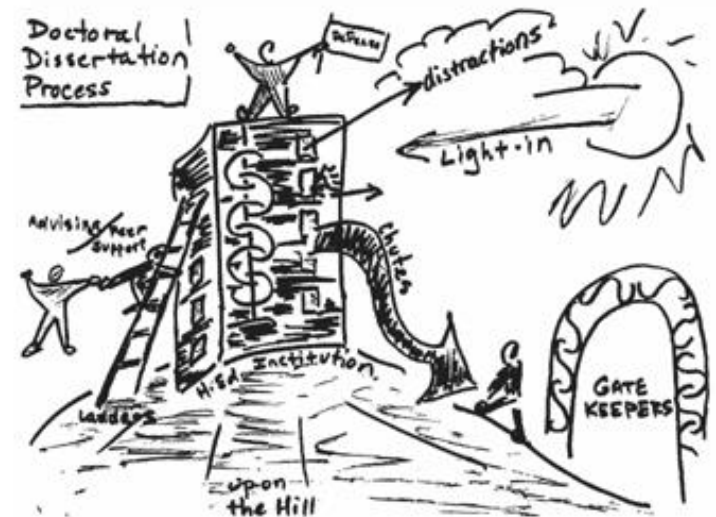


The way through a successful thesis

After: R.Brause (2000),
Writing Your Dissertation
Invisible Rules for Success



It is time for a change !

- “Writing a dissertation is not a difficult task once you have established your priorities and have the desire to complete it.”
 - “Successfully completing the dissertation process brings enormous exhilaration!”
 - “The deeper your education, the more it will change you.
 - (That’s why it’s so important to choose carefully what you study and with whom.)”
-

Writing thesis = Learning experience

- learn more about your discipline.
- learn more about writing to an audience built of specialists
- learn to organize large chunks of information
- learn to do original research
- learn to organize your time so that you are as productive as you want to be.

It is a journey from tourist to a “native land.” !

The evident things

- a dissertation is a lengthy document which is written by a graduate student in the process of completing a doctoral degree.
 - writing a dissertation includes:
 - reporting on research,
 - working with a committee and a chair,
 - having orals (exams & communications)
-

The no-evident things (1/2)

- Writing the dissertation involves *exposure to ideas*.
 - For some, this is equated with learning; for others, it engenders a resistant attitude.
 - Develop organizational and evaluation skills;
 - Increase the rigor of their thinking and become committed to lifelong learning;
 - Become more adept at participating in academic dialog;
 - Become researcher.
 - Learn about themselves as learners and writers in the process of writing a dissertation.
 - Some prefer isolation, others seek collaboration.
 - Students find themselves *dependent on others*.
 - Unstated rules, and rules which change unpredictably.
 - Without explicit information and direction, doctoral students feel vulnerable and discouraged.
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The no-evident things (2/2)

- There may be *gate-keeping* going on in the process of working towards an accepted dissertation.
 - E.g. the dissertation committee plays the role of gatekeepers.
 - One individual faculty member may delay a student's progress.
 - Doctoral students frequently try to become mind readers, trying to figure out what readers want.
 - The process is an intensely *emotional experience*: some people seem melancholy at some times, accepting, and even enthusiastic, at other times.
 - The dissertation process is clearly a *memorable* process.
 - The process of writing a dissertation is both *lengthy* and *unpredictable*.
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The aim: the new expert!

- your dissertation will reflect your resourcefulness at identifying pertinent sources.
 - in the process of writing your dissertation, you become the expert,
 - “Visit card”: the dissertation intends to be available to the entire academic community
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Expectation: “Break some new ground”

- contribute to the evolving knowledge base of a discipline through your dissertation.
- you conduct an intensive data search, insuring that the project you are mounting is different from what has “already been done.”
- You will bring a new perspective.
- You will study with new lenses, becoming aware of different phenomena.
- Your study will contribute to the expanding literature in your field.

In the process of breaking new ground, you, as the researcher, become proficient at conducting research.

Dissertation as public document

- engage you in conversation about your study
 - advisor(s) & committee will talk with you about your work
 - program peers will talk with you about your progress and your findings
 - friends and associates outside of your program will ask about your progress in completing your dissertation.
 - conferences and journals where your ideas may be shared as well.
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Dealing with the adviser and the committee

- When writing your dissertation you have many more readers of your work—potentially readers with different, conflicting theoretical orientations.
 - It is essential for you to deal with this potential conflict, discussing competing theories and ideas.
 - Your interpretation of your data will need to reflect an understanding of multiple viewpoints
 - With a dissertation, typically there are numerous drafts (diss. proposals!).
 - No longer is it acceptable to get a “passing grade” or helpful comments.
 - Need to respond to all comments.
 - Remarks and questions become directions for improving your text, as well as guidelines for future drafts and future parts of your dissertation.
 - Your dissertation is a work in progress.
 - Your committee’s input seeks to promote the possibility of attaining some level of perfection.
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Metaphors (1 / 3)

- A *Byzantine maze*:
 - ❑ There are many paths, with high bushes separating them, yet no maps, clues, or knowledgeable guides to lead from entrance to exit.
 - ❑ A candidate may go on seemingly endless treks, never confident of finding the way out.
 - A competitive race:
 - ❑ *hurdles* to be mounted or all the *hoops* to jump through.
 - ❑ a numerous fixed, human-created obstacles which the participants need to mount successfully.
 - ❑ The hurdles are strategically placed obstacles, making the path to be traveled intentionally difficult.
 - ❑ The hoops may change in size and location.
 - ❑ There is one predetermined, acceptable goal and route to be followed.
 - ❑ Those who are strongwilled, stubborn, and tenacious will prevail and succeed.
-

Metaphors (2/3)

- A non-competitive race
 - *Mountain climbing, running the rapids, and running a marathon*
 - There is a sense that the individual is testing and challenging herself or himself to try more difficult activities, seeking to enhance his or her record.
 - there is neither the necessity for competition with others nor a malevolent connotation.
 - The individual who succeeds in climbing the mountain is pleased at having met a self-established challenge.
 - A *game*.
 - Focusing on the fixed end, and the identification of winners and losers in the process.
 - There is always the possibility of playing another round with new winners.
 - The rules either were not explained at the outset or constantly change.
 - The dissertation writer considers herself or himself to be a victim, subject to others' rules, with no power or control.
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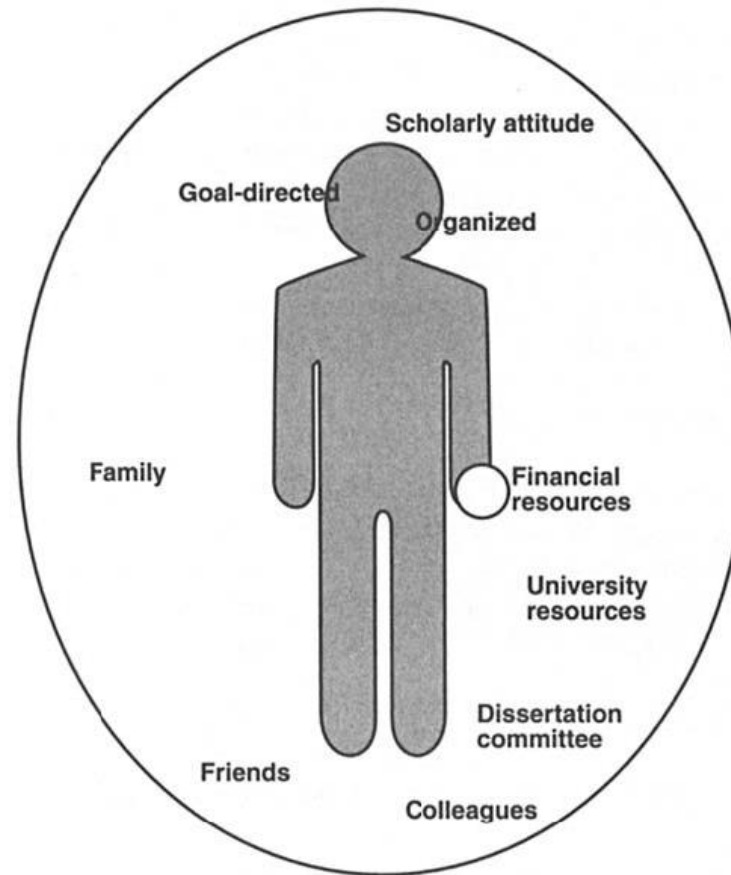
Metaphors (3/3)

- *Gardening* comparison:
 - the candidate focuses on the slow growth process from seed to flower: the need for patient weeding, fertilizing, watering, and constant monitoring to adjust for unpredictable factors such as weather conditions and the speed of seed germination.
 - In this model, the doctoral candidate may select the seeds to plant, based, for example, on knowledge about the climate and soil conditions.
 - Additional resources may enhance the quality of the flowers or fruit, or protect them from insects or unexpected weather conditions.
 - From this process, the gardener/dissertation writer becomes more knowledgeable and more adept at growing/writing!
 - It as an intellectual and emotional growth process with a positive, predictable outcome and little mental contribution.
 - *A coming of age experience* A guide brings me through a mindblowing experience, resulting in my viewing the world with new lenses, ready to face new challenges.
 - *A train ride, a trip, a journey* An exploration of new terrain, having new experiences and becoming exhilarated and exhausted in the process.
 - *An exercise, a war, a battle* An on-going conflict with no clear indication of appropriate strategies or predictable outcomes.
 - *A birthing event* A process filled with anticipation, tension of the unknown, and ultimately, a new life
 - *A blind person* An individual stumbling in a room never visited before
-

Personal Qualities of Students

- tenacious, persevering, goal-directed;
 - ready for numerous, unpredictable surprises;
 - flexible,
 - collaborative,
 - independent, and/or deferential as needed
-

The student ideal world



Student's Mind-set

Personally committed to completing the dissertation.

The commitment may take several forms:

- A “personal attachment...towards the project,”
 - A “personal belief in myself—that what I’m doing is important and good and of value to myself and others,” or
 - Others are “valuing my ideas” or
 - You have a “passionate desire to know the answer to a research question.”
 - Convince that it will be “worth it.” The benefits have to exceed the drawbacks.
 - Self-starter and self-discipline
-

Ready for the 2nd year?

- a sense of wonder, interest, and/or excitement about a specific topic or question;
 - extensive familiarity with “the literature” and the current state of knowledge in the field or discipline of your doctoral program;
 - encouragement and support for you and your ideas within your program community;
 - time to work on the project;
 - a desire to contribute to a discipline or field;
 - a determination to complete the doctoral program and go on with your life beyond graduate school.
-

<i>Category</i>	<i>Example/potential criteria</i>	<i>Rating (✓ or –)</i>
A sense of wonder, interest, excitement about a specific topic or question	Outline a talk on your topic for a ten-minute presentation	
Extensive familiarity with the “literature” and the current state of knowledge in the field	List ten key references and their main theses	
Encouragement and support for me and my ideas within my program	Name three faculty and three peers who support your interest	
Time to work on the project	Identify a block of time each day when you will work on your dissertation	
A desire to contribute to a discipline or field	Explain the potential impact of your study	
A determination to complete the doctoral program	What will you place on hold while you immerse yourself in your dissertation? Do you have plans for “after dissertation?”	

Options for selecting a topic

1. You draw on the knowledge which you acquired in your coursework and from your independent reading and journal writing.
 2. You engage in dialogs with professors about topics which might be acceptable, knowing your dissertation will only get done with the assistance and support of the faculty.
 3. You collaborate with student-colleagues, discussing the topics they are contemplating for their research, using recently accepted dissertations as samples of what your dissertation needs to represent, as well as sites where recommendations for future research are presented.
 4. You draw on your personal and professional experiences.
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Write a dissertation proposal

1. A descriptive title.
 2. A statement of the research problem or question and the theoretical concerns to be addressed.
 3. A presentation of studies and theories which are related to the proposed study.
 4. An explanation of the procedures planned to conduct the proposed study
+State of applying the procedure described in 4.
-

Statement of the Research Problem or Question and the Theoretical Concerns to be Addressed

- the topic you have selected is compelling
 - arises from your comprehensive understanding of the current knowledge in your field;
 - addresses a pivotal issue in your discipline;
 - is doable; and
 - is potentially significant.
 - The statement of your research problem typically includes 3 parts:
 - a relatively brief discussion in which you present a “problem” in your academic discipline;
 - a cohesive theoretical rationale;
 - a statement of the potential significance of the study.
-

A Presentation of the Studies and Theories which are Related to the Proposed Study

- indicates the unique qualities of your study, which may include:
 - filling a theoretical or research gap in the discipline;
 - exploring an inconsistency in research findings; or
 - clarifying a conflict between theories.
 - theories which are connected to the “problem” are explained.
 - Your theoretical rationale has several characteristics, in that it:
 - selects current, relevant, major theorists;
 - provides a historical evolution incorporating classical, seminal studies and theories which are repeatedly referred to in the studies which you value;
 - reflects the professional expertise available at your academic institution;
 - contributes to the academic discipline, noting links between previous studies and your proposed study.
-

An Explanation of the Procedures Planned to Conduct the Proposed Study

- discuss your projected methods for collecting and analyzing the data which responds to your research question.
 - opportunity for you to be creative while illustrating the depth of your knowledge of the field.
 - drawing on all the studies which you have read, you will design a process to provide you with the best data and the best strategies for interpreting your data.
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The start...

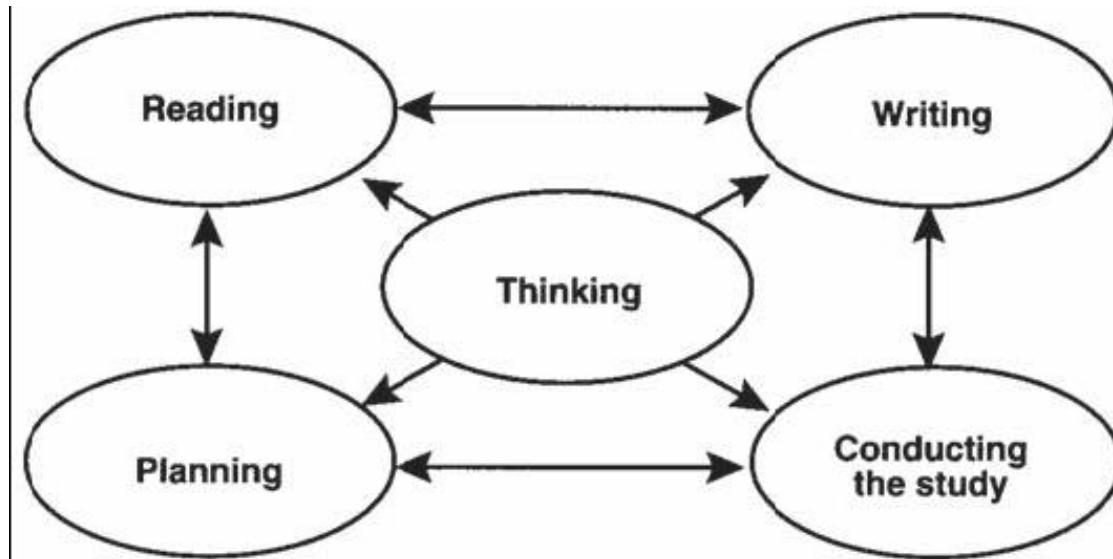
- A first step is to identify some potential questions which you might want to research for your dissertation.
 - You might find it useful at this point to note some of the topics and questions which interest you.
 - Putting these ideas on paper will help you to progress.
 - Second step: note your knowledge related to each of the revised questions.
-

Organize the second step

Questions and issues which intrigue me	What I know about the topic	Potential additional resources to address the topic
1		
2		
3		
4		

Intriguing topics/issues	A different perspective
1	1
2	2
3	3
4	4

Multidimensional work



Reading

- You will read voraciously and widely so that you become the most knowledgeable person in a specific domain!
 - You will know what's been done, what's in process, and what directions your field is taking.
 - This knowledge positions you to identify what needs to be done next.
 - As you read a journal article, your inquisitive sense might be sparked by a recommendation “for future research,” or you may devise a potentially more effective way of testing one aspect of a theory.
-

Organizational matters

- Make a bibliographic reference card for each document you look at when
 - you want to access an article a second time;
 - you want to verify that you have looked at this reference;
 - you need to create your bibliography;
 - you need to find out if you've seen anything by a particular author or in a particular journal;
 - you want to refer to an article in your text and need the date of publication or the appropriate pronoun when referring to the author.
 - Note the usefulness of the material once you have read it, thereby avoiding your return to documents you already know.
 - Create numerous *topical note cards* for each text, placing a potential topic or category for ease of reference.
 - Include notation of author and date on each card.
 - Group these cards by topic; you may revise these topical designations as you progress in your understanding of issues.
 - There are always new publications, and there is an infinite amount of information available which might be related to your topic.
 - But you also need to be pragmatic. You make a judgment call when you decide you have read "enough," at least for the time being, allowing you to move along responsibly and productively.
-

Planning

- plan your research questions, your methods for collecting and analyzing your data, and the organization of your findings.
 - Forms:
 - Establish a productive mind-set
 - schedule your dissertation time, including times when you will have access to specific resources;
 - document your progress.
-

Dissertation structure

- *"Once upon a time researchers believed that ... (literature review);*
 - *But then I thought that maybe ... (aims);*
 - *so, what I did was ... (method);*
 - *and I've discovered that ... (findings);*
 - *which changed the way we ... (contribution to knowledge)".*
-

And finally

- **SOME CONCRETE THESIS!**

