Dissertation Premise
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The Premise

The *Dissertation Premise* document is used in two ways:

- To **identify a preliminary topic** (problem) for your dissertation. This topic should be the product of an initial investigation on your part but will be subject to change and refinement and will inform the development of your prospectus.
- To help **assign the faculty members** who will guide your development of the *Dissertation Prospectus*. This process varies across different programs, so please follow the guidance in your program of study.

**Completing the Premise**

The *Dissertation Premise* consists of four parts: **title, problem statement, approach** for the study, and **references**. An annotated outline is included in this guide and should be used to create your premise document. You will also find a sample premise herein to serve as a model for your work, and a preformatted template is available on the [Writing Center](#) website.

Your primary goal for the premise is to narrow your dissertation topic such that you have provided a general sense of the direction of your research by identifying an initial problem to study. At this point, you do not need to know everything about the research project, especially the details of your methodology. Many of those specific decisions are made during the proposal development phase of your dissertation, although some consideration of how you will execute your study is appropriate from the beginning.

All documents related to your dissertation, including the premise, should follow the guidelines in the sixth edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* and should be saved in either a .doc, .docx, or .rtf file format. When completed, please follow the submission guidelines for your program. You may also want to review the *Litmus Test for a Doctoral-Level Research Problem*, which has been provided at the end of this guide and is available on the [Center for Research Quality](#) site.

Every doctoral student’s journey is a little different at Walden, so it is difficult to say exactly when to start the *Dissertation Premise*. Some students have an idea for a possible topic when they enroll, but many others begin seeing gaps in the existing research and strategies for addressing them as they complete their coursework and research training. Be sure to check your program of study and follow the guidance in your courses and from your program leaders.

**Your Supervisory Committee**

Students can find more information about the committee formation process on the [Capstone Committee Process](#) page of the Center for Research Quality website.
My Doctoral Research (MyDR)

As you are working on your Dissertation Premise, you should also begin familiarizing yourself with the My Doctoral Research (MyDR) system and other resources on the Center for Research Quality website. The MyDR system was designed to assist you and your committee in navigating your doctoral research journey, from the very beginning through the final approval. The various landing pages in MyDR will track your progress and will serve as a central location for resources to support that progress. The TaskStream element of the MyDR system is used to establish a process flow tool in which you exchange and store faculty evaluations and feedback on your work as you progress along that journey.

Students are entered into the MyDR system when both committee chair and second member have been approved and assigned by your academic program. Please be aware that your Dissertation Prospectus will be the first document that you submit for approval in MyDR, and a specific guide for creating a prospectus can also be found on the Forms page.
An Annotated Outline

The *Premise* document includes a title page (page 1) followed by pages containing the required elements in the premise. Please use the Premise template on the Writing Center website.

**Title Page**

The recommended **title length** is 12 words or fewer to include the topic, the variables and relationship between them, and the most critical keywords. Double-space the title if over one line of type and center it under the word “Premise.” Please note that your dissertation title will likely change as the project evolves, so allow yourself the flexibility to adapt your title, as necessary.

Include your name, your program of study (and specialization, if applicable), and Banner ID number—double-spaced and centered under the title.

**Title**

Start with “Premise” and a colon, and then include the title as it appears on the title page. Double-space if over one line of type and center it at the top of the page.

**Problem Statement**

Provide a one- to two-paragraph statement that is the result of a review of research findings and current practice and that contains the following information:

1. A logical argument for the *need to address an identified gap in the research literature* that has relevance to the discipline and/or area of practice.
2. Preliminary evidence that provides *justification* that this problem is meaningful to the discipline or professional field. Provide at least five key citations that highlight the relevance and currency of the problem.

**Approach for the Study**

Identify a possible research approach that is appropriate for the tentative topic identified in the problem statement, along with any *initial* thoughts on methodology:

- Quantitative
- Qualitative
- Mixed methods, primarily quantitative
- Mixed methods, primarily qualitative
- Other: Specify

**References**

On a new page, list your references formatted in the correct style (sixth edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, modeled at the end of this guide) for all citations within the *Dissertation Premise*. 
Sample Premise
Premise

How Online Doctoral Students Develop a Dissertation Problem Statement

Alpha B. Gamma

General Studies program – General specialization

A00000000
Premise: How Online Doctoral Students Develop a Dissertation Problem Statement

Problem Statement

Conducting a supervised independent research project is a unique feature of completing a doctoral degree (Lovitts, 2008). In their book on doctoral education, Walker, Golde, Jones, Conklin-Bueschel, and Hutchings (2009) highlighted the need to develop more “pedagogies of research” (p. 151) to support teaching graduate students to be scholars. Although much is known about how research training works in traditional doctoral programs, emerging research suggests that the online environment offers some unique challenges and opportunities for doctoral students (Baltes, Hoffman-Kipp, Lynn, & Weltzer-Ward, 2010; Kumar, Johnson, & Hardemon, 2013). Of the many aspects of a research project, development of the problem statement is arguably a key step because it sets the context for the entire dissertation (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2013; Luse, Mennecke, & Townsend, 2012). Many students are ultimately successful in defining the central argument for a dissertation, but little research has been conducted on how that process happens in a distributed, online environment. This research will fill this gap in understanding by focusing specifically on the development of problem statements by students in online doctoral programs. This information should help academic programs and members of supervisory committees to support the success of online doctoral candidates.

Approach for the Study

This study will use a mixed-methods, primarily qualitative, approach. It may involve interviews of doctoral students in conjunction with existing data on dissertation completion.
References


http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/jhe.0.0006ht


The Litmus Test

The Litmus Test for a Doctoral-Level Research Problem was designed to guide doctoral students and faculty in formulating a research problem. The distinguishing characteristic of doctoral-level research (versus master’s-level research) is that doctoral research must make an original contribution to the field; however, students may struggle to identify what research will authentically contribute to their field or discipline. The most critical step for such a contribution is to first identify a doctoral research problem with the four hallmarks noted here. Identifying a doctoral-level research problem is necessary, but not sufficient, to produce doctoral-level capstone.

Hallmarks of the Doctoral Research Problem

In Walden University’s scholar–practitioner model, a research problem shows promise of contributing meaningfully to the field or discipline only if the answer to all of the following questions is “Yes.”

1. Justified?
   Does evidence support that this problem is significant to the professional field? Evidence—relevant statistics (e.g., expressing an inequality, financial impact, lost efficiency), documentable discrepancies (e.g., two models that are difficult to reconcile), or other scholarly facts—must point to the significance and urgency of the problem. The problem must be an authentic “puzzle” that needs solving, not merely a topic that the researcher finds interesting.

2. Grounded in the Research Literature?
   Can the problem be framed to enable the research to either build on or counter previously published findings on the topic? For most fields, being grounded involves articulating the problem within the context of a theoretical or conceptual framework. Although many approaches can ground a study in the scientific literature, the essential requirement is that the problem is framed such that the new findings will have implications for the previous findings.

3. Original?
   Does the problem reflect a meaningful gap in the research literature? Addressing the problem should result in an original contribution to the field or discipline.

4. Amenable to Scientific Study?
   Can a scholarly, systematic method of inquiry be applied to address the problem? The framing of the problem should not reveal bias or present a foregone conclusion. Even if the researcher has a strong opinion on the expected findings, the researcher must maximize scholarly objectivity by framing the problem in the context of a systematic inquiry that permits multiple possible conclusions.