

# Contents

Acknowledgements   vii



Foreword   To Our Potential Readers: Is This Book for You?   1



Introduction   Busting Counterproductive Idealism  
in Dissertation Thinking   2  
*(Note: Please Do Not Skip This Introduction!)*



Chapter 1   It's *Just* a Dissertation   6



Chapter 2   Do I *Really* Have to Read This Whole Book?   24



## *Intermission*

Why Are Chapters 3 and 4 So Very Long?   37  
Which Comes First: The Chicken or the Egg?   38  
What Does a Quickie Look Like?   39



Chapter 3   Making it Easier (Not Harder) on Yourself:  
Choose a Doable Area of Inquiry   40



## *Intermission*

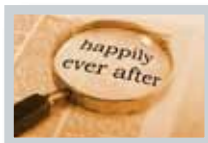
What Does Another Quickie Look Like?   74



## Chapter 4 Eenie, Meenie, Minie, Moe 76

Part 1: Selecting a Near-Perfect Advisor 77

Part 2: Assembling a High-Performing Committee 94



## Chapter 5 Happily Ever After 102

Part 1: What You Can Do to Make Your  
Advisee-Advisor Relationship Work 102

Part 2: What You Can Do to Make Your  
Advisor's Feedback Helpful to You 112



## Chapter 6 Magic 101: Transforming Daunting to Doable 130

Part 1: What Is a Prospectus and  
How Do I Write One? 130

Part 2: Creating a Doable Dissertation Timeline  
(or Revising a Former One) 133



## Chapter 7 Think Small: The Nitty Gritty of Getting It Done 152



## Chapter 8 Stuck in the Muck: Prevent and/or Combat Unprogress 184



## Chapter 9 I Feel Like Quitting: Special Circumstances That Don't Have to Stop You 218



## Chapter 10    The Finish Line—Transforming Doable to Done: Formatting Your Dissertation and Preparing for Your Defense    238

|              |  |     |
|--------------|--|-----|
| Appendix     | If You Still Want More: Additional Helpful Resources | 245 |
|              | Extra Copies of Selected Worksheets                  | 247 |
|              | List of Templates                                    | 253 |
|              | List of Tables                                       | 253 |
|              | List of Figures                                      | 254 |
|              | List of Exercises                                    | 254 |
|              | List of Narrative Anecdotes                          | 256 |
| Bibliography |  | 257 |
| Index        |  | 259 |

# INTRODUCTION

## Busting Counterproductive Idealism in Dissertation Thinking



### (We Know You're About to Skip This Intro: DON'T!)

When we first conceived this book, we wanted to title it **JUST GOOD ENOUGH**. But our colleagues and editors were concerned that this title might seem to condone sub-par dissertations and thereby might alienate many readers, especially scholars who care very much about their academic work. So we changed the cover title, but our premise is still **JUST GOOD ENOUGH**. We know: there are probably those among you who may balk at this concept for dissertations. But, before you scoff and maybe even bail, consider what we actually mean.

DOCTORATE

MASTER'S

BACHELOR'S

ASSOCIATE'S

HIGH SCHOOL

## JUST GOOD ENOUGH Does Not Mean Shoddy

| Shoddy  | Counterproductive Idealism  | JUST GOOD ENOUGH   |
|---|---|--|
| Unacceptable  | A perfect masterpiece   | Meets the criteria and requirements of your institution and department   |
| Barely passable   | Award-winning   | Enables you to graduate and earn your Ph.D.  |
| Poorly written  | Publishable manuscript  | Pleases your advisor and committee members   |
| Poorly researched   | Includes everything you've ever learned   | Well-written, well-researched, and readable  |
| Completed in two months                                       | Completed after seven agonizing years of in-depth research and writing          | Completed in one to three years  |
| Reiterates what encyclopedias would say about your discipline | The most amazing contribution to your field in the past hundred years           | Poses and responds to important research questions in your field   |
| Embarrassing  | Rivals the books and papers written by the most esteemed scholars in your field | Demonstrates that you are capable of the scholarly inquiries and methodologies characteristic of your discipline |
| Skimpy  | 500 or more pages   | Long enough to say something valuable about your topic   |

As you can see, we actually agree with those among you who hold Ph.D.-level research and writing up to high standards.

Dissertations are important: a dissertation demonstrates that a scholar is capable of the sustained, in-depth inquiry characteristic of academia and of a particular discipline. Dissertations establish and reflect compelling research agendas that can last a lifetime. And dissertations should be about ideas that matter to the writer and his or her readers. However, we do not agree that the dissertation needs to be outstanding in order to achieve these aims. A dissertation is a text produced by a *beginning* scholar; it is not the capstone, magnum opus of a lifetime.

Furthermore, for those among you who intend to publish a book-length text based on your dissertation, the truth is that a scholarly monograph published by a professional press is an entirely different project than a dissertation. It has a different audience, a different set of editors, and different goals. Publishers demand significant reworking of dissertations because of all these differences. So, if you are among those who do aspire to publish a book based on your dissertation, you will most likely be involved with a revision process in collaboration with a publisher for at least a year, often more.





Therefore, since you do not know what a publisher will desire and require, why waste valuable time trying to make it publishable now?

Our definition of the best dissertation is one that's done well enough to earn your Ph.D. as soon and as comfortably as possible. So now, let's proceed to helping you write the "perfect" **JUST GOOD ENOUGH** dissertation.

But, if you still have hesitations about the **JUST GOOD ENOUGH** approach, we suggest you read the portions of our book that you find helpful. There really is a lot of good advice. For those few, most skeptical among you: Fine. Don't read us. Put us back on the shelf and try it your way. We wish you well. But, we think you'll be back . . . and then you'll know where to find us. Rest assured, we won't hold a grudge. We'll help you when you are ready for us, and we even promise not to say, "I told you so."

*Whether the Ph.D. is just a glint in your eye or you are ABD (All But Dissertation), this book will help you believe you can do it and get it done.*



## Why This Book Will Help You

Whether the Ph.D. is just a glint in your eye or you are ABD (All But Dissertation), this book will help you believe you can do it and get it done. This book is valuable for people in all disciplines and at all stages of the dissertation process, whether you are just beginning to consider doctoral work or are facing a looming deadline near the end of Ph.D. eligibility. We designed our book to be a relatively quick read so as not to take precious time away from your main priority: writing your dissertation. We have also tried to make the text as interactive as possible by including:

- narrative anecdotes so you can relate to and learn from others' stories<sup>1</sup>;
- reflective exercises because you are best positioned to know what works for you (and, besides, what's more fun than indulging in guilt-free egocentrism?);
- topic navigation tips so you can quickly find the most relevant concepts for you in this book (and skip all the rest!);
- humor to lighten what is all too often an overabundance of stress that attends the dissertation process. (If you don't have a sense of humor, you may want to go find one before reading our book.<sup>2</sup>) However, try as we might, there are some topics in which even we couldn't find any humor—so we didn't.

<sup>1</sup> We have altered names and specifics in order to protect anonymity and in some cases have taken creative license with stories in order to illustrate a point better.

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from the Bed Head Company trademark, "You must have a sense of humor to use our products."

# CHAPTER 1

## It's Just a Dissertation



You're about to learn the most important dissertation advice you'll ever hear. So, without further ado, (lights dim . . . drumroll please . . .) take a deep breath because you are now about to enter the inner sanctum of insider knowledge about how to successfully and efficiently write a dissertation and earn a Ph.D. But we know you may not read every chapter in our book or every part of each chapter. We hope you do but accept that you may not. 🙄 So, to ensure that you will get as much assistance as possible from us, we have provided these following snapshot views of our most important dissertation approaches and recommendations. We actually think they are essential, although we just might be a wee bit biased (which doesn't mean we aren't right anyway!). Of course, we will repeat, refer to, and elaborate on many of these concepts throughout the book.





Even if you do read our entire book 😊, we wanted you to know and be able to implement the approaches and strategies as soon as possible in your dissertation process, whether you are just beginning or well into it already. Also, we have included specific helpful tips that will benefit you greatly by knowing and doing *now*, rather than later, in your dissertation process.

We have grouped our advice in this chapter under the following three categories:

- **JUST GOOD ENOUGH**
- Essential Tactics No Dissertator Should Be Without
- Big Life Lessons: Perspectives that Will Help Sustain You

## JUST GOOD ENOUGH

Some of these concepts are potentially so irreverent that others may tell you they are untrue or possibly harmful. Why? Because the academic culture creates and maintains certain unrealistic, overly idealistic, and detrimental perceptions about what it takes to write a dissertation. We are pushing back. As we said in the introduction, we are going to bust through counterproductive idealism in dissertating and instead promote a more realistic, doable approach that includes *doing as little as necessary to earn the Ph.D.* (Okay . . . we warned you we would be irreverent.)

1. **JUST GOOD ENOUGH.** Your dissertation does not need to be your magnum opus or masterpiece, the best in your field, nor that which will bring you fame and fortune. Nor does it need to include *everything* you've read and all that you'd like to research and write about. Your dissertation only needs to be **JUST GOOD ENOUGH** to earn your Ph.D. This may be hard for you to believe. Since you're already in graduate school, it's likely that you've spent your academic life going above and beyond basic requirements, taking ownership of your education, and maximizing your intellectual contributions. Yadda, yadda, yadda. Let's be more realistic. There's plenty of time later for indulging your overachieving nature. In fact, you can save many ideas for post-Ph.D. This is especially crucial if you plan to go into academia, since you'll likely want to craft an intellectual trajectory with a second and third major project. If you are in a discipline that encourages publishable dissertations, we say this: This "dissertation-as-publishable" expectation is counterproductive because it brings immense pressure on you and it also tends to ignore recent shifts in the publishing industry such as cutbacks, digitization, and increased competition. Such an expectation also ignores the fact that a dissertation is an entirely different project than a publishable scholarly monograph. If you do desire to

*We have included specific helpful tips that will benefit you greatly by knowing and doing now, rather than later, in your dissertation process.*





publish your dissertation as a book (and most Ph.D. candidates do not), editors will generally require such significant revisions that you will likely spend at least a year, probably more, revising the text after you earn your doctorate. So, meet your new mantra: **JUST GOOD ENOUGH.**

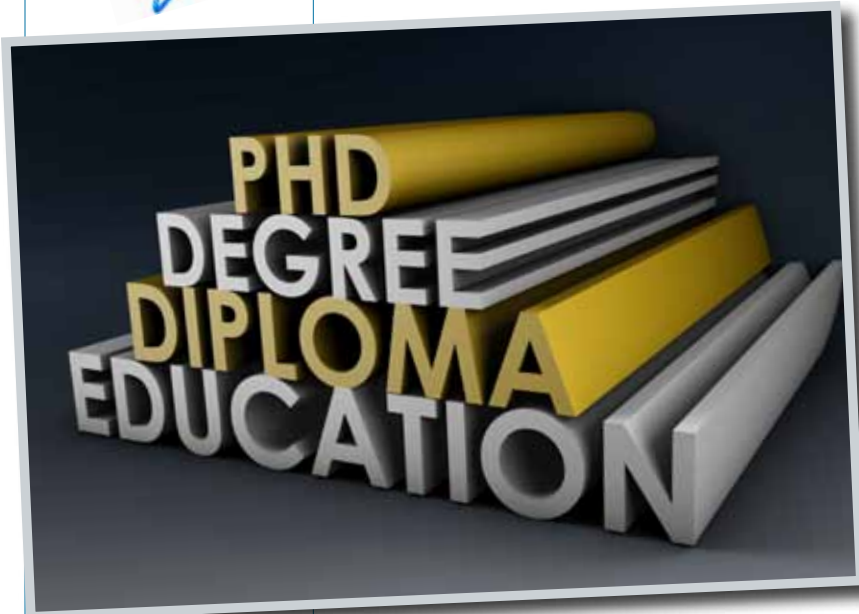
2. **A dissertation is a dissertation is a dissertation.** A dissertation is not a publishable book. But . . . it still matters. Our approach does not mean that the dissertation is a utilitarian, minimalist document; on the contrary, we believe it has significant intellectual, personal, economic, and cultural value. Dissertations do important work: as a text written by a beginning scholar, dissertations pose and respond to important research questions and demonstrate to a small committee that you are capable of the sustained, in-depth inquiry characteristic of your discipline and of the academy. In fact, we value the dissertation in these ways so much that we would claim that others who want it to be something else (such as a book, or a magnum opus, or a once-in-a-century contribution to knowledge) are actually *undervaluing* it by trying to make it something other than it is. Embrace the dissertation for what it is: a dissertation. Far from devaluing the dissertation, we love it. A dissertation is a dissertation is a dissertation, and we value and love it for being just what it is: a dissertation.

*The dissertation  
is just one part  
of the Ph.D.  
accomplishment  
and one part of who  
you are.*



3. **Dissertation ≠ Ph.D. ≠ who you are.** The dissertation is just *one part* of the Ph.D. accomplishment and *one part* of who you are. Because the dissertation is often viewed as the largest educational benchmark, it can become overly daunting and many people forget that it is just one part of a much longer and larger process of earning a doctorate and moving forward. In addition to the dissertation, the Ph.D. also often includes the following (specifics vary by discipline): significant coursework,

practica, research, clinical experience, teaching experience, qualifying exams, comprehensive exams (written and oral), and an oral defense. This does not even take into account all the other educational, personal, and professional experiences you bring with you prior to and concurrent with embarking on your Ph.D. The dissertation is but one component of this larger process. In fact, by the time you are writing the dissertation, you are *almost* a Ph.D. Even after you earn your Ph.D., you'll find that the dissertation will be but one part of your professional



pursuits. While you may describe your dissertation in job application materials, this is only one (if any!) part of what will land you a position. Resist the impulse to approach the dissertation as *the* single or most significant criteria for earning a Ph.D. or getting a job. Instead, recognize it as only *one part* of the larger process toward the Ph.D. Remember, too, that the Ph.D. itself is only one part of what is valuable about *you*. We would like to help you complete your dissertation while finding time to be the rest of you as well.

4. **Do as little as necessary!** In the immortal words of one of the greatest, most esteemed doctors of all time, “*Shorth is better than length.*” ~Dr. Seuss. Narrow your dissertation’s scope so it is achievable in a few years’ time. Make it no longer than needed for it to be approved. *Make it no longer than needed for it to be approved.* (We repeat concepts that are really important. Get used to it!) Length of time may vary according to discipline, but your dissertation should be a topic narrow enough and researchable enough to finish in the shortest amount of time possible (see Table 1.1).

**Table 1.1: Suggested Timelines for Dissertations\***

| If your dissertation . . .                                 | And . . .  | Then, you should finish in . . . |
|--|--|----------------------------------|
| does not require fieldwork or extensive data collection    | you can fully devote your time to the dissertation   | one year.                        |
| does not require fieldwork or extensive data collection    | you have other responsibilities (i.e., earning a living, raising a child, family responsibilities, etc.) | up to three years.               |
| requires one or more years of fieldwork or data collection | you can fully devote your time to the dissertation   | two years.                       |
| requires one or more years of fieldwork or data collection | you have other responsibilities (i.e., earning a living, raising a child, family responsibilities, etc.) | three years.                     |

*\*Please note:* these guidelines are approximate and assume that the dissertator has completed all preliminary work, such as forming a committee, selecting a topic, and writing a prospectus, and will *follow our suggestions throughout this book.*

*Do not strive for an ideal dissertation.* You will never meet this ambition. Every document can be endlessly improved. Consider this very book, for example—there’s probably a lot we could do to improve it, right? (Don’t answer; that’s a rhetorical question.) Remember, the best dissertation is one that you finish in a relatively short time so you can move on to greater goals and/or be free to enjoy a life without the anxiety that goes with an unfinished dissertation.

5. **The dissertation is pass/fail.** You don’t need to strive for an A. Doing so expends precious time and effort, and often sabotages your progress. Believe us when we say: working toward an A has been one of the main reasons

## Big Life Lessons: Perspectives That Will Help Sustain You

You thought you were just learning how to write a dissertation by reading this book, but you are actually learning much more! Like all life endeavors, the dissertation process is a learning experience. Of course, your primary focus is likely to be getting your dissertation done. However, we would like to highlight the many ways that your approaches, efforts, struggles, and even your setbacks will help you grow in many other current and future domains of your life, providing you with big life lessons you can carry forward. Although the following big life lessons are connected and overlapping, we chose to feature each one discretely to further illustrate its importance.

*Dissertating offers you a chance to build important skills that will help you in other and future areas of your life.*



1. **Dissertating builds valuable life skills.** Dissertating offers you a chance to build important skills that will help you in other and future areas of your life. For example, you can learn how to build these valuable life skills:

- multi-tasking
- reshaping and rethinking projects as needed
- planning workable timelines
- managing your time efficiently
- sticking to a self-imposed schedule
- organizing large projects
- saying “no” when necessary so as to not overextend yourself and in order to avoid deflecting energy from your priorities
- accepting criticism gracefully (unfortunately, an often-needed skill in life)
- planning strategically by making deliberate choices

2. **Lemonade recipes: Learning to reframe challenges.** We are about to take all the fun out of feeling miserable and complaining. One of the most important skills the dissertation process can provide you is the opportunity to become adept at learning to reframe challenges or, as we put it, turning lemons into lemonade. Dissertating, no doubt, will probably present you with many opportunities to turn lemons into lemonade, so we offer you the following examples as a starting point.

- *Lemon:* The dissertation process is the last dreaded, time-consuming part of preparation for my career. I guess I have to suffer through it all and just survive somehow.

*Love-of-learning lemonade:* This is possibly/probably one of the last times in my life that I have the opportunity to devote such an abundance of my time

and energy to my love of learning. I am going to fully appreciate the path to my dissertation completion.

- *Lemon:* Dissertating is so frustrating. There are so many unforeseen challenges, hoops to jump through, and problems to overcome. I guess I have to suffer through it all and just survive somehow.

*Embrace-the-challenges lemonade:* Challenges are part of my dissertating and they will be part of every worthwhile future endeavor in my life. Learning to deal with and overcome these challenges, obstacles, and even some hardships will contribute to my growth as an intellectual, writer, and human being. Learning that I can overcome obstacles, do things that are challenging, and be self-motivating will make it possible for me to have access to significantly more opportunities in life, where there are—more often than not—both challenging and unlikeable aspects that I will need to accomplish in order to achieve my goal. Therefore, working through obstacles with my dissertation will equip me with the skills and confidence I need to achieve many future life goals.

- *Lemon:* Dissertating is so hard and this process is so long, I sometimes feel like I might quit. I probably won't, but I can't help feeling that way. I guess I have to suffer through it all and just survive somehow.

*Resiliency lemonade:* I am continually experiencing how resilient I am. I am not a quitter. I am resilient and have stick-to-it-iveness and can accomplish my goals.

- *Lemon:* Aack! So many things aren't going the way I planned. My advisor wants me to change so many things. I don't know where to begin. I guess I just have to suffer through it all and just survive somehow.

*Flexibility lemonade:* Almost every day I have the opportunity to exercise my flexibility skills by creating alternative ways to accomplish my goals.

- *Lemon:* My advisor and/or committee members are so annoying and difficult to work with. They are driving me crazy. I guess I just have to suffer through it all and just survive somehow.

*Difficult-people-are-everywhere lemonade:* Learning to work with my difficult advisor will help me in my future. There are always going to be difficult people that I will have to work with, or for. Learning what I can do to get along with them better and not let them interfere with my pursuit of what I want to be doing will be a great asset in my future.

3. **Thrive, don't just survive.** Above we have outlined the ways in which dissertating offers you the opportunity to build valuable life skills, including how to make

# CHAPTER 5

## Happily Ever After


Part 1: What *You* Can Do to Make Your Advisee-Advisor Relationship Work

Part 2: What *You* Can Do to Make Your Advisor's Feedback Helpful to You



### Chapter 5—Part 1: What *You* Can Do to Make Your Advisee-Advisor Relationship Work

You may be basking in the glow of having secured an advisor and committee members. But, at some point, all advisee-advisor relationships pass through (and, unfortunately, beyond) those wondrous early moments where you smile pleasantly (if a bit coyly) at one another, and exude refined, intelligent exuberance about the great possibilities lying before you. Sooner or later it will be time to roll up your sleeves and work on training yourself and your advisor about how to communicate effectively. Yes, you heard us: you are now entering the advisor training phase of the dissertation process. Proceed with care. And never ever repeat anywhere that you are training your advisor!



*happily  
ever after*



At the beginning of Chapter 4: Eenie, Meenie, Minie, Moe, we included an excerpt titled “How to be a terrible thesis advisor.” We have a parallel ditty for you about being an advisee:

## “How to Be a Terrible Thesis Advisee . . . ”

- Miss appointments.
- Reschedule appointments.
- Miss deadlines.
- Complain about your advisor to everyone in your department.
- Be late for appointments.
- Make silly excuses or blame others for why you haven’t done something.
- Argue with the advisor about his or her suggestions.
- Insist on doing things your own way.
- Avoid your advisor for an extended period of time, with no communication whatsoever.

Unfortunately (and fortunately), you do share the responsibility for maintaining a productive relationship with your advisor. The fortunate part of this is that, although you can’t necessarily change your advisor, you *can* change yourself and increase the chances that your advisor will change his or her mood, opinions, reactions, and responses to you.

## How to Be a Close to Ideal Advisee

- Listen closely and carefully.
- Incorporate *all* your advisor's suggestions, and for the *few* times you don’t, offer a well thought out and carefully worded explanation.
- Keep all your appointments.
- Be on time for appointments.
- Respond quickly when your advisor communicates with you.
- Help your advisor feel knowledgeable, helpful, and valued by you.
- Express appreciation to him or her on a regular basis.
- Do not argue with your advisor.
- Involve your advisor in the process of setting realistic interim deadlines.
- Meet all agreed-upon deadlines, big or small.
- Guide your advisor gently on what help you need from him or her.

*Unfortunately  
(and fortunately),  
you do share the  
responsibility  
for maintaining  
a productive  
relationship with  
your advisor.*



## Adopt Realistic Expectations about Your Advisor

Your advisor is:

- not at your beck and call
- not your personal BFF
- not there to hear you drone on about your many personal life struggles
- not really your coach on how to stay focused
- not perfect

## Taking Ownership for Optimizing Your Advisee-Advisor Relationship

*Keep in mind that your advisor is just a person who has gone through the dissertation experience also. They too likely struggled to write and complete a dissertation. Now, this person is where you will be in a few more years.*



Some (perhaps many?) among you may feel relatively powerless in the advisee-advisor relationship. This is understandable to a certain degree because you do not yet have the same educational credentials or institutional and professional authority. However, you actually do still have quite a bit of power in this relationship. *Take your advisor off of that pedestal!* Keep in mind that your advisor is just a person who has gone through the dissertation experience also. They too likely struggled to write and complete a dissertation. Now, this person is where you will be in a few more years (if you choose to go into academia). The following are several strategies, each explained in more detail below, that will help you take ownership of this relationship and help optimize it.

## Steps for Taking Ownership of Your Advisee-Advisor Relationship

- ⇒ Step 1: Request and arrange a “kickoff meeting” as soon as possible.
- ⇒ Step 2: Become familiar with your advisor’s scholarship.
- ⇒ Step 3: Establish and cultivate a cordial relationship.
- ⇒ Step 4: Identify what your advisor hopes to gain from advising you.
- ⇒ Step 5: Give your advisor what he or she wants.
- ⇒ Step 6: Tell your advisor what you would like from him or her.
- ⇒ Step 7: Offer positive feedback to your advisor throughout the dissertation process by sharing when he or she has been helpful to you.
- ⇒ Step 8: Reinforce positive behavior.



**Table 5.1: How to Ask Good Questions in Order to Get Constructive Feedback**

| Instead of asking . . .          | Ask . . .  |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Do you like my argument?         | Does my argument make a new contribution to the field? If it can be improved, what are your suggestions?   |
| Does it flow well?               | Is the section on [insert section name] organized clearly? What might help it flow better?   |
| Is the research good?            | Are there any additional scholars you think I should consider including? Does the experiment design have any flaws?  |
| Is it clear?                     | I was having difficulty with writing the material on page [insert page number]. What do you take to be my main point? What do you think would make it clearer? |
| Do you think it is well written? | What I wrote about on page [insert page number] seemed a little awkward to me. Any suggestions?  |

6. **Provide advisor with deadlines for his or her feedback.** Give your advisor deadlines. (For suggestions about how to phrase this, see Template 5.2: Cover Letter for Draft Submission, p. 119.) You and your advisor are in some ways in the same situation regarding dissertation deadlines. You are learning to work within more open-ended deadlines and apply structure to them. Similarly, your advisor is also learning to work within more flexible, open-ended deadlines for responding to you. As stated earlier, during a semester class, faculty know they have to respond to student writing by a certain date because the students' next projects are due, or grades are due to the registrar's office. With dissertations, advisors have no deadlines for feedback. Help your advisor learn how to work within this freedom by politely offering some reasonable, effective structure. We are not suggesting that you mandate a deadline along the lines of: You must give me feedback on this section draft by May 15! This would be rude and ineffective. Instead, think of it as a collaborative deadline. When you are getting ready to submit a chapter draft for review, ask your advisor beforehand what his or her schedule looks like and when they anticipate having the most available time. Submit your section/ chapter when he or she indicates having a window of relatively slow time, and then let him or her know when you anticipate having time available to revise your work. Ask your advisor, "When can I anticipate you providing me with your feedback so I can plan my time accordingly?" This will hopefully *create accountability on the advisor's part—you are probably not the only person who may have difficulty accomplishing tasks without specific deadlines.*
7. **Reinforce productive feedback and redirect unproductive feedback.** Coach your advisor on how to give feedback tailored to your personality. Let your advi-

or know what kinds of feedback have been most helpful for you in the past. If you easily get demoralized, tell him/her that while you appreciate constructive criticism, it also would help if he or she can identify what is working well so you can do more of that. If your advisor gives you confusing, ambiguous, contradictory, or demoralizing feedback, respond by inviting him or her for coffee so you can have a chance to ask questions about the feedback. If your advisor returns a chapter and says you've missed some important scholarship in the literature review, ask him or her for advice about the additional directions you should start looking into. If your advisor is harsh in tone, identify a moment that was positive or less harsh, and communicate how helpful that aspect of the feedback was for you. Help the person learn how to communicate with you.

8. **Revise advisor feedback to better match what you would want.** Sometimes, no matter what you do, your advisor will give you feedback that is less (maybe waaaaay less) than ideal. In these cases, rather than waiting (fruitlessly) for your advisor to learn better communication skills, totally discounting what he or she says, or visiting the nearest opium den, *we strongly suggest that you revise your advisor feedback to sound the way you wish it had been spoken or written.* Table 5.2 offers some examples.

**Table 5.2: Revising Harsh Advisor Feedback**

| Advisor Version—<br>What S/he Actually Wrote or Said | Revised New and Improved Version— What <i>You</i><br>Let Yourself Read or Hear Him/Her Saying  |
|--|--|
| "I expected more of you."                            | "You are a very bright person, and a good researcher and writer. Right now, there are parts of your dissertation that do not match up to your capabilities."                                       |
| "This is a ridiculous claim."                        | "This particular point of view doesn't have enough written so far to support it."  |
| "You've done a shoddy job with experiment design."   | "The experiment design could be improved by doing the following: . . . "   |
| "Your methodology is completely flawed."             | "The methodology might be revised in order to be more valid. Try the following: . . . "  |
| "You are too wordy and repetitive."                  | "Please revise to make it more concise so readers can see your points more clearly. Some portions are repeated, so look for these repetitions and choose only your favorite and clearest version." |
| "This is not acceptable dissertation material."      | "Parts of your dissertation so far are very good and are what the committee and I will be looking for. Other parts need more revision to meet the requirements for it to be accepted."             |
| "You have a massive problem with this section."      | "This section could be strengthened by changing . . . and adding . . . and deleting . . . and reconsidering . . . "  |

a job, have a baby, fall in love, etc., you will no longer have large chunks of time in which to research and write; instead, you'll need to find time to fit dissertation work in on a daily basis.

## Develop a Weekly Schedule for Dissertating

As stated above, smaller bits of time do typically yield more meaningful and sustainable writing practices. However, we also want to recognize that some of you may have the luxury and tolerance to work for more extended periods of time on the dissertation. For you, we recommend that you work no more than six hours in any given day, and that you take a break every two hours of work time.

Whatever your schedule, it's important to identify and commit to when each week you will be dissertating. Some dissertators choose the morning when everything is quiet, some find that their best time is in the evening. If you cannot find an ongoing time for every week, then spend time each Sunday evening setting a realistic schedule for that particular week. If even that seems challenging, then spend time each morning at breakfast deciding what times you will dissertate. Put it in your calendar and do not budge. Imagine you have a meeting scheduled to receive a million dollars, but you have to be there at a certain time or you won't receive it. One would not be inclined to reschedule this meeting, right? Or, imagine that your success depends on you keeping to this schedule . . . hey, wait a minute . . . it actually does!

Table 7.2 on page 156 offers sample schedules for several dissertation writers. There are two people on a one-year plan, two on a two-year plan, and two on a three-year plan. Notice that each of these people has identified small chunks of time to work on their dissertations. They have identified these small chunks by balancing their own times of greatest energy<sup>13</sup> with the realities and other demands of their lives. Please take into consideration the following suggested time ranges, which are dependent on where you are in the process:

- if you want to finish in one year, you will probably need to average 30 hours per week
- if you want to finish in two years, you will probably need to average 20 hours per week
- if you want to finish in three years, you will probably need to average 10 hours per week

---

<sup>13</sup> The concept of reserving your peak energy hours for scholarship is drawn from Donald Hall's *The Academic Self-Help Book*.

NOTE: Table 7.2 has examples of actual work times; each dissertator should add additional time for getting situated into the work, transportation to get to your work-space, etc.

**Table 7.2: Sample Writing and Research Schedules**

| Name   | Total Time per Week                 | Weekly Writing and Research Schedule  | Justification/Explanation  |
|--------|-------------------------------------|---|--|
| Sandra | 30 hours per week (one-year plan)   | MWF, 4:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.;<br>8:00 p.m. – 11:00 p.m.<br><br>Saturday, 11:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.;<br>3:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.<br><br>Sunday, 11:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.;<br>3:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m. | Sandra enjoys spending the daytime mulling over the possibilities of what she will research and write that evening. She teaches late afternoon classes on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and so devotes those days preparing for her teaching responsibilities. She likes to socialize on Saturday evenings.  |
| Chen   | 30 hours per week (one-year plan)   | M,T,W,Th,F, 10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.;<br>2:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.  | Chen is fortunate enough to be able to devote most of his time to his dissertation. His part-time job only takes ten hours per week on weekends.   |
| Ben    | 20 hours per week (two-year plan)   | M,T,W,F, 7:00 p.m. – 11:00 p.m.<br><br>Sat, 10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.  | Ben works from 8:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m. He likes to do his dissertating on these four evenings, right after he goes to the gym. On weekends, he likes to have Saturday night and all day Sunday for free time.  |
| Alicia | 20 hours per week (two-year plan)   | M, T, Th, Sat, Sun, 12:00 a.m. – 4:00 a.m.  | Alicia works the evening shift at a restaurant that closes at 10:00 p.m. She is also a night person and has most energy late at night. She finds it quietest at this time as well. On Friday night she socializes and chooses not to dissertate. She can sleep till noon every day and still have free time till her work shift starts at 6:00 p.m.  |
| Niya   | 10 hours per week (three-year plan) | MTWTF, 5:30 a.m. – 6:30 a.m.<br><br>Sat, 1:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.<br><br>Sunday, 1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.   | Niya has three children and a full-time job. She has one hour a day before her kids get up and then her long day begins. On Saturdays and Sundays, she devotes larger chunks of time to dissertating while her husband, mother, or a babysitter takes care of the children.  |
| Keith  | 10 hours per week (three-year plan) | MTWTF, 4:30 a.m. – 6:30 a.m.  | Keith has a full-time job from 8:00 a.m. - 5:30 p.m. If he works on his dissertation in the evening after he gets home, he is too tired and/or feels guilty the entire day for not having yet worked on the dissertation. So, he decided to go to bed earlier (9:00 p.m.) each night, so he could wake up very early to work for two hours on his dissertation each morning. His evenings and weekends are devoted to spending time with his family. |

## Steps for Developing Your Doable Weekly Schedule for Dissertating



No dissertator can sustain an unreasonable weekly schedule for dissertating. Here we take you through the process of creating a *doable* weekly schedule for dissertating comprised of small chunks of time. Some of you might be able to establish an ongoing weekly schedule while others might need to set a new schedule each week or change the schedule several times a year depending on the degree of variation in your life. Here are the eight steps:

- ⇒ Step 1: Identify how many hours per week you need to dedicate to your dissertation
- ⇒ Step 2: Determine preferred times to dissertate
- ⇒ Step 3: Reality check: time devoted to other necessities and life commitments
- ⇒ Step 4: Merge preferred times with other life commitments
- ⇒ Step 5: Rearrange your schedule to better accommodate your preferred dissertation working times
- ⇒ Step 6: Create more time by outsourcing several non-dissertation life commitments
- ⇒ Step 7: Create more time by reducing other commitments
- ⇒ Step 8: Finalize your weekly dissertating schedule and commit to it

### Step 1: Identify how many hours per week you need to dedicate to your dissertation

As we have already stated, these are the suggested time ranges for completing the dissertation in the timeframe you have chosen.

- If you want to finish in one year, you will probably need to average 30 hours per week.
- If you want to finish in two years, you will probably need to average 20 hours per week.
- If you want to finish in three years, you will probably need to average 10 hours per week.



# CHAPTER 8

## Stuck in the Muck: Prevent and/or Combat Unprogress



Figure 8.1: Thesis Writing



It's true. Sometimes we get stuck. And stuckness is no laughing matter. In order to get unstuck, you must acknowledge that you are stuck, understand why, and develop strategies to forge ahead. Don't worry. We will help you do this. Even those of you



not stuck will most likely find our suggestions helpful as preventative measures so you won't get stuck later.

## What Dissertation Unprogress Looks Like

Unprogress can mean intending to, or setting out to, work on the dissertation but instead . . .

- doing something productive, just not on the dissertation (i.e., deciding the closet must be cleaned out TODAY, even if it's been two years and you've been living life just fine).
- distracting yourself any way you can (i.e., deciding to call a friend instead or getting sidetracked by old episodes of your favorite TV show, or by some digital game, or social media, or . . .).
- being an armchair dissertator (i.e., thinking and talking about it, but not actually working on it).
- overworking one aspect of the dissertation (i.e., choosing to read three more books about your topic just to make certain that you have read everything you could possibly read before you start working).
- making excuses, delaying, or putting it off (i.e., writing for only three minutes before standing up and deciding that you're not in the mood and you'll work on it later).

Our first recommendation is to revisit and re-read several crucial sections of our book:

- Chapter 1: It's **JUST** a Dissertation
- Chapter 6: Magic 101
- Chapter 7: Think Small

If re-reading those sections isn't enough help, however, it's time to put on your superhero or superheroine cape because we are about to help you perform incredible feats! Armed with this chapter, you will be able to understand and combat the many complex causes of stuckness.



## Woe is Me! Common Reasons Dissertators Get Stuck

Writing a dissertation is hard. It's hard for all people, harder for some than others, and harder for some at certain times.



**Doris's Story: I Haven't Worked on the Dissertation in Two Years.** Doris had gotten halfway through her dissertation, and then stopped working on it because she got tired and bored with it. Actually that's not quite true. She would try to work on it and nothing would get written. She had not opened her dissertation file for two years, and had a sense of dread and paralysis about the prospect. She led a full, happy life, but she knew she needed to get the dissertation done because it still hung over her. She really needed our book. And, after reading it, she decided to create a weekly schedule, along with a strategic working plan, in order to make progress. She also decided to reduce her original plans for the scope of the dissertation to forge a more manageable dissertation project.

There are many reasons why people get stuck on dissertations. In this chapter we help you understand and overcome the following common kinds of dissertation obstacles:

- **Lack of motivation.** How can I motivate myself to do things that are hard and/or unpleasant?
- **Procrastination.** How can I overcome procrastination or make my procrastination skills work for me?
- **Alignment.** How can I align my immediate behaviors with my longer-term values and goals?
- **Fear.** How can I let go of my fears, or at least move forward in spite of them?
- **Avoidance.** How can I avoid avoidance?
- **Motion without movement.** How can I make sure all my dissertation motion yields progress?
- **Drowning in research/data collection.** When is enough research/data collection enough?
- **Lack of confidence as a writer.** How can I learn to believe in my writing abilities?
- **Writer's block.** How can I conquer writer's block?
- **Perfectionism.** How can I allow myself to do **JUST GOOD ENOUGH?**

We hope knowing that these common struggles are shared by so many others will help you feel not so alone in your struggles.

*Two Important Notes:*

- **We encourage you to read all sections.** Many of these common obstacles overlap. For example, people may procrastinate because they have a lack of confi-

dence or are perfectionists. Or they might be perfectionists because they have a lack of confidence. We decided to categorize these obstacles in ways that might have the most resonance with different readers. However, if you are currently experiencing stuckness on your dissertation (or in order to avoid stuckness later), we strongly encourage you to read *all* the sections because you will find helpful ideas in several of the categories.

- **We encourage you to meet with your advisor.** Read the section at the very end of this chapter which addresses why people may be disinclined to meet with their advisors and why they should instead view them as resources to help get unstuck. You probably, however, should try our suggested strategies first and then you may not need to involve your advisor.

## Lack of Motivation: How can I motivate myself to do things that are hard and/or unpleasant?

Aah, motivation can be elusive and infuriating. Motivation comes in many shapes and sizes, and shifts across time and people. Not only is motivation different for each person, but what motivates you under one set of circumstances, or at one point in your life, can shift unexpectedly and frequently. In this section, we will describe several different types of motivation and help you understand and use them in order to make more progress on your dissertation.

*If you are currently experiencing stuckness on your dissertation (or in order to avoid stuckness later), we strongly encourage you to read **all** the sections because you will find helpful ideas in several of the categories.*



## MOTIVATION



SOMETIMES THERE'S NOT ANY.

## Procrastination: How can I overcome procrastination or make my procrastination skills work for me?

Many people procrastinate. They do so for a variety of reasons, all of which are perfectly normal human responses. The following are some of the common reasons why people procrastinate:

- Fears
- Anxiety
- Perfectionism
- Avoiding tasks they don't like
- Avoiding things they don't know how to do (yet)
- Avoiding things that are hard for them
- Avoiding tasks they worry they may not be “good enough” at
- Letting only externally imposed deadlines regulate their start and finish triggers
- Not feeling confident about their abilities to make the choices and decisions that need to be made
- Choosing immediate gratification over longer-term goals and best interests (i.e., not being aligned)
- Difficulty making themselves do things they don't like to do but need to do
- Other (there are probably many, many other reasons)

Regardless of the many *reasons* for procrastinating, however, we have found that there are essentially two *types* of procrastinators:

- Specific, task-related procrastinators: You are in a pickle.
- Long-standing, habitual procrastinators: You are in a PICKLE.

Not to worry, we have your back. We have help to offer so you can get out of any size pickle. We even have dynamite to blast through GIANT PICKLES.

### *Specific, Task-Related Procrastinators*

If you are not generally a procrastinator (or at least if you feel like procrastination is not an ongoing issue for you in life), it may be that you are procrastinating on a particular part of the dissertation. If this is the case, we suggest that you identify which task(s) you are procrastinating over. This exercise will help you do so.



## EXERCISE 8.3

### Identify which Parts of the Dissertation are Difficult

Contrary to what you may believe, it's unlikely that the entire dissertation is giving you difficulty. More than likely, it is a conglomeration of certain parts or processes that is causing you challenges. Complete the following exercise in order to help you identify which tasks are causing you to procrastinate:

1. What specific components of the dissertation are you procrastinating over? (Note: We purposely did not include "The entire thing" because we want you to identify more precisely which parts are giving you difficulty.) Check all that apply.

- ☐ Research
- ☐ Reading
- ☐ Writing
- ☐ The Introduction
- ☐ The Conclusion
- ☐ Chapter/Section \_\_\_\_\_ [fill in the blank]
- ☐ Formatting
- ☐ Works Cited/Bibliography
- ☐ Data Analysis
- ☐ Methodology
- ☐ Revision
- ☐ IRB Approval
- ☐ Securing Funding
- ☐ Submitting a Draft to Your Advisor
- ☐ Incorporating Advisor Feedback
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Why do you think you are procrastinating on the above components? We will start you off by including the most obvious answers:

*It is too hard. I don't know how to do it. I'm not sure I can do it.*

So now it's your turn . . . continue writing for five minutes about why you are procrastinating on the above components.

I am procrastinating on the above components because:

Now that you have identified specifically what dissertation components you are procrastinating over and the probable reasons why, we offer the following suggestions for moving forward and busting through your procrastination:

- **Create a way around the sticking points.** See if there is some way to not have to do that which you do not want to do:
  - o Brainstorm alternatives
  - o Make progress even without that piece
  - o Ask another person for his or her approach
  - o Try imagining it was absolutely impossible for this sticking point to ever get resolved. What would that mean for your project? Can you do without it? How could you complete the dissertation using another route?
- **Play to your strengths.** As much as possible, design your dissertation so that it caters to your strengths. Where there are aspects that are especially difficult for you, try to minimize their place in the dissertation. This doesn't mean you shouldn't challenge yourself, it just means with a large project, you will undoubtedly be challenged and you can make those challenges more manageable by limiting how many challenges you face. As much as possible, try to limit the time you devote to those aspects of your thinking, research, and writing that are hardest for you. Think deliberately about redesigning your time and your dissertation project to cater to your strengths. If you must incorporate some tasks that draw on what you perceive to be your weaknesses, then schedule those a little at a time so you are not overwhelmed with these unpleasant tasks.
- **Outsource when possible.** We are committed to academic honesty. And, you *must* check with your advisor before you ask anyone to do anything with or instead of you on your dissertation. But, for example, if making tables and graphs is slowing you down, find someone who can do that part for you (either pay them or offer an exchange of service).

### Try this: Bite-Size Pieces with a Twist

Create digital task lists or index cards with bite-size pieces of dissertation work. As you flip or scroll through these items to choose your next task, you must initial each one each time you decide not to do it. Once you have initialed an item three times, you cannot skip it any more.



- **Face difficulties head-on for five minutes.** Select your least favorite part of the dissertation and just force yourself to work on it for five minutes. Only five minutes. It's entirely possible that you will find, after the five minutes are up, that it's not nearly as excruciating as you were making it out to be. Or maybe it is. But either way you will have moved five minutes further along than before. What we hope you will realize is that even a paltry five minutes can get you making forward progress on even the most difficult or unpleasant dissertation tasks. Often getting started is the most challenging part. The hope is that after those five minutes you will feel more able to continue working.
- **Develop bite-size pieces.** Apply the same principle as we discussed in Chapter 7: Think *Small* to the task. Sometimes we procrastinate on a task because it seems enormous. We feel overwhelmed by the amount of work involved. Nearly every task can be broken down into smaller component parts. The following exercise will help you create bite-size pieces of unpleasant tasks in order to make them doable.

## EXERCISE 8.4

### Create Bite-Size Pieces of Unpleasant Tasks

1. Identify a task you are procrastinating over.
2. On a separate page, list the bite-size pieces (component parts) of that task.
3. For *each* of the above bite-size pieces (component parts), answer the following questions on a separate page:
  - a. What preparation do you need?
  - b. What is easy about this bite-size piece?
  - c. What is challenging about this bite-size piece?
  - d. How will you complete this bite-size piece?
  - e. When will you complete this bite-size piece?
  - f. What are my carrots and sticks for completing or not completing this bite-size piece?
4. Now go and earn yourself that carrot!

# INDEX

## A

abstract 46, 115, 132, 167  
 academic honesty 15, 197  
 advice 7–9  
 advisee–advisor relationship 80–81, 81, 92, 93, 100, 101, 102, 113, 129, 226  
 common mistakes 110–112  
 developing 105–107  
 feedback 102, 112, 113, 114, 116, 117, 118, 119, 120, 121, 122, 123, 124, 125, 126, 127, 128, 196  
 bad 112–113  
 constructive 116–117  
 harsh feedback 117–119  
 optimizing 113–115  
 resolving problems 121–128  
 templates for process 119–120  
 optimizing 104  
 advisors 10, 11, 22, 75, 78, 83, 100, 107, 108, 111, 112, 216, 224, 226  
 approaching 92–94  
 changing 224–226  
 choosing 38, 39–48, 77–79, 84–86  
 impasses, and 222–224  
 APA format 16, 137, 238, 261  
 appointments 103, 129, 167, 183, 217  
 areas of inquiry 46, 48, 50  
 avoidance 24, 32, 35, 186, 192, 193, 208, 209, 210

## B

backing up data 15–16  
 balance 33, 228, 229  
 bias 6  
 brainstorming 59, 60, 259

## C

challenges 18, 19, 27, 30, 31, 33, 34, 35, 36, 196, 197, 201, 218, 219, 220, 221,

222, 224, 226, 228, 230, 231, 232, 233, 235, 236, 237, 258

changing careers 233–234  
 child care 15, 163  
 claim 8, 117, 125, 213  
 clarity 30, 56, 58, 60, 63, 65  
 committee, dissertation 77, 95, 98  
 assembling 94–97  
 choosing members outside of your discipline 97  
 contacting all the potential committee 98–99  
 confidence, lack of 213  
 conflict 52, 97, 98, 113, 118, 137, 223, 229  
 context 10, 14, 94, 110, 243  
 correctness 15, 221  
 credibility 234  
 criticism 18, 117

## D

data collection 142, 143, 211  
 deadlines 13, 22, 116, 133, 138, 144, 145  
 defense, of dissertation 16, 78, 135, 138, 140, 142, 143, 147, 240, 243, 244  
 preparing for 240  
 depth 8, 40, 41, 53, 154  
 difficulties of a dissertation, identifying 196

## E

efficacy 52  
 English, as a second language 220  
 essential tactics 22  
 exercise, daily 17  
 expenses 66

## F

fears 186, 205, 206, 207, 208, 241, 244  
 focused, staying 177  
 form 9, 14, 15, 16, 17, 22, 26, 34, 39, 43,



44, 45, 59, 70, 73, 75, 76, 77, 85, 86,  
87, 89, 92, 94, 96, 100, 105, 106, 107,  
130, 131, 132, 133, 135, 138, 140,  
141, 142, 143, 145, 147, 149, 150,  
151, 153, 167, 181, 182, 185, 188,  
194, 210, 215, 221, 224, 225, 226,  
238, 239, 240, 241, 242, 243, 244, 261  
formatting 16, 22, 28, 135, 196, 238, 239,  
244  
freetalking 53, 57, 58  
full-time job, and dissertating 233

## G

“getting stuck” 185–187  
goals 202, 203, 204

## I

illness 235  
“It’s **JUST** a Dissertation” 42, 68, 73, 151,  
153, 180, 183

## J

job prospects 50  
job search, and dissertating 230

## L

life cycle, of dissertation. *See* process, of  
dissertation  
life goals 14, 19, 201, 202  
long-distance dissertating 221  
looping 63

## M

mapping 61  
MLA format 16, 137, 238  
model 45, 70, 107, 147, 168, 175  
“Motion without Movement” 13  
motivation 189–191  
    carrots and sticks 192–194  
    lack of 187  
    three types of 188  
movement 186, 210  
multi-tasking 18  
myth 17

## O

outsourcing 14, 15, 163  
overly ambitious goals 133

## P

perfectionism 186, 195, 215, 216  
plagiarism 119, 215  
planning  
    backwards 135–143  
planning a timeline. *See* timeline, of a  
dissertation  
pregnancy, and dissertating 228–230  
process, of dissertation 25–28, 28, 29  
procrastinating 45, 195, 196, 197, 198, 199,  
200, 201, 210  
proposal. *See* prospectus  
prospectus 130, 131, 136, 139, 140, 142,  
143, 167, 169  
    as marketing brochure 131  
    as roadmap 131  
    components of 131–133  
publishable dissertation 41

## Q

quickwriting 53, 54, 55, 56

## R

reasons for pursuing a Ph.D. 30, 32–34  
requirements, dissertation 44–45  
researching 12, 26, 48, 68, 87, 182, 210, 211,  
212, 220  
research methodology 69, 70, 71  
    doable 71  
research questions 8, 52, 65, 66, 67, 69, 70,  
71, 133, 139  
    doability, and 67

## S

sample dissertations 45  
sample writing and research schedules 156  
schedule, dissertating 152, 154, 162  
    developing 155, 157  
self-awareness 20  
self-confidence 207  
service requirements 11  
small goals 175  
small successes 153, 175, 192  
sticking points 197  
strengths and weaknesses 30–32  
submitting a dissertation 243  
summary 57, 115, 212

## T

tactics for success 10–17  
tenure-stream job 218, 219, 231, 232  
timeline, of a dissertation 133, 134–151  
    plan backwards 144  
    troubleshooting 148  
timelines for finishing 9  
time management 182  
topic. of dissertation 26, 37, 38, 42, 43, 44,  
    51, 52, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 61, 63,  
    64, 69, 72, 73, 78, 83, 88, 130, 135,  
    152, 177, 183  
    brainstorming, and selection 59  
    career prospects, and 50–51  
    choosing 43–48  
    doable 43  
    freetalking, and selection 57  
    guiding principles for choosing 42–43  
    identifying 46–47

    mapping, and selection 61–63  
    narrowing 40, 53  
    overly ambitious 43  
    quickwriting, and selecting 55  
transition ritual 179  
trauma 219, 235, 236

## U

unpleasant tasks 198  
unprogress 184, 185, 203, 205

## V

viability of a dissertation 226–228

## W

workspace, choosing 178  
writer's block 32, 35, 186, 214, 215  
writing and motivation 180



## IS THIS THE BOOK FOR YOU?

Whether the Ph.D. is just a glint in your eye, or you are ABD (All But Dissertation), or you are somewhere in between, this book is designed to help you achieve your goal.

Academic culture too often creates unrealistic, detrimental perceptions about what it takes to produce a dissertation. With a hearty dose of irreverence and a unique fusion of writing and therapeutic strategies, we promote a more realistic, doable approach. We offer the perspectives and step-by-step practical suggestions that will enable you to complete your dissertation sooner, rather than later, and with minimal stress. You may even enjoy the process! (Okay, maybe that's a stretch for some, but you can at least not hate it!)

So (in our modest, but truthful, opinion), this is the must-have book for you if you are:

- Considering applying for a Ph.D. program but wondering if you are capable of writing a dissertation. (You ARE capable—or you will be after you read our book).
- Beginning your Ph.D. program and want to learn how to strategically use your coursework to start preparing for your dissertation.
- Selecting your topic and advisors and would like to know the criteria for choosing so as to make the dissertation process easier (not harder) on yourself.
- Starting, or into, dissertating and would like a workable plan to get that coveted Ph.D. in one-to-three years.
- Getting discouraged by your advisor's negative, insufficient, slow or unclear feedback and want to be able to transform this into something helpful rather than hurtful. (Really—we CAN help you do this.)
- Feeling stuck, frustrated, or (worse yet) like abandoning the dissertation and need assistance getting unstuck and re-motivated.
- Panicking as your Ph.D. eligibility deadline looms near and you need a strategy and a big push to make progress right now. You CAN do this (aided by our advice and assistance)...after all "It's Just A Dissertation!"

P.S. If you are a family member, friend, or advisor of a current or potential dissertator, consider giving this book as a gift to that dissertator in your life.

