



# “I wish I knew then what I know now...”

## Helpful Hints for Thesis Management

### Settling on a Topic

- Start thinking about an area of research that really interests you NOW. Talk to a faculty member about your interests to see if a faculty member within or outside the department is already doing research in that area. If so, see if you can get involved and talk about thesis ideas.
- If you feel “interested in everything,” talk to students and find out what research they are involved in or what their thesis/dissertation topics are. This can help you get an idea of what is already being done

### Committee Selection

- In determining who will serve on your committee, select faculty members you are most comfortable working with. Talk to those faculty about your research interests to see if they would be interested in the project. Getting them personally invested in your project can make a huge difference!
- Really be careful about choosing Co-Chairs (2 faculty) as opposed to just a Chair. If you decide to have co-chairs, that means you have to meet with both faculty about your project simultaneously. If one chair is left in the dark about your project, it can lead to set-backs. One Chair is the easiest approach.
- While you are conducting your literature review, go ahead and schedule time to meet with your measurement committee member. You will need time to review research questions, discuss approaches, and etc., depending on the project. Furthermore, your measurement faculty member will have to approve your method section anyway so you might as well get it out of the way.

### Time Management—Keeping Yourself Active

- Set aside time to work on your project. Pretend that it’s a job. Find a designated place that you will report to do your job...your thesis! Like a job, don’t leave until you have completed your time. Set reasonable goals for yourself for each day on the job!
- Make deadlines for yourself to get work done and have someone hold you accountable. Friends, parents, peers, and certainly committee members can all be helpful in reminding you to get things done on schedule.

- Meet with your Chair either weekly or bi-weekly. If your Chair offers a bi-weekly research meeting, make it a point to attend. If you are a person who needs the extra push, then arrange a time with your chair to meet weekly or as needed. It's always good to touch base with your chair at least once a week to report progress, stumbling blocks, or to ask questions.

## Writing: The Major Task

### **General Considerations**

- Read other theses (in your topic area if possible) to learn about what you will need to include in yours. School psychology theses can be found at the library or in the small office next to Andretha's desk (ask for assistance).
- Develop research questions before you begin any major writing. It's okay if they change along the way, but having a set of questions to guide you can keep you from getting distracted from your objective. It's much easier to write about your questions than to write questions about what you've written.
- The most common plan for writing Chapters 1-3 is to write them in the following sequence:
  - Chapter 2: Literature Review
  - Chapter 3: Methods
  - Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 1 can be written last because it is a summary of Chapters 2 and 3.

- Be careful to keep your current version of your thesis saved so that you know which is the most current.
  - Be cautious of making changes while committee members are reading an earlier draft
- Keep multiple copies (disk, CD, hard drive) in different places in case of problems such as hard drive failure or loss of a disk.
  - E-mailing yourself your most current document may also be helpful for you
- It might be helpful to work on one section at a time and then turn it in for review. It can sometimes take a while to get your draft back. You can work on another section to turn in once you get the first one back, and it gives your chair less to read at a time.

### **Literature Review**

- First, find a few current literature reviews or prominent articles in your area. Begin your search for articles using the references listed in these. If you do go to Psycinfo, be as specific as possible at first, and then start eliminating words that are making your search too narrow.
- Each time you get an article, enter the reference into a database in excel. Update this file each time you get a new article. This will help you keep track of the articles you have and the ones you need to get.
- Find a good way to file/ organize your articles. Some think it is best to get a stacking file so you can keep each category of articles together and they are easy to access. Keep them in a labeled manila folder so you can take the articles to go and not get them mixed up with the other ones.
  - Once you get more established in your thesis, you can put articles in a 3-ring binder with A-Z tabs. Use your references section as a cover page to the folder so you can arrange your articles alphabetically by author, title, journal, etc.
- When you have read a few articles, start developing a skeleton outline for your literature review. Add the citations of each article on the page on the outline where it fits.

Ex.

I. Curriculum Based Assessment

A. History/ Development

(Shinn, 2000)

(Shapiro, 1996)

B. Comparison to standardized measures

(Howell, 2000)

- It is usually easier to type a summary of the article immediately after reading it. That way the important information is already recorded and typed on your computer and you do not have to sort through all your articles again.
- Develop a form on which you record all the basic information about the study: citation, type of study (qualitative, quantitative, single-subject), background info, purpose/hypotheses of study, methodology (N, demographics, measures), results, discussion, and limitations. This will help you become very efficient at distilling the most important information in the articles you read.

### Method

- It is important to have people on your committee who are familiar with your methodology, if at all possible. Similarly, many students include a member of the Research & Measurement department to serve as a consultant about methodology/statistical issues. Start looking for this person early, as the stats professors are very popular and often get over-committed.
- Consider using an existing database, if possible. The Omnibus database from Pinellas County Schools and Dr. Curtis' NASP data on school psychologists' demographics and job functions are very good examples. Don't forget that there is research going on outside of the department, like at FMHI. This will eliminate any hassles related to finding participants, getting parent permission, scheduling times to be in the schools, etc. and probably take months of the time it takes you to get done.
- Make a plan for writing Chapters 1, 2, and 3 and decide what you want to put in each so you do not have too much overlap.
- Do not expect to complete your outline or literature review until you have decided on your methods as your lit review supports or proves the need to do your study. After you have gotten an idea for you methods, go talk to a methods person immediately to see if it is feasible. Make a chart for each research questions, documenting the question, method of assessment, and type of analysis.

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Assessment</b>	<b>Analysis</b>
Is there a difference in IQ between the first and second year cohort?	WISC	ANOVA
Is there a difference in the performance between the first and second year cohort?	First year GPA	ANOVA

### The Proposal Defense

- Consult all the members of your committee about issues related to your thesis before proposing (Consult your chair to let them know you want to talk to your other members).

Perhaps have them all read an early draft or outline so that they can give their ideas and critique ahead of time.

- It may be helpful to have the members of your committee read the same draft and comment in different colored inks.
- Practice with your peers for the defense. Allow them to pick your project apart. That way, it will allow you to defend the project in its entirety and prepares you for the same sorts of questions that can be posed by faculty during your defense.

### The Big Picture

- Remember, you don't have to "save the world" with your thesis. There will plenty of time for that in your career. Don't make it bigger than it really is and allow it to overwhelm you. Think of a thesis as a learning experience and not as an attempt to become a prominent researcher. It is an opportunity to learn the research process or practice for a dissertation.
  - If you have an idea for a big study, try to break it into chunks. Save the more intensive piece for your dissertation or for a small grant later in your career.
- Use each other as a network. Hold your own group meeting to discuss the progress of your thesis. Each person can set individual goals for each meeting. Make it a competition where someone is rewarded (free lunch). Make it fun while getting it done!
- Think very seriously before changing your topic. Changing will definitely set you back a few months or more. Remember, in terms of any career in research you may be planning, your Ed.S. thesis is not going to make or break you (except for the fact that you finished it and moved on). If you start something and then decide you really want to pursue a new direction, consider saving it for your dissertation or for a grant. On the other hand, if you are miserable in your first topic then you will lack the all-important motivation to complete it. Use your advisor and peers as a sounding board if you find yourself in this situation.

**Rachel Cohen, 2<sup>nd</sup> year**

Thesis Title:

Committee:

**Kheya Ganguly-Kiefner, 2<sup>nd</sup> year**

Thesis Title:

Committee: Ellen Kimmel (Major Professor, School Psychology/Educational Psychology), Linda Raffaele-Mendes (Member, School Psychology), Sue Street (Member, Counselor Education)

**Kelli Henson, 2<sup>nd</sup> year**

Thesis Title:

Committee: Kelly Powell-Smith (Major Professor, School Psychology), Kathy Bradley-Klug (Member, School Psychology), Robert Dedrick (Member, Educational Measurement and Research)

**Carrie Morris, 2<sup>nd</sup> year**

Thesis Title:

Committee: George Batsche (Major Professor, School Psychology), Kathi Armstrong (Member, Child and Family Studies, FMHI), Robert Dedrick (Member, Educational Measurement and Research)

**Frank Sansosti, 3<sup>rd</sup> year**

Thesis Title: Effectiveness of Social Story Intervention for Children with Aspergers Syndrome (Proposed May 2002)

Committee: Kelly Powell-Smith (Major Professor, School Psychology), Michael Curtis (Member, School Psychology), John Ferron (Member, Educational Measurement and Research), Jonathan Greenstein (Member, St. Joseph Hospital Child Development Center)

**Molly Tremper, 3<sup>rd</sup> year**

Thesis Title:

Committee:

**Jenine Ziemann, 2<sup>nd</sup> year**

Thesis Title: General Education Teachers and Classroom-Based Interventions: Knowledge, Training, and Building-Level Influences (Proposed September 2003)

Committee: Linda Raffaele-Mendez (Major Professor), Michael Curtis (Member), John Ferron (Member)