your intentions and goals need to be precise. Perhaps you would like to publish with the chair after the dissertation is written or presented at conferences. This is something you need to mention. Maybe you are not interested at all in academic life. Again, be upfront and honest with them about your goals. Faculty are more likely to agree with someone with whom they have a clear picture of expectations. Sometimes the topic is not attractive to them; that you cannot change and you move on. Sometimes they have so little expertise in your topic area that they are afraid to take on the responsibility. They are doing you a favor by rejecting your request.

COMPREHENSIVE EXAM

What is the purpose of the comprehensive exam?

The comprehensive exam is the threshold for doctoral students as they transition to doctoral candidacy. The comprehensive exams are designed to assess student preparation for their dissertation work through their written analyses, syntheses, integration, and interpretations of the exam questions.

What kind of questions can I expect on the comprehensive exam?

The comprehensive exam comprises three questions: discipline knowledge, literature review, and research and ethics. Each of these questions will need to be explored in detail and follow the APA guidelines.

What is considered a passing grade?

Each question in the comprehensive exam stands alone, and you must score 84%-100% on each question to be considered as having passed the overall exam. Sometimes a student may pass only one or two questions but not all three. In such cases, students will retake only the question(s) that failed.

May I use prior work to answer my questions in the comprehensive exam?

Students may not use prior work verbatim for more than 10% of any single question, even if proper self-citation is used. This work is to be substantially new research and writing, not a recycling of prior work; however, the student will likely use the same ideas they may have explored during the coursework.

What latest publication date should I use when citing and referencing scholarly literature?

Please be mindful of the publication date of scholarly literature. Your references should be from relevant peer-reviewed literature published in the last ten years, with the exception of seminal works, theories, and historical analyses.

How long should my responses be?

While there is no strict page number requirement, you should plan for about 7-10 pages per question, with no more than 10-12 pages.

When will I have access to the comprehensive exam course?

You will have access to the course ten days prior to your course start date. Comprehensive exam questions will be posted by 11:59 PM the night before the course starts.

RESEARCH PROPOSAL

What is a research proposal?

A research proposal is a plan for the study you want to pursue. It is a condensed document that lays out your entire plan or proposal for the research study. A research proposal has details of the methodology and looks more like a plan of action for your dissertation. Even though it includes a summary of the key literature, the main focus of the proposal is to detail the methodology. A good proposal includes several ingredients showing the level of preparedness before conducting the study. The dissertation proposal includes all the methodological details, identifies literature gaps, includes key scholarly sources, and is a well thought-out plan. You can find the research proposal template at this link: <https://www.franklin.edu/about-us/policy-information/office-academic-scholarship/institutional-review-board-irb/documents>

The proposal template is also included in DISS9100.

How long should a research proposal be?

There are no hard rules about the length of the proposal, but for most students, this document is around 20 pages (including references). Quantitative studies may have longer proposals because there are many variables in the study, and each variable is thoroughly detailed. Qualitative studies may have much shorter proposals because of the nature of their design.

What is the purpose of the research proposal?

The purpose of the research proposal is to give you and your committee a good understanding of the study, how it will be conducted, and the anticipated results. It is a starting point of conversation with your committee where everyone agrees on launching the study. It is the foundation of your proposal defense and is an application requirement for the Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Should I write my literature review first or my proposal first?

This is a question that you and your committee chair discuss together; it will depend on your particular case. Some students are very familiar with the literature on the topic. They have a thorough grasp of the foundational literature and its gaps. In this scenario, it may work better to start with the proposal and return to the literature review later to finalize it. Other students begin without such knowledge of their literature and are missing significant foundations on their topic and studies already conducted around it. For these students, working on a full literature review can be the first necessary step.

DISSERTATION PROCEDURES

Do I have to follow the DISS9100 layout?

DISS9100 is one of many models to complete the dissertation. It is a guideline, not a requirement. DISS9100 is meant to help you through your journey with practical tips, guides, and resources. It is not a course that you are required to follow in the same way as your coursework! Please keep this in mind as you are going through the dissertation journey. You and your chair decide on the best order for you and your study. You will need to reach specific milestones during the dissertation, such as writing a proposal, defending the proposal, getting approval from the IRB, collecting data/using secondary data, analyzing data, and writing your dissertation; however, the way you organize your work is yours alone. You need to have a proposal written and a proposal defense before applying to the IRB, and you need IRB approval before collecting or utilizing secondary data, but you still have many different ways to utilize the course to your benefit. It is simply a guide!

Isn't the dissertation just another long paper I have to write?

No! Your coursework is a warm-up for the actual marathon. Your coursework provides you with the tools you need to complete what is coming next. Your coursework could be considered the easy part of the dissertation. The doctoral journey of conducting a study and writing a dissertation is different, full of barriers you have not yet identified, requiring persistence, self-diligence, and growth. Growth happens at any age, and it is part of what happens in this journey; you get to the other side a changed person. Your dissertation is NOT a paper you write. Your dissertation is a complete scientific study you undertake. It is a project that you oversee from beginning to end. It has many elements that you will need help designing and performing, but the ultimate journey is yours to ride. Your committee is there to guide you, but it does not show you the way or carry the journey for you. This is where the dissertation is different from any other type of degree. You are expected to find your path without clear guidelines. Understanding this is the first step toward a successful dissertation.

What is the order of writing the dissertation?

There is no such order. What works for one student and one committee may not work for another. Depending on the needs of the student and the layout of the study, some students work on their proposal, proposal defense, and IRB submission first. They then collect data, analyze their data, and write the entire dissertation from the beginning to the end. Other students may start with the literature review before moving to the proposal, proposal defense, and IRB submission process. Afterward, they collect and analyze data and return to writing the dissertation. The dissertation's success does not depend on the order in which it is written, and there are many possible versions of the writing order. Please consider an open conversation with your chair about your layout, but keep in mind that it is what best suits the study that usually dictates the order of the work. There are, however, two important rules to keep in mind: 1) No one can start data collection activities without submitting an IRB application and receiving a determination, and 2) no one can begin the IRB application process without a fully approved proposal and proposal defense.

Is a qualitative dissertation easier than a quantitative dissertation?

It is not. They are different. Your research question and the focus of the study determines the methodology. There is generally more work upfront in quantitative studies because the design needs to be perfect before data collection. Conversely, there is generally more work in qualitative studies during and after data collection. To simplify, a quantitative study is conducted when we know the variables we want to measure. A qualitative study is conducted when we do NOT know what to measure, and our goal is to find what we can measure in the future. Check out the resources and guidelines for doctoral students at our Office of Academic Scholarship at this site:

<https://www.franklin.edu/about-us/policy-information/office-academic-scholarship/resources>

Is a mixed-methods dissertation more work than the other two methodologies?

Mixed-method dissertations are often stronger, more robust studies that draw from both methodologies. They are not more work than qualitative or quantitative, and students do not take longer when they conduct mixed-methods dissertations. However, the student needs to understand both methodologies well to design a mixed-methods design.

What are the benefits of using secondary data for my dissertation?

Using secondary data for the dissertation is attractive to many students. This is available data from government agencies, national and international organizations, and other universities. It is often collected using a sturdy methodology and comes in large sample sizes. Secondary data shortens the time the researcher will spend in data collection and design and allows them to analyze large samples that would have been nearly impossible to acquire on their own. Secondary data can be quantitative or qualitative. Some sources are freely available for researchers, and others may require special permissions, but this is an attractive path for the dissertation for many novice researchers.

Do I need IRB approval even if I am using secondary data?

Whether using secondary data or conducting research without human subjects, you still need to get IRB approval before starting your study. The IRB website has all the information you need for this process. Please go to this link to find out more: <https://www.franklin.edu/irb>

What is suspension, and when does it happen?

Doctoral students or candidates are suspended when they are not progressing in the dissertation process. These regulations are often initiated by the Program Chair or registrar's office. Please familiarize yourself with the student handbook to understand the details of these processes. Suspension of doctoral students is directly related to their course performance. Suspension of doctoral candidates happens when a candidate does not make sufficient progress for two consecutive terms. When a student is suspended, the student can come back when they are ready to resume their work. A form must be filled out at least 60 days prior to reinstatement. A doctoral candidate can also be suspended if they submit their application to the IRB three (3) times and still have not addressed or resolved substantive issues in their study plan as identified by the IRB.

DISSERTATION CONTENT

What is a theory, and why do I need one in my dissertation?

The theory is a way of thinking, a way of looking at the world, and, for the seasoned researcher, a way of predicting the future - but what is it, exactly, and how does it work? Well, the interpretation of what constitutes a theory may be different from one person to another, and that definition is likely to change and be fluid. In its simplest form, a theory is a set of defined expectations and rules on how the world works, and a theory is nested within a larger framework. You need a theory, or sometimes more than one combined together, to guide your study. Consider existing theories and see how they fit with your line of thinking and how you think about the outcome of the study.

Maybe you look at the world through a practical lens, so having a practical explanation for a phenomenon is what you are predicting in your study. In this case, perhaps you are looking at some theory under the umbrella of functionalism to use for your study.

What is a theoretical framework?

If there is theory, there is a theoretical framework. Theories are grouped together into larger frameworks, which we call theoretical frameworks. Often, we encounter similar theories that are all looking at the world through similar lenses but with a few different nuances to them. In broader terms, they all belong to the same group. This group is the theoretical framework in which various theories are nested. A simple example would be feminism. There are many feminist theories, from Marxist-feminism to matrix of domination to hegemonic masculinity and so on. They all belong to the larger feminist framework, even though they differ in the details.

What is a conceptual framework?

The conceptual framework should not be confused with the theoretical framework. The theoretical framework is where different theories are grouped together. The conceptual framework is a unique relationship that you are drawing out of your own constructs and the variables of your study. The conceptual framework utilizes your dissertation theory and predicts or draws possible relationships between variables or constructs. In other words, the conceptual framework is your conceptual framework that works for your study. It is unique in how you employ the theory and other ingredients (constructs and variables) in your work.

We have learned not to use "I" in the dissertation, but my committee member/chair is saying I should and could. What is the position of the university?

Franklin University does not adhere to a firm rule about using the first or third person in dissertations. We follow the APA, but APA is a guideline, not a rule. APA recommends using the first person for things you are writing about yourself. Some researchers do not prefer this style and are more inclined to write "the researcher" for themselves. This technically contradicts what APA recommends but is still acceptable if that is the preference of the student and the committee. Please know that you have a choice to select your style and should discuss this with your chair. Here are a few links from APA that show the debate on this topic, with various sources pointing to different options:

<https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/grammar/first-person-pronouns>

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/apa6_style/apa_formatting_and_style_guide/apa_stylistics_basics.html

<https://classroom.synonym.com/third-vs-first-person-dissertation-3649.html>

<https://writingcenter.uagc.edu/first-vs-third-person>

COMMITTEE WORKINGS AND FEEDBACK

What is the expectation of getting feedback from faculty?

Most faculty at Franklin will likely provide your feedback within a few days, but that may not always be the case – depends on workload and the time of year. We try our best to work as quickly as possible for our students. Chapters or other work submitted by the student to the entire committee are expected to have a less than two-week turnaround. Working drafts submitted to your chair alone should have a turnaround time of about one week. Be proactive in this process. Remind the committee if you have not heard anything after two weeks. Send gentle reminders to your chair if the chair is not responding. Sometimes, chairs follow up with the rest of the committee if the feedback is not within the expected time. It is in your best interest that they spend sufficient time with your work and provide useful feedback rather than a speedy response.

What happens when the feedback is contradictory? One committee member is telling me something that is contrary to what the other member said.

This is not uncommon in scholarly work. After all, faculty have their guiding principles regarding what is acceptable and what is not. Sometimes their ideas on approaching the study are not in alignment. The best approach in such cases is to try and digest the feedback and do some research to see if you truly understand it, then you can create a plan on how to address it. If you still have questions or feel unclear on something, reach out to your chair to find a resolution. You may sometimes need to go back to the faculty who provided feedback and ask for clarification. The chair may need to decide if there is a general contradiction in writing, literature, or content. If the contradiction is in the methodology, the methodologist will make the final call. Part of the doctoral journey is learning how to navigate these situations, so do not shy away from them but regard them as learning opportunities.

What if my committee chair is not providing adequate feedback?

We hope this never happens, but the truth is sometimes it does. Faculty are human. Life happens to them, and sometimes things do not follow the plan. They may not be able to keep up with your dissertation study. In such cases, please do not reach conclusions about them without having an honest conversation with them. Take ownership of the process, and do not wait around for faculty to contact you. Once you have had a discussion with the chair, you may be able to evaluate the situation and consider what is going on. If the issue is irreparable, please reach out to change your committee chair or committee member who is not meeting your needs. Here is the direct link to the form to change your committee chair or member:

<https://forms.office.com/r/y4b2mysD11>

Please make sure you have reached out to another faculty who is available to substitute the chair or the member you wish to change. Once you have submitted the form, the appropriate program chair must approve it before the change is official.

I had a GPA of 4.00 in all of my coursework. Now that I am in the dissertation stage, my committee is constantly giving me feedback to improve and nothing is approved.

What have I done wrong?

You have not done anything wrong. The dissertation journey is a very different experience from coursework. Any graduate student with a master's degree can finish doctoral coursework, but not every student can finish a dissertation. Working on a dissertation is very different, with much higher expectations of you as a doctoral candidate. In a nutshell, the expectations are that you become a practitioner and independent scholar-researcher. This means that you will be trusted to conduct practical and research studies independently in the future. The dissertation process is the journey that transforms a student from following weekly assignments in a coursework environment into someone who can make decisions, conduct research, think critically, and navigate gray areas successfully on their own. This is NOT a small task! Therefore, your excellent coursework GPA does not indicate that you will be able to finish your dissertation successfully or at all. The two are not related!

The feedback I received from my chair was rude and heartbreaking. I cried after I got it, and now I feel very lost. What can I do?

This will happen to most students during the dissertation journey. Please know that no faculty is trying to do this on purpose, and many of them are unaware of how this affects you. They are simply trying to improve your work and address critical issues. When this scenario happens, take some time to collect your thoughts. Do something else to take your mind off the issue. Go back to your work after some time away and revisit the feedback. Was it rude or honest? These are two different things! Faculty will NOT sugarcoat their comments in the dissertation stage. Why? Because their names and reputations are also at stake, and they are treating you like a colleague, not a student. Remember, their names appear on the front page of your published work. They will scrutinize everything, recommend changes, and comment on things they see that are not right according to their standards. They are not belittling you, and they are not dismissing your work. Quite the contrary, they are looking at it, considering its value, and noting what needs to be changed. Take that as a blessing. Work on the comments calmly, one by one. Address not only the comments they are giving you, but also the philosophy of those comments and anticipate them in the rest of the work. This is expected of you even though it is not pronounced directly. It shows your growth as an independent scholar-practitioner. Nothing is worse than a student who goes back to the paper and only changes what the faculty has written in their comment. ***The expectations are that you understand the logic of the comment and address it throughout your work!*** If your committee chair or member wrote in the comment, "This does not make any sense to me!", for example, consider their comment and try to understand why and how to prevent that reaction in the rest of the paper. Do not take it personally. They are not saying that you are writing gibberish, but rather a specific part does not make sense to them. See if you can make your writing clearer and add or remove additional information to bring things in context. Do not become defensive or try to justify why you wrote one thing or another. There is perhaps nothing more unattractive for a faculty than a student who makes excuses for everything and whose focus does not seem to be on learning but on being defensive. Such behavior shows that you are not open or willing to learn, and are not attentive or interested in improving your work. Your focus needs to be constantly on the dissertation work, not yourself.

I told my committee that I need to be done by December, but they are not providing me with feedback quickly enough. What do I do?

Telling your committee that you need to finish by a certain date or time is naïve. They will not follow your timeline but will hold you to their standards and provide quality feedback as they are able. In fact, your urgency can only work against you. You cannot expect anyone to have a quick turnaround on your paper because you want to finish on a specific date. Your committee will provide you with feedback, which you will address in your revisions and resubmit. There will be another round of feedback on the same piece, which you will address in your revisions and resubmit. Your committee will have additional feedback based on those revisions, or regarding details they missed earlier or did not consider before, which you will address in your revisions and resubmit. It can go like this until your dissertation is good enough for the committee to support it and put their own names on it. There are no guarantees that your work will pass just because you submitted it several times. Some students do not make requested changes or take the feedback they receive seriously. They are too focused on finishing within a certain deadline that they are not paying attention to their work. They are not involved or in love with their work. They are not interested in their research study. These are some things that the committee will identify right away, from how you talk to how you write to how things are put together. Please keep in mind that if you are not invested in your study, others will not be either!

How often should I expect to meet with my committee chair?

This is different at different times in your dissertation journey. We often see that chairs and students frequently meet at the very beginning of the study, but less so during the data collection and analysis. Some students start working with their methodologist first to iron out the details of the methodology and then begin working with the chair. This is why it is crucial to know your chair's expectations and working style, preferably before asking a faculty to be your chair.

How often should I expect to meet with my entire committee?

There are no hard rules about this, because some students may schedule more frequent meetings than others. Still, you should have a complete committee meeting with your entire committee after comprehensive exams, before and after your proposal defense, and before your dissertation defense. Many students meet one-to-one with their committee chair and one-to-one with their methodologist throughout the process of their dissertation journey.

My peers' experience with the dissertation journey and committee chair differs from mine. Is this common?

Yes, everyone's journey is different from the next student. There are several reasons why the dissertation is not a cookie-cutter situation and does not quite work like a classroom setting. Please remember that no dissertation is the same. They may have similar parts, but every single dissertation is a unique study in its own right. Therefore, there are specific details, issues, and problems that arise that will be unique to that specific dissertation. Also, the combination of the three committee members and the student is also unique among them, just like the dynamics between the student and the chair. These dynamics cannot be repeated exactly the same way for every student. Even students who have the same chair will often report slightly different experiences.

I was told the doctoral journey would be three years. I am in my fifth year, and I am not done yet. What is going on?

Our graduation data shows that some students finish in less than three years, and others right at the three-year mark. Most commonly, students graduate in 3.5 to four years, but remember that each journey is very different. You CAN finish in three years, but that does not mean you will finish in that timeframe. Your work may not have reached the quality needed to finish. You or your committee may have had barriers and personal issues along the way that delayed progress or completion. Perhaps you took one or two semesters off, or perhaps your life is full of other obligations, and that is never a good time to work on your dissertation. There could be many reasons why you are still working and it is the fifth year. Persistence is an important quality you need to have to see this process to the end.

My paper keeps coming back to me with changes and revisions. Am I going to graduate on time, or ever?

Faculty will always make comments and ask for feedback. Again, this is not coursework! There is no moment in this process where faculty will feel like, "This is passing level now, let's move on." They will demand quality, and they are not giving up until you deliver! Expect that every piece you write will have several rounds of feedback until everyone agrees that you can move on to the next section. Yes, you will graduate if you are persistent enough to work until it becomes the most excellent work you can produce. But you cannot hold your committee or yourself to any strict deadlines in this process. Most students are unaware of this and believe things go just like in the coursework, where an assignment is submitted and accepted and on to the next. The dissertation work is very different.