



Learning Design and Leadership Exam-Dissertation Sequence: An Iterative Approach Leading to your Final Dissertation

Introduction

This document sets out the processes by means of which doctoral students in the Learning Design and Leadership program proceed through the six courses and four examinations of the exam-dissertation sequence. These elements track the design of a traditional, five-chapter thesis. We are also happy to support other thesis designs, however we believe that the five-chapter thesis provides a rigorous, conventionally recognizable introduction to scholarly research practices.

Six Course Exam-Dissertation Sequence



Each step involves milestones leading to the final dissertation



Rationale

This exam-dissertation sequence has been designed around the following principles:

1. The dissertation process is **iterative**, with six major deliverables following cycles of peer review and advisor review and four points of evaluation and feedback by examination committee.
2. There is an emphasis on **evolution of ideas**: at each iteration, as well as the new sections of the draft dissertation text, old sections are revised and a change note appended. The examiners remain the same through all four steps—three reviewers at the general and special field steps, increasing to four for the preliminary and final exams. This means that the examiners travel with the candidate as their work evolves. Candidates provide links to CGScholar in their Word documents, so examiners can review initial drafts, peer reviews, and self-reviews documenting changes based on peer feedback in each of the cycles of peer review.
3. The process is **collaborative**, modelling the canonical social processes of scholarly knowledge production (scholarly journals, monographs, and competitive research application).
4. The questions for **the general and special field exams** are the same for all candidates because we are taking this opportunity for them to draft initial text for the literature review chapter of their dissertation, whatever their topic may happen to be. We use the general and special field exams and their connected courses to create initial drafts of chapter 2 of the dissertation. Here, the candidate will demonstrate their capacity to select and synthesize the literature in their chosen domain either at a general level in terms the broad contours of the discipline (general field) and at a specific level in terms of the precise domain that they would like to address in their dissertation (special field).
5. The rubrics scaffold **metacognitive reflection** on scholarly practices in peer-reviews, self-reviews, and change notes. These also establish practices which explicitly acknowledge the social provenance of knowledge in the peer and examiner community, as well as being a mentor to others in intellectual work.
6. The source texts in CGScholar are **multimodal**, including inline video, datasets etc. These can be accessed via permalinks into the CGScholar version.

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Examination Process



Examination Process Details

<u>General and Special Field Examinations</u>	<u>Preliminary Examination</u>	<u>Final Examination</u>
<p>Focus: First and second parts of dissertation Chapter 2 Literature Review (see examination questions below)</p> <p>Note: A single Chapter 2 Literature Review will be prepared in time for the preliminary examination</p> <p>Examiners: Three of the four committee members</p>	<p>Focus: Chapters 1 to 3 in the Graduate College-approved format</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Written Research Proposal Manuscript 15-minute oral presentation <p>Examiners: Four committee members</p>	<p>Focus: Full dissertation in the Graduate College-approved format</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Written Manuscript 15-minute oral presentation <p>Examiners: Four committee members</p>

General Exam Question

Write a literature review that provides evidence that you have a command of the wider field of scholarly endeavor associated with the research question(s) you have chosen for your dissertation. A literature review sets the context for your dissertation demonstrating that you have discovered, presented and analyzed the value of the key sources that contain the theories, practices, data, methodologies and applications associated with your research question. (Be sure to refer directly to your research question in the review!)

What is the broad shape of the area in which you are working? What are its main challenges? What kinds of innovative ideas and transformational practices is the field begging, generally speaking? One rough measure of generality might be, if you were to create undergraduate college course introducing students to this general area of knowledge, what would you want them to know? What should they read to get a sense of the critical issues being addressed in theory, research and practice?

The literature review should not merely be descriptive—it should be analytical and critical. However, at the same time it should be a fair representation of the perspectives and voices of a range of people across the field. What are the main issues arising in this general field? The main challenges to be addressed. The questions being asked by the intellectual and practical leaders in the field? Absences or gaps in our knowledge? Work that needs to be done? Of course, you need to map the broad shape of the field to make your case, but the focus here should be your argument about work that needs to be done, which also justifies your dissertation focus.

However, having said this, in a literature review your voice is secondary. This should be a place where you let the field speak. You are there, of course, in the selection of texts and the framework you develop to present them—but subtly so.

Special Field Examination Question

Write a literature review, focusing in on theory and research related to the specific topic you have chosen for your dissertation. In contrast to the literature review you wrote for the general field examination, narrow your focus to research findings relevant to the particular area you will address in your dissertation. Here you demonstrate that you are an expert in the area of empirical research and/or theoretical work that directly relates to (what might become) the topic of your dissertation.

Be sure this section does not repeat the general field section. Revise the general field section as needed, submitting both together with a change note explaining any changes you have made in the light of the special field literature review.

Some issues to address: how the special field is located within the general field; challenges addressed by the special field: how these connect with the challenges of the general field; how the key concepts and theoretical frameworks of the general field are applied, extended or modified in the special field; how the methodologies of the general field have been applied in the special field; the main findings generated by these methodologies

Some questions to consider: What brings you to this special field? What are the main theoretical approaches in your special field? What are the most commonly used methodologies? What are the principal empirical findings? What answers does the literature provide (and fail to provide) to your research questions? Do these answers tend to confirm or deny your hypotheses? What are the practical needs for research and intervention in your special field? What potentials are there for extended application and innovation? What work needs to be done, in general, in particular in your dissertation?



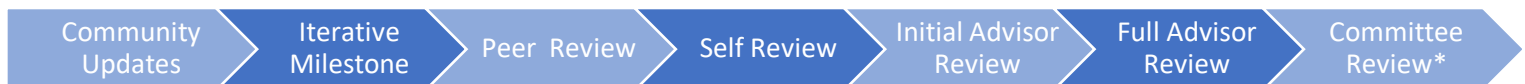
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Support: Faculty Advisor, Dissertation Advisor, and Peers

- Initial Individual Advising Session with Dissertation Advisor
- Weekly Group Advising Sessions; Advisors and peer discussions
- Individual Advising Sessions, as needed, with Dissertation Advisor or Faculty Advisor
- Peer mentoring and collaborative learning and reflective practices integrated into all processes
- Rubric for each milestone (see <https://ldlprogram.web.illinois.edu/dissertation/courses/rubrics>)
- Sequence tracker and regular asynchronous check-ins
- Target timelines

Iterative and Cumulative Contributions and Review Process

Repeated for each step and milestone in the sequence



Peer Learning Communities and Peer Review Process

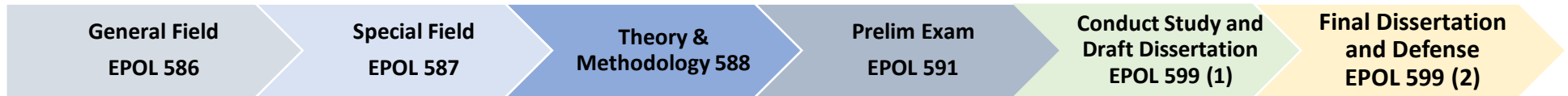


**Circumstances may warrant an alternate reviewer*



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Six Course Exam-Dissertation Sequence Milestones



Iterative and Cumulative Contributions and Review Process

*Focus on one step at a time; one update at a time.
Each step in the sequence follows a similar process →*



Detailed Process

Refer to the Navigating the [Exam-Dissertation Sequence webpage](#) for additional details and links

Seminar Elements

1. Start or update your plan on your [EDS Progress Report](#)
2. Submit the **Research Seminar Registration Request Form**
3. Respond to Admin Updates in the Community with the relevant prefix (See [this page](#))
4. Complete Milestones for the current seminar
5. Present at least once per seminar course (ask questions, seek feedback, share your ideas, share your progress, etc.) [Google Tracker](#)

Note: You may be assigned peer reviews for any type of work at any time

What to you while you wait for each review cycle

1. Begin working on the admin updates in the next step.
2. Gather literature for the next step (*do not submit the next work until you receive feedback on the previous work*).
3. Complete a peer review for someone else.

Work Creation and Review Process

Create your First milestone Draft work in CGScholar **and** a Word document according to the requirements and literature review guidelines.

*Subsequent works will use the “duplicate” feature and **must** include the most recent version of all previous milestones. (General plus Special plus Methodology, etc.)*

Refer to the [Work Submission and Review Guidelines webpage](#) for full details. Following these guidelines will ensure that your work is routed for peer review in a timely manner. Details are not repeated on this document due to the length and level of detail.

Committee Feedback

1. Fill out [department form](#) to request the **exam** (Forms are: qualifying, prelim, or final).
2. Receive notification from the department with exam question or scheduling confirmation within a week or two.
3. Submit work to Committee via the online form as a Word document
4. Receive committee feedback within one to two months
5. Revise work based on committee feedback (even if not required to resubmit) and include change notes.
6. **Duplicate** the finalized version to create the start of the next work (About this Work – Versions – Select the “Duplicate” icon next to the version you want to copy); Rename the work and re-add the icon. *Do not create a new work and do not try to re-submit your previous work again, as a single work can’t be routed for peer review again.*



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Six Course Exam-Dissertation Sequence Milestones



Preparing your Research Proposal

Refer to the [Thesis Office's webpage](#) throughout the entire process

General Field Research Seminar and Examination

1. Admin Updates with a prefix of 0 and 1
2. Add entries to your Annotated Bibliography
3. Temporary Chapter 2 Part 1: General Field Literature Review
4. Examination

Refer to the [EDS Pework webpage](#) and the [General Field webpage](#) for more details.

Forms

1. Online EdD EPOL Exam **Seminar Registration Form**
2. Qualifying Exam **Request From**

Special Field Research Seminar and Examination

1. Admin Updates with a prefix of 2
2. Add entries to your Annotated Bibliography
3. Temporary Chapter 2 Part 2: Special Field Literature Review
4. Examination

Refer to the [Special Field webpage](#) for more details.

Forms

1. Online EdD EPOL Exam **Seminar Registration Form**
2. Qualifying Exam **Request From**

Methodology Seminar

Refer to the [Methodology webpage](#)

1. Admin Updates with a prefix of 3
2. Add entries to your Annotated Bibliography
3. Create a Logic Model
4. Meet with Dr. Kalantzis to discuss your study (either in a group or individual advising session).
5. Chapter 3 Part 1: Theoretical Foundation and Research Questions
6. Chapter 3 Part 2: Methodology Design
7. Chapter 3 Part 3: Methodology Implementation and Appendices
8. Submit [IRB Documentation](#)

Forms

1. Online EdD EPOL Seminar **Registration Form**
2. IRB Application Form
3. IRB Research Team Form
4. Other IRB Forms as necessary

Research Proposal Seminar and Examination

1. Admin Updates with a Prefix of 4
2. Fully streamlined Chapter 2
3. Chapter 1: Introduction
4. Chapters 1 to 3 aligned with the Graduate College's approved format.
5. Coordinate with the Dr. Francis to schedule your preliminary exam.
6. Prepare a 15-minute oral presentation and submit slides for advisor review.
7. 15-minute Oral Presentation Examination to your committee (60-minute session)

Refer to the [Preliminary Exam webpage](#) for additional guidance.

Forms note: you must be enrolled in the term you plan to present

1. Online EdD EPOL Seminar **Registration Form**
2. Request for Appointment of Thesis/Dissertation Committee Form

1. Complete assigned peer reviews

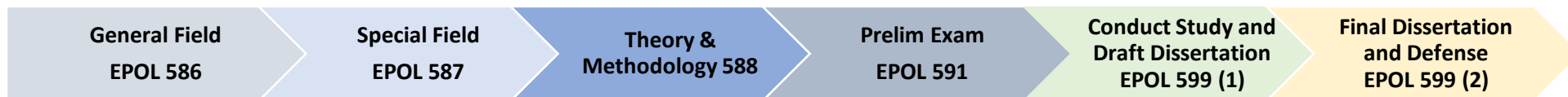
2. Present at least once per seminar course (ask questions, seek feedback, share your ideas, share your progress, etc.) – Sign up on the Google Tracker

Important: The form to register for a Seminar/Course is different than completing the form for an exam



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Six Course Exam-Dissertation Sequence Milestones



Implementing your Research Project and Preparing for your Final Dissertation

Refer to the [Thesis Office's webpage](#) throughout the entire process

Collect Data

[Refer to the Data Collection webpage](#)

Once your committee has approved of your project and you have IRB approval, you may begin the data collection process.

1. Admin Updates with prefix of 5
2. Following your approved IRB and methodology implementation plan, begin collecting data.
3. Keep your data organized as you go.
4. Keep a data collection log of what actually happens – how many did you invite, how many responded, etc.
5. Start writing the beginning of chapter 4 that includes your actual project implementation.
6. Finalize your appendices with your final data collection instruments, images of your IRB paperwork, etc.

Revise Chapters 1 to 3 and Prepare for Chapters 4/5

[Refer to the Chapters 1-3 Revisions webpage](#)

While waiting for your data collection to conclude, you can work on a few items.

1. Review and proofread chapters 1 through 3 in detail.
2. Revise to reflect past tense or present progressive. *"The present study focused on..." instead of "will focus on"*
3. Adjust anything that may no longer be true, such as a piece of your methodology plan that you didn't originally include.
4. Fully proofread, including asking a friend, family member, or copy editor to proofread it.
5. Format your work based on the thesis office requirements.
6. Submit your title page to the thesis office for approval.
7. Map out an outline for Chapters 4 and 5. Create placeholder headings.
8. Start a draft of your final defense presentation – focusing on headers

Data Analysis

[Refer to the Data Analysis webpage](#)

1. Conduct a pre-analysis with partial data.
2. Evaluate your analysis plan and the data collection instruments.
3. Build your data analysis formulas so once you have the data, you can paste it in.
4. Be thinking of how you'll present your data once it is all collected.
5. Continue mapping out your chapter 4 and 5 outline. Even if you don't know your findings yet, what subsections do you anticipate including?
6. Continue drafting your presentation.
7. Meet with Dr. Kalantzis to discuss your interim or final findings. (either in a group advising session or individually)

1. Complete assigned peer reviews

2. Present at least once per seminar course (ask questions, seek feedback, share your ideas, share your progress, etc.) – Sign up on the Google Tracker

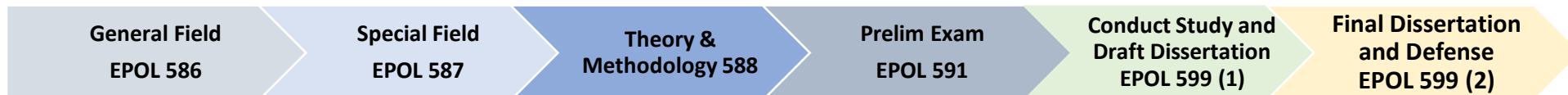
Forms: note: choose any term between your prelim and final defense if your data collection and analysis will take more than one term.

1. Not a form, but coordinate with Dr. Francis to request EPOL 599 registration approval; you can register for this multiple times for 0 to 8 credits each time.
2. Leave of Absence if you need more than one semester to work on this step (you do not need an LOA during Summer)



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Six Course Exam-Dissertation Sequence Milestones



Writing your Final Dissertation

Write Chapters 4 and 5

[Refer to the Chapters 4-5 webpage](#)

1. Admin Updates with prefix of 6.
2. **Meet with Dr. Kalantzis during this stage to ensure that you are on the right track.**
3. Write Chapter 4 and submit it for advisor review; make revisions.
4. Write Chapter 5 and submit it for advisor review; make revisions.
5. Submit final draft for advisor review.
6. Once you receive preliminary advisor approval on your full dissertation, request to register for 599.
7. Send Dr. Francis an approved copy of your final dissertation that will be shared with your committee.

Forms note: you must be enrolled in the term you plan to defend

1. **Not a form, but coordinate with Dr. Francis to request registration approval for EPOL 599; you can register for this multiple times at only 1 credit, adding up to 8 credits**

Prepare and Present your Oral Presentation

[Refer to the Final Dissertation and Defense webpage](#)

1. Coordinate with Dr. Francis to schedule your peer presentation and final defense exam
2. Prepare a 15-minute oral presentation and submit slides for advisor review
3. 15-minute Oral Presentation to your peers (30-minute session)
4. 15-minute Oral Presentation Examination to your committee (60-minute session)

Forms note: you must be enrolled in the term you plan to defend

1. **Not a form, but coordinate with Dr. Francis to request registration approval for EPOL 599; you can register for this multiple times at only 1 credit, adding up to 8 credits**
2. **Request for Appointment of Thesis/Dissertation Committee Form**

Submit your Final Thesis

[Refer to the Final Dissertation and Defense webpage](#)

1. Copy Editor for final review
2. Committee Review prior to your final defense (Word doc)
3. Advisor Approval after your final defense and final revisions (Word doc)
4. Departmental Review and Approval (PDF)
 - a. Online Students: Jena Pfoff
 - b. On-Campus Students: Linda Stimson
5. Thesis Office Review and Approval (PDF)
6. Submission of approved PDF dissertation manuscript and final defense presentation to post to our LDL alumni prelims and dissertations page

Refer to the [Thesis Office's webpage](#) throughout the entire process

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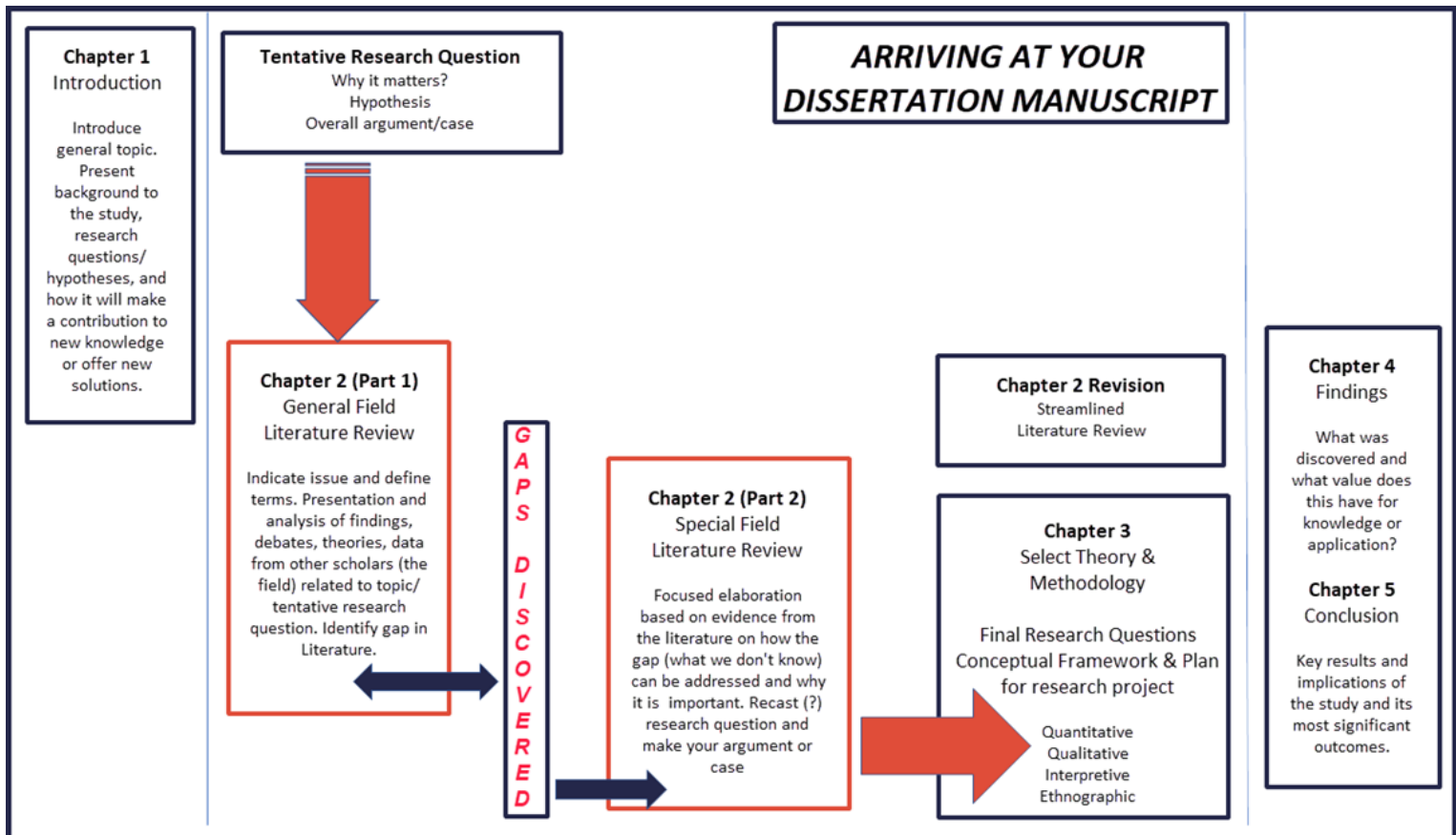
Key Milestones Leading to Your Final Dissertation



Each step includes one or more milestones



Final Dissertation Structure



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5-Chapter Dissertation Model – by Methodology

Across the three main kinds of methodology, this is how the five-chapter dissertation plays out

Dissertation Type	Qualitative Methods	Quantitative Methods	Interpretive Methods
Chapter 1: Introduction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Background - Motivation and Purpose of the Study - Problem Statement, Significance and Research Questions - Brief chapter overview 	<i>Qualitative aspects:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Why you have chosen qualitative methods - Brief summary in the chapter overview of how you will implement these methods <i>Interpretive aspects:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Why these questions are worth answering - How the answers will likely be relevant - Reasons for your selection of qualitative methods 	<i>Quantitative aspects:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Why you have chosen quantitative methods - Brief summary in the chapter overview of how you will implement these methods <i>Interpretive aspects:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Why these questions are worth answering - How the answers will likely be relevant - Reasons for your selection of quantitative methods 	<i>Interpretive aspects:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What you wish to interpret, why it needs fresh re-interpretation - Why you have chosen interpretive methods - Brief summary in the chapter overview of how you will implement these methods
Chapter 2: Literature Review <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - General Field Overview (with subheads for general themes in this area of the discipline) - Key dilemmas and enduring challenges in the general field - Special Field (with subheads for particular themes in the narrower area of your thesis topic) - Gaps in the literature in the special field 	<i>Qualitative aspects:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Methodological alternatives and tendencies in this area of the discipline - Empirical studies, qualitative compared to quantitative in the special field <i>Interpretive aspects:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The interpretive frame of reference of general field within the discipline - Empirical results and their interpretation in the special field 	<i>Quantitative aspects:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Methodological alternatives and tendencies in this area of the discipline - Empirical studies, qualitative compared to quantitative in the special field <i>Interpretive aspects:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The interpretive frame of reference of general field within the discipline - Empirical results and their interpretation in the special field 	<i>Interpretive aspects:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The general field: its interpretive frame of reference - The special field: the interpretations now applied and why they need to be revisited <i>Other Methods:</i> Are the general or special field also addressed qualitative or quantitative methods? How can these results support your interpretive endeavor?
Chapter 3: Theory and Methods <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Definitions of Concepts - Theoretical Model - Methods Approach: Justification and Limitations - Research Planning: sample, recruitment - Research Ethics (described here, documents in appendix) - Research Instruments (described here, documents in the appendix) - Data analysis processes 	<i>Qualitative aspects:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Why you have selected a particular qualitative approach - Your hypotheses: what you expect to discover - Your implementation plan <i>Interpretive aspects:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Key concepts and explanatory framework - The epistemological presuppositions behind the qualitative methods you intend to use, and your plan to apply these methods 	<i>Quantitative aspects:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Why you have selected a particular quantitative approach - Your hypotheses: what you expect to discover - Your implementation plan <i>Interpretive aspects:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Key concepts and explanatory framework - The epistemological presuppositions behind the quantitative methods you intend to use, and your plan to apply these methods 	<i>Interpretive aspects:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Key concepts and explanatory framework - The epistemological presuppositions behind the interpretive methods you intend to use (e.g. philosophy, semiotics, cultural theory), and your plan to apply these methods - Your plan of action for tackling this interpretive project
Chapter 4: Findings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Divide findings into sections and subsections with thematic headings and subheadings 	<i>Qualitative aspects:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Quotes, paraphrases, images, videos <i>Interpretive aspects:</i> -- Empirical narrative: qualitative data systematically organized around your interpretive frame	<i>Quantitative aspects:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - datasets, data visualizations <i>Interpretive aspects:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Empirical narrative: quantitative data systematically organized around your interpretive frame 	<i>Interpretive aspects:</i> Theoretical narrative: systematically laying out your revised interpretation
Chapter 5: Conclusions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reflection on the Intellectual Journey - Summary of Findings - Implications: Recommendations for Action and Future Research 	<i>Interpretive aspects:</i> What does this all mean (concluding interpretations)? Where do we go next (more qualitative empirical work)?	<i>Interpretive aspects:</i> What does this all mean (concluding interpretations)? Where do we go next (more quantitative empirical work)?	<i>Interpretive aspects:</i> What does this all mean (concluding interpretations)? Where do we go next (more interpretive work)?



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5-Chapter Dissertation Model

Chapter 1. Introduction. Outlines what the thesis is about – it includes the background to the study, research questions, and how it will make a contribution to new knowledge or offer new solutions.

Chapter 2. Literature Review. This chapter consists of two parts, addressing the literature from the perspectives of the general and special field. The general field literature review is a summary and analysis of key literature that is relevant to the research question/hypothesis. Its focus is the general framework within which scholars have addressed these questions. It also reveals and discusses any gaps in the literature. The special field literature review then addresses the gaps revealed by the general field literature review and any finely focused research and thinking that may be relevant to the study's research project. This chapter also includes an explanation about how the research project addresses an important gap in the scholarly literature or an important area of practical need.

Chapter 3. Theory and Methods. The first part of this chapter offers definitions of the key concepts, and the explanatory framework that connects these concepts for the area that the research project is exploring or testing. Connecting theory to methods are your hypotheses, or anticipated possible answers to your research questions, answers for which your methods will provide evidence. The second part of this chapter outlines and justifies your method (or methods). This will include an analysis of the underlying epistemology—how well these intensively focused knowledge processes render empirical data or explanations deeper and broader than knowledge casually acquired in everyday experience of the lifeworld? And as every methodology has its critics, what are the main critiques of this approach? What are the limitations of these methods? The chapter concludes by describing the techniques and instruments used to collect and analyze data, referring to the instruments themselves (in the appendices), and an implementation plan. (This presentation will be in the future tense for the preliminary examination, then revised into the past tense for the final examination.)

Chapter 4. Findings. Present the results of dissertation study/research project – what was discovered and what value does this have for knowledge or application?

Chapter 5. Conclusions. Discusses key results and implications of the study and its most significant outcomes. Presents models of action and recommends research agendas for the future.