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’s Doctoral Capstone Form and Style 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 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**

*Note:*

A social problem involves an issue that affects a specific population/discipline. It is the issue that students see “on the ground” so to speak. The social problem is often what prompts students to think about a topic of interest drives their dissertation topic. Usually such a topic is one that students identify with, sometimes having personally experienced some aspect of the problem as it exists in the world. All too often, students want to solve a specific social, organizational, clinical, or practical problem rather than explore a research problem.

A research problem is a focused topic of concern, a condition to be improved upon, or troubling question that is supported in scholarly literature or theory that you study to understand in more detail, and that can lead to recommendations for resolutions. It is the research problem that drives the rest of the dissertation: the purpose, the research questions, and the methodology. It is the research problem that is identified in the Problem Statement of the prospectus.

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 area of practice. Keep in mind that a gap in the research is not, in and of itself, a reason to conduct research. Make sure to clarify the problem that led you to the gap. The situation being experienced in a societal population or discipline is described within the problem statement.

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. These references need not all be from peer-reviewed journals but should be from reputable sources, such as national agency databases or scholarly books, and should ideally be from the past 5 years.

3. Assure that the problem is framed within and primarily focused on the discipline (program of study).
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, including your quantitative design
- Qualitative, including your qualitative approach
- 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 Quantitative Premise
Premise

Differences in the Quality of Problem Statements Written Throughout the Capstone Process

Alpha B. Gamma

General Studies program – General specialization

A00000000
Premise: Differences in the Quality of Problem Statements Written Throughout the Capstone Process

**Problem Statement**

Conducting a supervised independent research project is a unique feature of completing a doctoral degree (Lovitts, 2008; Luse, Mennecke, & Townsend, 2012). 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 (Baltet, 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 throughout the capstone process. 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 quantitative approach. It may involve objective ratings of student work products across time.
References


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


Sample Qualitative 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; Luse, Mennecke, & Townsend, 2012). 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 generic qualitative approach (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). It may involve interviews with a representative group of doctoral graduates who have successfully defended their dissertations and whose work was highly ranked by faculty.
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.