

What Should I Do Now to Prepare?

When it comes to carrying out research, readiness and preparedness will determine the quality of your dissertation. Keeping a work schedule in order to carefully plan your study will help you enjoy the process, thus minimizing stress related to this important stage in your university life. If you follow a few recommendations before getting started and while taking the different courses in your program, can aid in completing your research in a timely manner and almost guarantee a high-quality product that you will feel proud of!

Time Management: Plan Your Time Efficiently

Make sure you know the **deadline** for submitting your dissertation. Then, start to plan backwards. This way, you guarantee that you will have enough time to revise and complete your dissertation.

Devoting as much time as possible to planning and structuring your dissertation while taking the different courses in your program is challenging and can be exhausting. That is why you have to prepare well and allocate specific times during the day to complete your research. Stick to a **work schedule** that will allow you to complete your research in a timely manner while avoiding last minute burnout. For this, you need to allocate time for the following tasks:

Reading and researching: In order to understand the state-of-the-art of your topic

Gathering and analyzing data: Make sure you have sufficient time to design your data collection instruments, pilot them, reach your sample, gather data to finalize and engage in the analysis phase.

Drafting more than once: The possibility of drafting will help you write a more cohesive and coherent text, directed by the guidelines provided in the handbook. Drafting will also help you further expand your thesis statements, and even revise and modify your initial thoughts and ideas.

Proofreading: Allow time for revision. This means let your written work sit for a bit so you can go back and revise with fresh eyes. The Writing Center can help you in this process as well.

Meeting with your dissertation advisor: This is an ongoing process as well as an opportunity to add the experience and expertise of your advisor into your dissertation.

To sum up, create a schedule and stick to it: Being able to manage your time efficiently will be **KEY** to completing your research in time.

Get Familiar with the Dissertation Guidelines

Carefully read the dissertation handbook and familiarize yourself with the format requested for your dissertation. This will save you time and effort as you will be making sure you meet expectations and deadlines. Additionally, use this to guide you as you take your courses. Keep in mind

what you will complete and the overall purpose of the document as you engage in your courses. See if anything jumps out at you in terms of research interests.

Make APA Your Ally

At Westcliff University, the dissertation will follow APA 7th ed (with a few variations found in the handbook). A helpful recommendation would be to intentionally practice APA guidelines before you begin work on your dissertation, so you are able to use its format from the very beginning. Making APA your ally from day one will facilitate your writing process, in particular the revision and editing stage. See the APA 7th edition tab for support resources.

Take Advantage of Every Course During Your Program

During every course, try to engage with the readings provided from different perspectives. This way you will be able to assess if you are interested in a particular topic and if you can identify this early on, you can use the literature to support your research. Look for connections between the readings and your topic. If there is one, create an annotated bibliography, or any other strategy you find useful and practical to collect your potential sources.

Start a Mendeley Account

Consider starting a [Mendeley](#), or another reference generator, account. This service stores your research articles in APA 7th edition and allows you to highlight and take notes about the articles. As you take courses and find relevant information, consider adding it to Mendeley. When you begin your RES721 course, you will have a place to start.

RES Courses

Your RES courses are specifically designed to help you to succeed on your dissertation research. Consider what you want to study in your dissertation before you begin these classes. If you can go into these courses with a topic in mind, you will know which specific aspects of research apply to you and use this course time to benefit you personally.

Set a Graduate Writing Center Consultation

Have a few ideas for research you want to talk through? Consider booking an appointment with a graduate writing center specialist to discuss your initial ideas. Talking through potential ideas is always beneficial, even if it is to just help you process and put words to your thoughts. After this, you can then go to your advisor or chair with well-articulated ideas to select between.

Be Open Minded and Remember That Research is a Cyclical Process

This means that you can modify the way you approach your dissertation in order to offer solid, valid and reliable research that resonates with the current state of your selected field. Try not to feel frustrated if you need to change your plan. This is completely normal, and more common than you think. That is one of the reasons why you need to plan your research ahead of time.

Write Each Day, Even If It Is Just One Single Idea

Think about this: If you write only on weekdays at least 125 words a day (half page if double spaced!), you will be writing 2.5 pages a week, 10 pages a month. We recommend you set realistic goals for this, but always consider that it is worth the effort.

Keep Track of your Thoughts

Get an idea out of the blue? Consider installing an App like Google Keep to contain all ideas in one place.

Read Approved Dissertations from Other Students

Reading previous dissertations from students in your own program will help you understand and illustrate what is expected of you. It can potentially give you ideas on how to illustrate and display your data and findings when the time comes. You can contact the school librarian for access to the repository.

Find a Research Topic That Motivates and Excites You

Working on something you love will guarantee you will enjoy the research process. If you do not have an idea of what you want to research, answering the questions below might be able to help you:

What Interests and Motivates You?

Always select a field or topic that piques your interest. You will spend many hours reading and writing, thus, finding a topic that motivates you is of paramount importance. It will also help you avoid burnout.

What Do I Know as of Today?

Decide to do research on something you know at least a bit about, a topic in which you have some type of expertise. In this, you can use your strengths to write an outstanding dissertation.

What Type of Access to Resources Do I Need and Have?

Access

Consider whether you will need access to government documents or if Google Scholar and LIRN is enough. Also, take into consideration if you need to interview participants face-to-face or if this will be done online. Additionally, make sure you have the financial resources needed to complete your research (if needed). Consider aspects like gas money, equipment, copies, and so on.

Enjoy Doing

Again, a good piece of advice is to think about what you like the most: Do you like talking to plenty of people? Do you enjoy reading government documents or prefer journal articles?

Initiating Conversation

Before you start working on your topic, you need to research what is out there. Don't overwhelm your dissertation chair with ongoing questions about what you could research. A good tip would be to meet with your chair and present at least two or three ideas that you are interested in. This way, the conversation is limited to selecting the most appropriate topic for your research.

Remember Yourself

The last advice before getting started with your dissertation is to take care of yourself: Nurture your soul, body and mind to be strong enough to complete your research in the healthiest way possible.

Remember, carrying out research **does not need** to be a burden. Completing your research will be sometimes challenging, of course. But it is up to you to try your best to enjoy the process while learning and experiencing how fascinating discovering new knowledge can be. Always remember that you can do it, and you do have resources and support to help you along the way. Try to take advantage of that support. We, at the Graduate Writing Center, are certainly here for you and are dedicated to **supporting** you throughout this journey.