

UW College of Education  
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## **Clarifying Guidelines for the Three-Article Dissertation**

Below are examples of general and specific guidelines, formats, and recommended components for the three-article dissertation, based on feedback from some of our faculty and guidance provided by other institutions and departments. Ultimately, students should work with their faculty advisor and committee for clarification and approval of their dissertation.

### **General Description**

A three-article dissertation should include three distinct papers, each self-contained, with an introduction and conclusion that explains how they are related. Please note that in select cases, a dissertation could include two papers or more than three, and the guidelines below would broadly apply.

### **Basic Guidelines**

1. The articles should form a cohesive body of work.
2. Articles should be self-contained, with distinct research questions, designs, and findings.
3. One possibility is that the first article is a literature review or theoretical argument, the second is a methodological contribution, and the third is an empirical study. Another is to have three separate empirical articles.
4. Articles should be related but not overlapping, offering unique perspectives on the same overarching topic.
5. Articles should be well developed with clear potential for publication, as determined by the dissertation committee.
6. Dissertations should include some kind of introduction and conclusion that draw connections across the three articles to explain their collective significance and ensure cohesiveness of the overall document.
7. The need for three articles should be clear and approved by the dissertation committee.
8. Students must be first author on all articles. While we suggest that students be the sole author on all articles, if articles are co-authored, students must be the first author.

### **General Structure<sup>1</sup>**

Typically, each paper should be a normal journal length article (e.g., between 5,000 and 10,000 words). The total number of chapters is usually five, and the total length approaches 150 type-written pages (about 35,000 words). As with the conventional PhD dissertation, appendices of unlimited length may be added, but these appendices are commonly appendices to

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<sup>1</sup> Heavily adapted from UT's School of Social Work and the University of Houston's College of Business

each paper, rather than appendices to the dissertation as a whole. The dissertation should be formatted in APA unless there is an exception for the discipline or journal.

The general format for the three article dissertation generally looks like this:

|           |  |
|-----------|--|
| Chapter 1 | <p>Introduction and background to the general topic area. This chapter weaves the papers together and describes their collective meaning and combined contribution to the field. It should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. a definition or statement of the problem,</li> <li>b. the importance of the problem, i.e., why it is worth researching, why it matters to the field, and its potential implications for policy and practice.</li> <li>c. the philosophical and/or theoretical foundation(s) supporting the problem/issue,</li> <li>d. an overview of the important literature (overview, because each article will have its own unique literature review), and</li> <li>e. the research questions.</li> </ul> <p>In the case of co-authorship on any individual chapter within the dissertation, the student must indicate the percentage of effort and a description of the role played by each author in the introductory chapter.</p> |
| Chapter 2 | First Paper  |
| Chapter 3 | Second Paper   |
| Chapter 4 | Third Paper  |
| Chapter 5 | <p>Conclusion, implications, and suggestions for further research. This chapter ties everything together and helps the reader see how the manuscripts, as a whole, contribute to the field. It should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. a brief summary of the dissertation's major findings, limitations, discussion, and recommendations,</li> <li>b. discussion of connections (i.e., similarities and differences) between the separate manuscripts that are included in the dissertation, striving as much as possible to present the document as representative of a coherent body of work,</li> <li>c. discussion of knowledge gaps or limitations that are not visible when each manuscript is considered individually, and</li> <li>d. an agenda for future research on the issues addressed in the dissertation.</li> </ul>   |

**Considerations for Choosing a Three-Article compared to a Traditional Dissertation**

| <b>Three-Article</b>  | <b>Traditional</b>   |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Can be faster timeline for publishing dissertation research</li><li>• Opportunity to pursue three distinct but related lines of inquiry</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• More common and familiar option in education, so more shared understanding among faculty of what it entails</li><li>• Opportunity to focus on one central line of inquiry for duration of the dissertation</li></ul> |