

GRADUATE PROGRAM IN COMMUNICATION

Words of Wisdom from a Ph.D. Graduate

1. Where are all the forms I'll need?

There are two places you'll access forms:

- a. UK's Graduate School website. Doctoral students need to log-in to the Doctoral Degree Candidate Forms webpage (and SAVE that access information as it will be your lifeline throughout the post-coursework process). Specifically, go to: http://www.research.uky.edu/cfdocs/gs/DoctoralCommittee/Selection_Screen.cfm. This website previews all four of the electronic forms you'll need to complete during the doctoral process; this website ALSO describes how many weeks in advance you need to submit each form. NOTE: You will NOT be able to see/access any form beyond the stage that you are in academically. For example, upon your initial log-in, the only form you can see is called "Advisory Committee Meeting." You cannot submit a latter form until this and other preliminary forms are submitted and approved.
- b. Another place that has some useful forms is the Graduate Program in Communication's webpage: <http://ci.uky.edu/grad>.

2. The doctoral process seems overwhelming. Where do I even begin?

First years: review or print the *Plan of Study Form*.

- As you're selecting classes, be sure that you're choosing classes that will enable you to finish in a timely manner.
- Once you've picked an advisor, confirm your plan of study with him/her (get feedback about how to classify courses & ask for suggestions of what other courses you may lack).

3. When should I know my dissertation topic?

Truth is, you can put off a dissertation topic...for a little while. However, once you've secured an advisor, it's best to get the ball rolling on a dissertation topic.

Here's why: if you know your dissertation topic WHILE you're still completing your coursework, then you'll have the opportunity to work smarter, not harder. For example, my dissertation topic and theoretical lens was determined just after I completed my first year of coursework. Thus, when I took Theory Construction (CJT 790), the final paper I wrote for that course was a HUGE portion of the literature chapter of my dissertation.

4. I'm about to finish coursework. What next?

- a. Get a committee together. Your advisor is a resource (he/she is likely to suggest other faculty who may be a compliment to your research interests and dissertation topic).

NOTE: YOU are largely responsible for securing your outside committee member. Therefore, as you take cognate courses, be sure to establish a favorable relationship with that non-communication-department professor.

- b. Once you create a committee, you must schedule a formal meeting with the entire group—*do this months before you want to take your qualifying exams.*
 - The Advisory Committee Meeting is a time for your committee members to meet. However, the main goal of the meeting is for you to propose a completion timeline to your committee. The completion timeline should include: when you'll take qualifying exams, when you'll submit your IRB, when you want to have a proposal meeting, when you'll begin and complete data collection, when you'll send out a pre-defense draft to committee members, and when you want to defend your dissertation.
- c. You must submit an Advisory Committee Meeting form to the Graduate School. This form is accessible here (Step One: http://www.research.uky.edu/cfdocs/gs/DoctoralCommittee/Selection_Screen.cfm).
NOTE: you must log-into the system in order to submit forms or review the status of your forms!
- d. As you finish up your coursework—using the Plan of Study Form and discussing your class selection with your advisor—the next step is: gear up for qualifying exams. Preparing for your qualifying exams includes (a) submitting a qualifying exam request to the Graduate School and (b) studying, of course!
- e. You must register your qualifying exam with the Graduate School. This form is accessible here (Step Two: http://www.research.uky.edu/cfdocs/gs/DoctoralCommittee/Selection_Screen.cfm).
NOTE: you must log-into the system in order to submit this form. Be sure to submit your *Qualifying Exam Request Form* 2 weeks before you are to take your exams.

5. Which format of my qualifying exams should I take?

You have two choices when it comes to qualifying exams. You can sit for them "in-house" or complete "take-home" exams. There are advantages and disadvantages to both. For both formats of the exams, students are allowed a rest day. Typically, students write for two days, take a day off, and then write for two more days.

	Advantages	Disadvantages
In-House	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Committee members (who review and ultimately determine your pass/fail status) are understanding of in-house examinees if certain scholars aren't highlighted in an exam 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You have only four hours to write a complete answer per question. Hence, students who are slow writers or students who like to write and re-write versions of papers are not suited for

	<p>response, since the in-house test taker is limited to memory and a one-page, "cheat sheet."</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Also, committee members expect less content from in-house examinees (since they are limited in time and resources)—typical in-house exam responses are approx. 6 typed pages. 	<p>this type of qualifying exam.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> You are not allowed to access ANY references (other than your memory and "cheat sheet") during the examination.
<p>Take-Home</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You are free to use and cite as many references as you want throughout the week-long writing process. You are not limited in terms of access to journals, books, and other references. You have 24 hours to complete each exam question (over a 5 day period). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Committee members place high expectations on take-home exam responses since the test taker has unlimited resources and more hours per day to write a response.

6. What do I do after my qualifying exams?

After you take your qualifying exams, you must defend those answers. So be sure to schedule a qualifying exam defense with your committee. Note: the qualifying defense is a departmental mandate (not a Graduate School requirement), therefore you do not have to submit electronic documentation to the Graduate School for this step. Passing your qualifying defense is a fun transition because it is AT THAT POINT you are finally considered a *doctoral candidate* (also known as ABD: all but dissertation).

After you've taken qualifying exams and defended those exams, it's time to tackle the dissertation! The first step is to **prepare your proposal**. A dissertation proposal is the first three chapters of your dissertation-- typically, the introduction, literature review and methods chapters. After continually touching base with your advisor and writing these chapters, it's time to schedule a proposal defense.

7. I've defended my proposal.... How do I actually write a dissertation?

Of course, there is no formula for writing a dissertation. However, I do have a few tips:

- Outline everything. Outline each chapter. Outline the subsections of your chapters. Outlining is so helpful because it's easy to get lost in a dissertation. Outlining will prevent you from including random theoretical ideas or getting off track when you're making an argument.

- Proofread daily. By the time you finish your dissertation you're SICK of looking at it. So it's helpful to read and reread paragraphs as you write them. Look for grammatical errors, make sure your thoughts flow into following sections, be sure you're transitioning between sections and arguments, and watch out for any APA errors. It'll help to proof your work as you go along!
- Similarly, it's helpful to cite references accurately as you write. Keep up with your references throughout and cite as you write. It'll save you so much time at the end.
- Less is more. Don't worry about how long the dissertation is. Instead, focus on the quality of your argument. Are you providing clear explanations and arguments? Are you adding to the scope of our discipline? Are you developing, disproving, or confirming theory? Are your conclusions novel? Are you saying something *smart*?

8. I'm nearing the end of my dissertation, how do I get this to my committee members?

At least two months before you want to defend your dissertation, you MUST notify the Graduate School. It will assign you an outside committee member (this fifth dissertation committee member is a representative of the university--- s/he is supposed to make sure the defense process is not abusive or too easy). This notification is step three of the doctoral degree candidate

forms: http://www.research.uky.edu/cfdocs/gs/DoctoralCommittee/Selection_Screen.cfm

Committee members should have a hard copy of your dissertation at least two weeks before your defense date. Committee members should receive an electronic and paper copy of your dissertation (minus the acknowledgements page).

The acknowledgements section is not included since it's customary to thank members of your dissertation committee; instead, members can read about your gratitude after you turn in the final version to the Graduate School (but be sure to remember to send them the FINAL electronic version).

Also, two weeks before your defense: submit the notification of defense form to the Graduate School. (Step Four: http://www.research.uky.edu/cfdocs/gs/DoctoralCommittee/Selection_Screen.cfm)

9. How do I defend a dissertation?

It seems daunting, huh? The actual defense. Well, take heart.... many of us have managed to survived the actual defense. Here's how you prepare for your defense:

- Of course, read through your dissertation in its entirety--- perhaps more than once.
- Think to yourself: where are the holes in this research? What are the weak places in my theory, methods, or conclusions? If you'll anticipate what committee members will want to address, you'll be able to formulate profound responses. REMEMBER, during the defense, you don't have

- to answer every question right away. In fact, my advisor encouraged me to jot down questions and take a minute to think about what I wanted to say before actually responding.
- Create a concise PPT that overviews each section of your dissertation. You should be able to present the key points of your dissertation in a 10-12 minute defense-day presentation. There is no need to explain everything in-depth as your committee members have already read your dissertation.
 - Bring a pad and pen with you to your defense. Take notes. Write down questions and concerns that are posed.

10. I defended! Hallelujah! Now I have to turn this in *where*?

After your defense, you'll have revisions to make. Meet with your advisor and get a plan together regarding what corrections and additions you need to make. After all necessary edits are made to your post-defense dissertation, you submit the document to the Graduate School.

You can submit your dissertation electronically (instructions can be found here: http://www.gradschool.uky.edu/CurrentStudents/electronic_dissertation_instructions.html). Once your revisions are approved by your advisor and your dissertation is properly formatted, THEN you can turn in your dissertation to the Graduate School.

NOTE: the easiest way to format your dissertation is to ask a recent Ph.D. graduate for a copy of his or her graduate-school-formatted-dissertation. Work smarter, not harder!

The UK Graduate School will take a day or two to review your dissertation and then you must make those changes (yes, more revisions) before submitted a final copy to the Graduate School. That final version must be printed on thesis-paper (I bought a ream for 26 bucks at Kennedy's Bookstore) and submitted along with multiple copies of your abstract and other preliminary pages-- instructions for exactly what you must submit will be supplied by the Graduate School when it give you a list of final revisions.

After you turn in the FINAL versions to the Graduate School, it will have you come back one more time to award you a small gift of congratulations. It will also provide you a "bill" and send you to the accounts payable desk to pay for the filing, binding, and copyright components of your dissertation. These fees were between \$150-\$200 dollars.

11. I'd like a bound copy of my dissertation. Any recommendations?

The two copies you submit to the Graduate School will be bound and placed on file in the UK library. They do not supply you or your advisor a bound copy of your dissertation. Therefore, if you want a bound copy of your dissertation, I recommend using an online dissertation-binding company. I used www.thesisondemand.com.

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Helpful Hints

Connect with your “Buddy”—this person WANTS to help you. Her or she is older (in the program) and seasoned. He or she isn't just “assigned” a buddy, he or she volunteers for the job because he or she wants to help newbies. So take advantage of his or her insight. And make a new friend!

Decide early the goals/timetable you have for completing the program. If you want to finish the program in less than 4 years, you need to set serious goals.

Talk through your plan of study. Get input from older peers; they have insight into what classes are too heavy to take in the same semester.

Pick a cognate. Register for a cognate class early, because if you don't like it or the professor, you'll need to move to a new area of study in order to select your cognate dissertation committee member.

Begin talking to faculty about their research interests and your ideas for dissertation topic. Do this by the end of year one, if not sooner. Set up a few meetings, feel out professors. Ask yourself, do their research areas match my interests? Are they already working on some research that I could get involved with and EXTEND into my dissertation?

Truth is, your dissertation topic will most likely be an intermingling of your dissertation idea AND your chair's expertise/area of research. Some Ph.D. students get themselves into “trouble” by trying to make a chair fit into their ideal dissertation topic. It's better to remain flexible about your ideas until you have fleshed out your topic with a confirmed dissertation chair. The best dissertations are born out of YOUR research interests AND your chair's interests/strengths.

NOTE: your dissertation chair must be a tenured faculty member. Also, you can only have ONE assistant professor on your committee (everyone else must be an associate or higher rank).

Take CJT 790 Theory Construction seriously. Also, don't be scared of theory construction—it's a great class! If you have your dissertation topic in mind, then you can use theory construction to basically write the literature/theory chapter of your dissertation.

NOTE: don't take theory construction before year two (typically, taking it early doesn't help doctoral students because most aren't set on a dissertation topic or theoretical lens in the first year).

Talk with your chair about selecting committee members. Her/his input will enable you to select a committee that (a) helps you construct a successful dissertation and (b) help you establish a committee that meshes well together—an advantage to you as a doctoral student.

Meet with your committee members before your qualifying exams. Ask them for a general idea of what they'll have you write about (they can't tell you exactly what their specific exam question is, but they can give you the gist).

Talk to your committee members DURING the dissertation writing process. Touch base with them to see if you're adequately operationalizing concepts and building a strong argument. Their input throughout the process will improve your defense day (not to mention your actual dissertation)!

Outline your dissertation! Sit down with your chair to get a sense of your research questions and theoretical components that you'll be weaving into your research.

Set deadlines and MEET DEADLINES. Deadlines keep you on track and are absolutely necessary if you plan on completing your dissertation on time. You are the only one who can control the pace and success of your program.

Don't freak-out if you get a B in a class. Letter grades don't define you—not your worth or your success.

UK is a climate of whales not sharks. In other words, you'll succeed in this program to the extent that you help (not compete) with your colleagues. Your peers are your allies (not your rivals). Don't compare grades, pace through program, or anything. "Comparison Ruins Contentment" are wise words to live by.

Accept instructor feedback with grace. If a professor turns a paper from white to red (marks it up with comments) consider it a loving act.... that professor is trying to make you a better writer, theorist, and scholar. Consider his or her input, weigh it, and make the changes they suggest—he or she has doing this for a while.