

Improving Information-Seeking Behaviors and Knowledge Bases for  
Thesis Students in the Applied Behavior Analysis Graduate Program and  
Students in the Rehabilitation and Mental Health Counseling Graduate Program

## **Video 12: Steps to Completing a Thesis**

This is a no-nonsense review of the steps required to complete a thesis.

1. Chose a topic. Do that by the end of spring semester.
  - a. How do you choose a topic?
    - i. Read research articles. And how many? As many as it takes to get a grasp of the topic.
    - ii. Think about what you are interested in.
    - iii. Think about what sites are available to you.
    - iv. Talk to faculty members about your interests and potential topics.
2. Choose an advisor. Do that by the end of spring semester.
  - a. How do you choose an advisor?
    - i. Talk to faculty to determine their interests.
    - ii. Consider who matches your interests.
    - iii. Consider whether you would like to work with the person.
3. Complete an area paper. Start this at the beginning of the summer. Finish by the end of summer term.
  - a. The purposes of an area paper are to review literature related to your thesis topic and to become knowledgeable about the literature; learn to conduct a literature review; learn to write in a coherent and organized fashion; and learn to write in APA format.

- b. Meet regularly, probably weekly, with your advisor as you work on the area paper. Continue to meet regularly with your advisor as you write the proposal, conduct the thesis research, and write the thesis manuscript.
  - c. Have weekly goals for work you will accomplish on the area paper.
  - d. Work on the area paper should be done in a stepwise fashion to help break down the requirement into manageable units of work each week. For example, a student might commit to work X number of hours for the week or might commit to a specific product for the week. This would be perhaps accumulating 20 references; reading and summarizing six research articles; or writing the outline of the paper.
  - e. Turn in drafts of the paper (or parts of the paper) to your advisor for editing and note – that may take 5 or 6 drafts.
  - f. Incorporate your advisor's editing and turn in a final copy of the area paper to your advisor.
4. Put together a thesis committee. Do that in your fall semester.
- a. The committee has to have a minimum of 3 doctoral level faculty members with expertise in your area.
  - b. Ask faculty members to become committee members after you have decided on the study with your advisor.
5. Write the proposal. Do that in your fall semester.
- a. The proposed research must be developed after consideration of the research site and potential participants.
  - b. You have to have a site with acceptable participants secured before writing your proposal.
  - c. The proposal consists of an introduction section, a method section written in future tense, and a results section with a description of expected results and a graph(s) with hypothetical data.
    - i. The introduction orients the reader to the purpose in your paper, briefly reviews relevant literature, and justifies the importance of the study. It ends with your purpose statement(s) otherwise known as your research question(s).
    - ii. The method section details exactly how you will conduct the study. Consider writing this section in such a way that a person skilled in your area but not knowledgeable of the subject matter could understand. Be explicit section by section.

- iii. The results section describes the expected data and the graph shows how you will display the data.
  - d. Understand that you will provide your advisor with a first draft of the thesis proposal manuscript (or sections of the manuscript) after you have given your very best effort towards investigating the topic and writing the manuscript. You should edit your own work a number of times before giving a draft to your advisor. It is your advisor's responsibility to ensure that your proposal is cogent, well laid out, and written in APA format so your advisor will edit your draft and ask for changes. This process will continue a number of times until the proposal is acceptable.
  - e. The proposed research must meet two important criteria.
    - i. It must address a worthwhile research question. The study adds to the literature by answering a research question that has not been answered in any previous studies and
    - ii. It must be doable. It can be completed in 2 to 3 months.
6. Defend the proposal. Do that in your fall semester.
- a. Schedule a meeting with your committee once the final draft of the proposal is accepted by your advisor.
    - i. Schedule a room for the proposal defense at least 1 week in advance of the proposal and
    - ii. Send out an announcement for the thesis proposal defense to the University community
  - b. Give your proposal to the committee at least a week in advance of the proposal meeting -- a full 7 days please.
  - c. The proposal should be your best work, free of errors and in APA format.
  - d. At the proposal defense, engage your committee in a PowerPoint presentation explaining the study and be ready to field questions by the committee.
  - e. It is common for your committee members to suggest changes to your document at the proposal defense meeting.
    - i. Some may be rather minor such as grammatical changes, or asking for a detail while others may require you to revisit the literature and re-write portions of your paper.
    - ii. Take these suggestions seriously, make the changes and let your committee members know that the changes were made and how you made the changes.

- iii. Bring the proposal defense form to the meeting, typed out and ready for committee members' signatures.
7. Complete and submit IRB materials. Do that also in your fall semester.
  - a. You have to have committee approval for the thesis before you can submit IRB materials.
  - b. Work on the IRB application as you are preparing your proposal so you are ready to submit the materials as soon as you defend your thesis.
  - c. The IRB meets once a month so time your committee meeting to get your IRB materials in before the deadline for the next meeting.
  - d. You will need signatures from your advisor, a scientific reviewer, and the chair of the department. The Chair's signature may be difficult to get at the last minute so you should have your proposal and IRB completed well in advance of the IRB deadlines (at least 3 business days). For specifics on IRB check out: <http://www.research.usf.edu/cs/irb.htm>
8. Apply for graduation, in the spring semester.
  - a. Check with Graduate School on deadlines. The deadline typically is near the beginning of the semester in which you want to graduate.
  - b. There are several steps in the process so keep in mind multiple deadlines.
  - c. The Graduate School website is <http://www.grad.usf.edu/newsite/current/asp>.
9. Conduct the thesis study, that is, in the fall and spring semester.
  - a. Recruit and train research assistants. If possible recruit and train RAs while awaiting IRB approval in order to avoid delays in getting started with the study.
  - b. Following IRB approval, recruit participants and get signed consent forms.
  - c. Pilot the assessment and intervention procedures.
10. Do the format check with the Grad School.
  - a. Check with the Graduate School for the required format and the deadlines for format checks at <http://www.grad.usf.edu/newsite/current/asp>.
11. Write the final thesis manuscript.
  - a. The thesis manuscript must be your best work. It must be error free, clear, and well organized.
  - b. It must be written according to Graduate School formatting requirements. And note: this is somewhat different from APA.

- c. You should provide your advisor with a first draft of the thesis manuscript or sections of the manuscript after you have put your very best effort into writing the manuscript. You should edit your own work a number of times before giving a draft to your advisor. Again, it is your advisor's responsibility to ensure that your proposal is cogent, well laid out, and written in Graduate School format so your advisor will edit your draft and ask for changes. This process will continue a number of times until the thesis manuscript is acceptable.

12. Defend your thesis before your committee.

- a. Schedule a meeting with your committee once the final draft of the thesis manuscript is accepted by your advisor.
- b. Be sure to:
  - i. schedule a room for the thesis defense meeting at least 1 week prior to the defense and
  - ii. to announce the defense to the University. This is not optional as the University community must be notified of graduate defenses.
- c. Give your thesis manuscript to your committee at least a week in advance of the defense meeting, that is, a full 7 days ahead
- d. The thesis manuscript should be your best work; free of errors and in Graduate School format.
- e. At the thesis defense meeting, engage your committee in a PowerPoint presentation explaining the study and results and field questions by the committee.
- f. It is common for your committee members to suggest changes to your document at the final defense meeting.
  - i. Some may be rather minor such as grammatical changes, or asking for more detail while others may require you to re-write portions of your paper.
  - ii. Take these suggestions seriously. Make the changes and let your committee members know that the changes were made and how you made the changes.
- g. Bring the thesis defense form to the meeting, typed out and ready for committee members signatures.

13. Submit the completed thesis to the Graduate School.

- a. The manuscript must be in the proper format.
- b. The manuscript must include all changes requested by your committee.

- c. You cannot graduate until you receive final approval from the Graduate School.
14. And last of all...Submit a bound copy of the thesis to the program.
- a. The bound copy must be the final version approved by the Graduate School.
  - b. The copy must be spiral bound with a clear front cover and black back cover.
  - c. The bound copy must include the form signed by committee members as the second page of the document. following your title page.

So there you have it. That's all you have to do. Good luck and let us know what we can do to help you.

Email: [fmhilibrary@usf.edu](mailto:fmhilibrary@usf.edu).

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