Sample Dissertation Outline

Students and committee, please use this template as appropriate with your dissertations.
- Title (no more than 12 words)
- The title, problem, purpose, method, and RQs must align
- Paragraphs should be **at least 5** sentences, (which is a complete paragraph).
- Every heading should have a paragraph under it.
- Chapters 1-3 should have a chapter summary; chapter 4 should end with a conclusion/summary of the entire dissertation.
- All Chapters start on a new page.
- All chapters updated to past tense prior to the final defense.
- Transition sentences at the end of each section should be used to tie back into the topic.

Dissertation Outline

Chapter I: Introduction

An introduction paragraph can be written LAST, after the organization of the paper. It introduces the reader to the topic of the paper

1. **Background of the Problem**: Begin with the early history of your topic, containing historical information. Aligns with the Title of the Dissertation
2. **Statement of the Problem**
3. **Theoretical Framework**
   - Selected Theory: Identify the main theory guiding the study.
   - Relevance to Research Problem: Explain how the theory provides insight into the research problem.
   - Guidance for Study: Describe how the theory shapes research questions, data collection, and analysis.
   - Key Concepts: Summarize core concepts from the theory that are relevant to the study.
4. **Purpose of the Study/Resource**: The purpose should align with the main topics of your Literature Review. Begin with "The purpose of this qualitative or quantitative study is…. And ends with 3 RQs or PLO's
   - Research Questions or Program Learning Outcomes
        (The problem, purpose, and research questions all align)
5. **Significance of the Study/Resource** (what it is going to do): "The significance of this study (or resource) is…" then discuss what the expected information will provide for the field of psychology
6. **Definitions and Key Terms**: Only list non-lay-terms and constructs, not needed for all dissertations

Literature Review
1. **Topic 1**
    a. **Subtopic a**
    b. **Subtopic b**
    c. **Subtopic c**
2. **Topic 2**

       a. **Subtopic a**
       b. **Subtopic b**
       c. **Subtopic c**
3. **Topic 3**
       a. **Subtopic a**
       b. **Subtopic b**
       c. **Subtopic c**
Summary

Chapter II: Methodology (Critical Analysis suggested topics, can vary or be added to)

1. The methodology for your Dissertation:
   a. **Research Design**
      1) **Inclusion**
      2) **Exclusion criteria**
   b. **Literature Search and Selection**
1. **Data Extraction and Synthesis**
1. **Critical Appraisal**
1. **Ethical Considerations**
   c. **Other as appropriate**
Summary

Chapter II: Methodology (Program Development suggested topics, can vary or be added to)

1. The methodology for your Dissertation:
   a. **Program Overview**
      1) **Participants**
      2) **Facilitators**
   b. **Target Audience**
   c. **Objectives and Learning Outcomes**
   d. **Assessments and Psychometric properties**
   e. **Ethical Considerations**
   d. **Other as appropriate**
Summary

Chapter II: Methodology (Qualitative/Quantitative)

1. Research Design
   b. **Participants Sampling**
      1. Inclusion criteria
      2. Exclusion criteria
      3. Recruitment & Sampling Strategy
1. Data Collection Methods
1. Data Extraction and Synthesis Critical Appraisal
1. Ethical Considerations
1. Other as appropriate
Summary

Chapter III: Results
1. This chapter presents the findings or outcomes of your study or project. The structure and content will vary depending on the type of dissertation **(**Program Development**,** Critical Analysis**,** Qualitative or Quantitative Research**, or** Program Evaluation**).** Regardless of format, the purpose of this chapter is to clearly describe and summarize what was discovered, developed, or analyzed in relation to your research questions, objectives, or problem statement.
    a. Program Development- This chapter will describe and summarize the content of the program or resource developed (e.g., curriculum, workshops, workbook, intervention model, or training manual).

    - Provide an overview of the purpose and structure of the program.
    - Describe each major component or section (for example, session titles, themes, or learning objectives).
    - Explain how the content aligns with the theoretical or conceptual framework and addresses the identified problem or need.
    - You do not need to include the entire program or resource in this chapter; instead, include the full program as an Appendix at the end of your dissertation.
    - In this section, focus on offering a summary and rationale for the content you developed, describing how each component contributes to the overall purpose and intended outcomes.

    b. Critical Analysis- n this section, synthesize the existing literature on the topic or problem you selected and draw conclusions regarding the state of the literature in this area.

    - Identify the key themes, patterns, and findings that emerged from your review of empirical and theoretical works.
    - Discuss areas of agreement, contradiction, or gaps in the current body of knowledge.
    - Highlight what your synthesis reveals about the field's understanding of the problem and potential directions for future research or practice.
    - Conclude with an analysis of the implications of your findings for scholars, practitioners, or policymakers.

    c. Qualitative or Quantitative- Present the results of your data analyses in response to your research questions (for qualitative studies) or hypotheses (for quantitative studies).

    - The presentation of results may vary depending on the nature of your analyses.
    - For quantitative studies, report descriptive and inferential statistics, such as means, standard deviations, correlations, or regressions. Use tables and graphs to illustrate key findings.

- For qualitative studies, present themes, categories, or patterns that emerged from your data analysis, supported by representative participant quotes or narrative examples.
- Ensure that each result is clearly linked to a specific research question or hypothesis and that the data presentation remains objective and organized.

d. Program Evaluation- Present the results of data analyses in response to your evaluation questions.

- Summarize findings that demonstrate how well the program achieved its intended outcomes.
- The presentation of results may vary depending on whether you used quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods approaches.
- Organize findings into tables, charts, or graphs where appropriate to support clarity and interpretation.
- Discuss key indicators of program effectiveness, areas for improvement, and any unanticipated outcomes that emerged from the evaluation process.

e. Other: Depending on your dissertation type, you may also include contextual information, data integrity checks, visual aids, etc.

Summary

Chapter IV: Discussion
1. **Implications**- Review of implications of the resource for clinical practice
2. **Empirical Data** if gathered– discuss that here
3. **Limitations**
4. **Future Research** that needs to be done by others
5. **Christian Integration**
Conclusion (conclusion or summary of the entire dissertation)

References
**(single or double-spaced within
and no more than double-spaced between entries)**

Appendix
Will include the Program developed or any additional essential data.
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EXAMPLE

What is the Cause of Mental Illness? A Qualitative Literature Review
The title, problem, purpose, method, and RQs must align

Chapter I: Introduction and Literature Review
When a loved one is diagnosed with an illness, someone invariably asks, "what caused this?" Often, the implication grows from the person's belief that someone did something to cause it, and had they known they could cause this, they would have done something to prevent

it (Smith, 2022). In 2023, 3.5 million people were diagnosed with a mental illness for the first time (American Psychiatric Association, 2023). Mental illness costs the US Governments 10 billions dollars every day. Each day, 17 attempt or die by suicide. Children are at higher risk to be physically abused when they have a mental illness…lower academic achievement.. etc.

Background of the Problem

The first reported instance of mental illness was in 1649 when physician Bob Smith posited that his patient was not feigning illness but instead suffering with an organic form of…. Later, … we engaged in trephining. Subsequently, we performed lobotomies…. Today, we rely on the DSM-5-TR to ….. and provide sufferers with medication.

Statement of the Problem

The Problem is that mental illness has no known definitive etiology; its cause is unknown. This is a problem because until people understand what causes mental illness, they will continue to fight medication use and will not be able to prevent mental illness.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative literature review is to describe what the literature has established as the cause of mental illness by addressing the following research question: What is our current understanding of the cause(s) of mental illness? Answering this question will help to…

The problem, purpose, and research questions all align.

Significance of the Study.

When people are diagnosed with diabetes or arthritis, they do not question the medications they are prescribed. When told they have depression, anxiety, or bipolar, they often tell us they do not believe in medication. People need to understand what causes mental illness; they will not fight medication use and will learn what to do and not to do to prevent mental illness.

Definitions and Key Terms. Only list non-lay-terms and constructs if necessary

Term 1.

Term 2.

Literature Review

The Biopsychosocial model is the prevailing theory to explain the etiology of mental illness.

Biology

Genetics plays a major role in …..

Psychology

A person's personal psychology is based on their inherent traits

Social

Individuals develop in part due to their environment. Twin studies, for example,…

References

Ord, A. S., Slogar, S. M., & Sautter, S. W. (2021). Lifestyle factors, cognitive functioning, and functional capacity in older adults. *International Journal of Aging and Human Development*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1177/00914150211009467

Ord, A. S., Stranahan, K. R., Hurley, R. A., & Taber, K. H. (2020). Stress-related growth: Building a more resilient brain. *Journal of Neuropsychiatry and Clinical Neurosciences, 32(2),* 207-212. https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.neuropsych.20050111

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2006). Self-regulation and the problem of human autonomy: Does psychology need choice, self-determination, and will? *Journal of Personality, 74*(6), 1557-1586. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6494.2006.00420.x

Appendix