



Doctor of Philosophy in Counselor Education and Supervision

Dissertation Handbook

2025-2026

Department of Counseling

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INTRODUCTION AND DISSERTATION OVERVIEW

The dissertation represents the capstone experience of your doctoral studies and serves as the foundation for your future scholarly contributions. Completing your dissertation is a significant academic milestone that reflects your dedication, intellectual investment, and collaboration with your Dissertation Chairperson and Dissertation Committee. Congratulations on reaching this pivotal stage in your academic career!

With the guidance of your Dissertation Chairperson and Committee, you will contribute original research to the counseling literature while developing important professional and scholarly skills. The dissertation process demands focus, persistence, and thoughtful engagement with feedback. It typically involves multiple revisions and a deep commitment to refining your work until it meets the standards of your Committee.

Although your Chairperson and Committee will provide support and direction, the dissertation is ultimately your own. It is a substantial investment of your time, energy, and expertise, and it makes your emergence as an independent researcher and scholar.

We wish you success throughout this process. As faculty, we are committed to making your dissertation experience a meaningful learning experience that will establish your foundation as a researcher in the counseling profession. This Handbook offers detailed guidance, resources, and structure to support you in completing an outstanding dissertation.

DISSERTATION PROCESS

The dissertation process consists of several stages. Details specific to each stage are overviewed in the relevant sections of this Handbook. The outline below provides a general overview of the process with hyperlinks to relevant Graduate School forms and resources.

*Doctoral forms, with the exception of the Milestones Agreement Form, are now available for electronic routing through DocuSign. If the links do not work, please seek assistance from the Student Development Specialist.

1. Complete the Milestones Agreement Form.
 - a. See Appendix F and G in the CES Program Handbook, or obtain from Doctoral Program Director or the SDS
2. Select a Doctoral Advisor/Dissertation Chair.
3. Establish your Dissertation Committee.
 - a. Complete the [Appointment of Doctoral Dissertation Committee Form](#)
 - b. For approval of non-UTSA or Graduate Faculty [Application for Graduate Faculty Special Membership](#)
4. Complete all core and required coursework with a grade of B or better.
5. Successfully pass the Qualifying Examination.
 - a. Complete the [Completion of Qualifying Examination Form](#)
6. Apply for candidacy for the Ph.D. in Counselor Education and Supervision.
 - a. Complete the [Application for Candidacy Form](#)
7. Organize and complete the Dissertation Pre-Proposal meeting
8. Prepare your Dissertation Proposal.
 - a. [Formatting Templates and Requirements](#)
 - b. [Dissertation Preparation Guidelines](#)
9. Present and pass the Dissertation Proposal Defense.
 - a. Complete the [Dissertation Proposal Approval Form](#)

10. Obtain IRB approval.
 - a. [IRB Website](#)
11. Collect your Dissertation data.
12. Prepare your Dissertation document.
 - a. [Formatting Templates and Requirements](#)
 - b. [Dissertation Preparation Guidelines](#)
13. Successfully defend your Dissertation and file the Final Program of Study Form.
 - a. Final Program of Study Form [obtained from SDS]
 - b. Complete the [Certification of Completion of Dissertation Requirements Form](#)
14. Submit final copies of the Dissertation to the Graduate School.
 - a. [Final Submission Requirements](#)

FACULTY AND STAFF ROLES IN THE DISSERTATION PROCESS

THE DOCTORAL PROGRAM ADVISOR

When you entered the program, the Doctoral Program Director was assigned as your temporary Doctoral Program Advisor. Following your second year in the program, and prior to enrolling in COU 7893 during your third year, you should select a Doctoral Program Advisor based on: (a) your review of faculty research interests, (b) interviews with faculty members, (c) faculty member availability, and (d) work with faculty on mutual areas of interest. Your Doctoral Program Advisor must be a tenured or tenure-track faculty member in the Department of Counseling at UTSA. There is no form associated with selecting a Doctoral Program Advisor. Please inform the Doctoral Program Director and the Student Development Specialist after the faculty member has agreed to serve in this role. It is essential to communicate regularly with your Doctoral Program Advisor about your progress and work. Please note that your Doctoral Program Advisor will also serve as your Dissertation Chairperson and supervise your dissertation process.

THE DISSERTATION CHAIRPERSON

The Dissertation Chairperson must be a tenured or tenure-track faculty member in the Department of Counseling at UTSA. Your Dissertation Chairperson will provide guidance, mentoring, and feedback. Your responsibilities in this professional relationship include being receptive to feedback, interacting professionally and responsibly in all communication and meetings, and keeping your Dissertation Chairperson informed of your progress. You and your Dissertation Chairperson will work to ensure that your proposal and dissertation drafts are of exceptional quality before the manuscript is sent to the Doctoral Dissertation Committee for formal review. Your Dissertation Chairperson will also facilitate your pre-proposal, proposal, and dissertation defense meetings and provide suggestions for presenting effective academic presentations. Although you may decide to conduct a dissertation directly related to your Dissertation Chairperson's line of research, this is not necessary or expected.

Note. In rare cases, a Dissertation Co-Chairperson may be appointed.

THE DOCTORAL DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

Your Doctoral Dissertation Committee is formally established after you pass your Qualifying Examination. All members of the Doctoral Dissertation Committee must be members of the UTSA graduate faculty or be approved for Special Faculty status. Typically, members of the committee are tenured or tenure-track departmental faculty and may include UTSA adjunct

professors or professors in practice approved as Special Faculty by the UTSA Graduate Council. Per the Graduate School, an individual outside the university may serve on the dissertation committee, but only after receiving Special Faculty status (See UTSA Graduate Catalog for more information). Approval of a Special Faculty appointment to your committee requires your Dissertation Chairperson's approval as well as approval from the Department Chairperson. Only one Special Faculty member may participate as a Dissertation Committee member.

You may select committee members based on their research interests, specialized expertise, methodological skills, and shared interests. If recommended, select a methodologist to work with you. The majority of the committee must be tenured or tenure-track faculty from the Department of Counseling. In addition to your Dissertation Chairperson, you must have at least three committee members. The recommended committee size is four to five members total (this number includes your chair). Keep in mind that faculty may not be available to serve on your committee for various reasons. Committee members provide consultation and feedback related to your methodological approaches, writing skills, presentation style, and professional interactions. As representatives of the department, college, and university, committee members are committed to ensuring high-quality dissertations.

CHANGES TO THE DOCTORAL COMMITTEE OR DISSERTATION CHAIRPERSON

Doctoral students in good standing who choose to change their Dissertation Chairperson must: (a) inform their current Dissertation Chairperson of their intent to change, (b) write a letter documenting the reason(s) for the desired change, and (c) submit the letter to the Dissertation Chairperson, the Dissertation Committee, and Department Chairperson. Please remember to discuss your intent to change your Dissertation Chairperson with your current Chairperson before submitting the formal request. If there is a need to change members of the committee, please consult with your Dissertation Chairperson and all committee members before making a formal change.

THE STUDENT DEVELOPMENT SPECIALIST

The Student Development Specialist (SDS) in the Department of Counseling is available for consultation about the required forms for the dissertation and graduation. The SDS will assist you in disseminating your announcement to students, staff, and faculty, and may provide assistance or guidance with scheduling meeting rooms for your dissertation pre-proposal, proposal, and dissertation defense. The SDS will also audit your academic file to make sure you have completed all required forms for the dissertation and graduation. Please be in contact with the SDS if you change your contact information or need information about forms and procedures used in the dissertation process.

DISSERTATION ELIGIBILITY AND ENROLLMENT

QUALIFYING EXAMINATION AND ADMISSION TO CANDIDACY

You cannot begin formal dissertation work until you pass your Qualifying Examination and are formally admitted to candidacy. The Qualifying Examination is also referred to as the Portfolio. The Ph.D. Program Handbook outlines the process for completing the Qualifying Examination. Please consult with your Dissertation Chairperson and the Student Development Specialist, who will verify you have completed the academic requirements to move on to the Qualifying Examination and inform you of any additional information needed at this stage. After you pass

the Qualifying Examination, you will work with your Dissertation Chairperson and the Student Development Specialist to create and submit a formal application to the Graduate School for admission to candidacy.

REGISTERING FOR DISSERTATION CREDIT

After you are admitted to candidacy, you may enroll in dissertation credit under your Dissertation Chairperson in the next available semester. During all phases of your dissertation, you will register for COU 7993 or COU 7996. You may enroll in 3 to 6 dissertation credits each semester. If you enroll in 3 semester hours, you will register for COU 7993. If you enroll in 6 semester hours, you will register for COU 7996. Once you have completed the required nine credit hours of dissertation, you may register for COU 7991 and enroll for one credit each semester until you graduate. You must be enrolled continuously while working on your dissertation, and you must be enrolled during the semester in which you graduate. Please see the UTSA information bulletin and the fiscal services website for current tuition and fees schedule. Be aware that costs are involved in conducting your research, writing your dissertation, and fulfilling graduation requirements. To qualify for funding for GRA positions, students must enroll in 9 credits fall and spring semesters. This can be 9 dissertation hours or a combination of dissertation hours and other coursework.

DISSERTATION PRE-PROPOSAL, PROPOSAL, AND FINAL DEFENSE

The dissertation process involves three major milestones after passing your Qualifying Examination: Pre-Proposal Meeting, Proposal Defense, and Final Defense. Each phase is built upon the previous one and requires committee approval to advance.

PHASE ONE: PRE-PROPOSAL MEETING

The Pre-Proposal meeting is your first formal presentation to your Dissertation Committee after establishing your research focus. This meeting allows you to present your preliminary research plan and receive committee guidance before developing your full proposal.

Initial Planning

You will develop the content and prepare materials for your Pre-Proposal Meeting during the COU 7893 Advanced Research course in the spring semester of your third year. It is recommended that you meet with your Dissertation Chairperson prior to this semester to discuss your topic, timeline, and strategies for completing your dissertation. Once you have a clear plan, you will schedule your Pre-Proposal Meeting with your Dissertation Committee.

Scheduling and Logistics

Before scheduling the Pre-Proposal Meeting, you must pass the Qualifying Examination/Portfolio. Meetings with your Chairperson and Dissertation Committee are typically held during the fall and spring semesters. Summer meetings may be possible depending on faculty availability. In consultation with your Dissertation Chairperson and Dissertation Committee, schedule your Dissertation Pre-Proposal Meeting on a mutually agreed-upon date and time. This meeting provides an opportunity to present your proposed study and receive feedback to guide the development of your dissertation proposal.

Meeting Preparation

- Allocate 1 hour for the meeting, including presentation, Q&A, deliberation, and final decision.

- Prepare a 15–20-minute presentation outlining your intended dissertation study that includes key elements of:
 - Chapter One: Introduction
 - Chapter Two: Summary of the literature review
 - Chapter Three: Proposed methodology
- All members of your Dissertation Committee must attend.
- Seek the help of your Dissertation Chairperson and the Student Development Specialist to reserve a room, if needed.
- Be prepared to discuss your research design, theoretical framework, and rationale.
- Provide committee members with a handout summarizing key elements of your proposed study.

Note. Development of presentation skills is essential for your doctoral growth. Therefore, you should avoid reading directly from written notes during the oral presentation.

Meeting Structure

Your Dissertation Chairperson will facilitate the Pre-Proposal Meeting. The meeting will proceed as follows:

1. Chairperson introduces the student and Committee.
2. Student presents the proposed study.
3. Committee engages in discussion, asking questions, and providing feedback.
4. Student steps out while the Committee deliberates.
5. Chairperson invites the student back and announces the decision.

Outcomes and Next Steps

During your Pre-Proposal Meeting, the Dissertation Committee will provide feedback and input to help guide you in your proposal development process. Please draft the proposal as recommended by the committee and provide a written response documenting your revisions.

If you are unprepared in the meeting, or if the committee deems your plan is not acceptable, you will need to make the necessary revisions to your proposed study and schedule another Pre-Proposal meeting.

After receiving approval, you will proceed to the next phase of the dissertation process to prepare your dissertation proposal.

PHASE TWO: PROPOSAL PREPARATION AND DEFENSE

After receiving approval during your Pre-Proposal Meeting, you will begin preparing your formal dissertation proposal and planning for the Proposal Defense. This phase involves drafting the first three chapters of your dissertation, incorporating committee feedback, and presenting your proposed study in a formal meeting.

Proposal Development

You will write the first three chapters of your dissertation in accordance with your Committee's feedback from the Pre-Proposal Meeting, as well as all Graduate School and Department guidelines. To prepare your formal Dissertation Proposal, you are encouraged to seek initial and ongoing support from your Dissertation Chairperson and consult with peers, the Writing Center (if needed), and a dissertation editor (if recommended). APA style must be used throughout, unless otherwise specified by the Graduate School requirements. These chapters, along with

the relevant appendices, will form your formal dissertation proposal. Every effort will be made to provide feedback within 10 business days throughout the process. Key steps include:

- Prepare a well-written and methodologically sound proposal that includes:
 - Chapters 1-3 of your dissertation with Chapter Three written in the future tense.
 - All relevant appendices (e.g., interview guides, permission forms, IRB forms, instruments, letters of support, manuals).
- Solicit and receive feedback from your Dissertation Chairperson and revise as needed.
- Resubmit your proposal with a summary of changes until approved for formal Committee review.
- With your Dissertation Chairperson's approval, submit the approved proposal to your Dissertation Committee.
- Revise the proposal based on committee feedback and resubmit your proposal with a summary of changes and revisions to the Committee, allowing 10 business days for each review cycle.
- Once approved, you will schedule your Proposal Defense with your Dissertation Committee.
 - *Note. You should complete the IRB training requirements before your Dissertation Proposal Defense date and provide proof of completion and current IRB compliance to your Dissertation Chairperson.*

General Writing Guidelines

The following guidelines represent the minimum Departmental expectations related to the format, structure, and content of your dissertation. You are responsible for adhering to the Graduate School Guidelines in addition to the guidelines listed below. Your Dissertation Chairperson and Dissertation Committee may recommend additional requirements and sections. For dissertation proposals, you will follow the requirements for writing Chapters One through Three. Much of a dissertation proposal is written in future tense, except for the literature review. The final dissertation will follow the guidelines for all the chapters and will be written in the appropriate tenses (e.g., Chapter Three written in the past tense). Qualitative and quantitative studies will differ to some degree in rhetoric and methodology. For multi- or mixed-method studies, you will need to meet the requirements and expectations for quantitative and qualitative studies, and other requirements recommended by your Dissertation Committee. For specific guidance, refer to the following appendices:

- Appendix A: Guidelines for Writing a Qualitative Dissertation (p. 14)
- Appendix B: Guidelines for Writing a Quantitative Dissertation (p. 19)
- Appendix C: Guidelines for Writing a Mixed Methods Dissertation (p. 24)

Developing your Writing Skills

It is essential that you develop and refine your writing skills. The University offers numerous opportunities and resources to sharpen your writing skills and help you prepare for your dissertation. We fully expect you to utilize the writing resources at UTSA. Formal submissions of written work to the Dissertation Chairperson and Dissertation Committee must be of exceptional quality. Submitting poorly written documents to the Dissertation Committee will slow your progress.

No defenses will be scheduled until the committee agrees that the proposal and dissertation are exceptionally written. To support your development as an academic writer, the University offers many workshops throughout the year, and several of your courses may include embedded writing instruction. Additionally, your Dissertation Chairperson and Committee may require you to seek further writing support to strengthen the quality of your work.

Scheduling and Logistics

Once your proposal is approved by your Dissertation Committee, you will schedule your Dissertation Proposal Defense in consultation with your Chairperson and Committee on a mutually acceptable date.

Meeting Preparation

- Plan for a 1.5-hour meeting that includes your Presentation (max 30 minutes), Q&A, committee deliberation, and final decision.
- All members of your Dissertation Committee must attend.
- Seek the help of your Dissertation Chairperson and the Student Development Specialist to reserve a room, if needed.

Note. Development of presentation skills is essential for your doctoral growth. Therefore, you should avoid reading directly from written notes during the oral presentation.

Meeting Structure

Your Dissertation Chairperson will facilitate the Proposal Defense. The meeting will proceed as follows:

6. Chairperson introduces the student and Committee.
7. Student presents the proposed study.
8. Committee engages in discussion, asking questions, and providing feedback.
9. Student steps out while the Committee deliberates.
10. Chairperson invites the student back and announces the decision.

Outcomes and Next Steps

If your proposal needs major revisions, you must implement the changes recommended by the Committee and provide a written summary of the changes. The Committee will have 10 business days to review and respond. If the proposal is not approved, you will work with your Dissertation Chairperson to determine whether to revise the current study or begin a new one. Once your Committee deems the study acceptable, you may seek IRB approval.

Research Involving Human Subjects

Following a successful Dissertation Proposal Meeting and completion of the Dissertation Approval Form, your next step is to secure UTSA Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for the study. All students planning to conduct research involving human subjects must submit an application to the IRB. Students planning to submit an IRB proposal will need to complete the IRB training before their proposals will be reviewed. In addition, you must complete all forms and documentation required by the IRB.

The IRB application must include your Dissertation Chairperson. It is important to allow sufficient time for the review process. **No research can begin, and no data can be collected until you receive written notification of final approval by the IRB.** You must use the stamped IRB-approved forms in your study, and you must follow all IRB guidelines for the protection of human subjects and ethics in research.

PHASE THREE: DISSERTATION PREPARATION AND FINAL DEFENSE

After receiving IRB approval following your successful Proposal Defense, you will begin the final phase of your dissertation journey. This phase involves conducting your research, completing your dissertation document, drafting a journal article, and presenting your completed study in a

formal defense meeting.

Data Collection

Once you have passed your Dissertation Proposal Defense and have received written approval from your Dissertation Committee and the Institutional Review Board (IRB), you may begin the data collection phase of your dissertation. You must adhere exactly to the recruitment, data collection, and data analysis plans as outlined in your proposal and IRB documentation. Any variation from previously approved data recruitment, collection, and analysis plans will require written approval from your Dissertation Chairperson and the IRB. This may require consultation with the Dissertation Committee. **Significant changes to your study will require another Proposal Defense Meeting.**

Dissertation Completion

Once you have collected and analyzed your data, you will write the final chapters of your dissertation and edit the entire document for grammar, clarity, and overall readability in accordance with APA and all Graduate School and Department guidelines. You are encouraged to Meet with your Dissertation Chairperson and Dissertation Committee members to: (a) discuss your research progress, (b) seek methodological consultation, and (c) address any other issues that may arise during this stage of the dissertation. You are also encouraged to consult with the Writing Center (if needed), the Graduate School, and a dissertation editor (if recommended).

To help ensure your final draft meets Graduate School formatting standards, you should register for a formatting workshop or webinar and schedule a preliminary draft review appointment with the Graduate School. These steps can reduce the number of formatting revisions required and help prevent delays in graduation. If your final draft does not meet formatting guidelines, your graduation may be postponed until the document is approved.

Throughout the process, every effort will be made to provide feedback within 10 business days throughout the process. Key steps include:

- Prepare a well-written dissertation that includes
 - a. All chapters of your dissertation written in the appropriate tense and APA style must be used throughout, unless otherwise specified. The document must also conform to all Graduate School guidelines.
 - b. All relevant appendices (e.g., interview guides, permission forms, IRB forms, instruments, letters of support, manuals) used in your study.
- Solicit and receive feedback from your Dissertation Chairperson and revise as needed.
- Resubmit with a summary of changes until approved for formal Committee review.
- With your Dissertation Chairperson's approval, submit the approved dissertation document to your Dissertation Committee.
- Revise based on committee feedback and resubmit with a summary of changes and revisions to the Committee, allowing 10 business days for each review cycle.
- Once approved, you will schedule your Final Defense with your Dissertation Committee.
 - a. *Note. At this stage, your dissertation is expected to be a document of exceptional quality, reflecting the highest level of scholarship, written presentation, and research in the counseling profession.*

Scheduling and Logistics

Plan well in advance for your Dissertation Defense. Faculty availability may be limited during the summer semester. In consultation with your Dissertation Chairperson and Dissertation

Committee, you will schedule your Dissertation Defense on a mutually acceptable date. You are responsible for knowing about and adhering to the Graduate School and Department timelines related to dissertations.

Meeting Preparation

- Plan for a 2-hour meeting that includes your Presentation (max 45 minutes), Q&A, committee deliberation, and final decision.
- Ensure all members of your Dissertation Committee attend.
- Coordinate the date, time, and location with your Dissertation Chairperson and the Department of Counseling, reserve a room if needed.
- Work with the Student Development Specialist and your Dissertation Chairperson, to prepare a formal announcement (including the dissertation title, your name, defense details, and Committee Members). This SDS will share this announcement at least 5 business days before the defense.
 - *Note. The Final Defense is open to the public and may be attended by students, faculty, professionals, and personal guests.*
- Communicate any changes in date or time in advance to your Dissertation Chairperson, your Dissertation Committee, and the Chair of the Department of Counseling.

Note. Development of presentation skills is essential for your doctoral growth. Therefore, you should avoid reading directly from written notes during the oral presentation.

Meeting Structure

The Dissertation Defense is a formal meeting where you present your completed study to your Dissertation Committee, the academic community, and the public. Your Dissertation Chairperson will facilitate the meeting. The meeting will proceed as follows:

- Chairperson introduces the student and Committee to the audience.
- Student presents the study in its entirety to the Dissertation Committee and audience.
- The Committee will ask questions, offer feedback, and may suggest revisions.
- Student and Guests step out of the room while the Committee deliberates.
- Chairperson invites the student back to share the Committee's evaluation and feedback.

Outcomes and Next Steps

After your Dissertation Defense, your Dissertation Committee will determine whether you passed and provide feedback on your dissertation grade. There are three outcomes:

- Pass with Few or No Revisions
You may fully pass your Defense and be asked to complete few to no revisions. You may proceed with submitting your final document following Graduate School final submission requirements, which may include formatting changes. Your Committee may sign the required paperwork at their discretion.
- Pass with Required Revisions
You may pass the Dissertation Defense but be required to complete revisions before final approval. The Committee may take up to 10 business days to review your changes. Committee members may approve or request additional revisions, and this process may repeat until all members are satisfied. If substantial revisions are needed, you and your Committee will work together to determine the scope and timeline for completing them. Once approved, you may proceed with submitting your final document following Graduate School final submission requirements, which may include formatting changes. Your Committee may sign the required paperwork at their discretion.
- Failing Evaluation

A Dissertation Defense also may earn a failing evaluation. A failure of the Dissertation Defense, while uncommon, indicates that the study and/or presentation was flawed to such an extent that the dissertation and defense cannot be approved. Reasons may include:

- Not following approved data collection and analysis plans.
- Academic dishonesty as outlined by the UTSA Code of Conduct, which includes intentional and unintentional plagiarism, collusion, cheating, and falsifying academic records. Please review the UTSA Student Code of Conduct for detailed explanations of these behaviors.
- Intentionally falsifying data or engaging in ethical misconduct in research.
- Poor communication during the Dissertation Defense.
- Failure to respond to Committee revisions and guidance during the dissertation process.

If you fail the Dissertation Defense, you must begin a new dissertation project. Cases involving academic dishonesty will be referred to Student Judicial Affairs and the Departmental Fitness to Practice Committee.

To avoid issues, maintain regular communication with your Dissertation Chairperson and Committee throughout the process.

APPENDIX A: GUIDELINES FOR WRITING A QUALITATIVE DISSERTATION

QUALITATIVE STUDY GUIDELINES FOR CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION

In Chapter I, you introduce your study, establish a strong rationale for the dissertation, and provide an overview of the research design. For each section, you will follow the general Departmental Guidelines and Graduate School recommendations as previously outlined. The following guidelines represent the minimum expectations for developing, conducting, and writing a qualitative dissertation. In general, the overall rhetorical structure of the dissertation is engaging, uses first-person language, and is rich with qualitative language (Creswell, 2024). Your purpose statement will include an explanation of how your chosen methodological approach will best answer the need established in your Need for the Study section. Your rationale and purpose will clearly and convincingly establish the need for qualitative investigation. The overview of your study will reflect an emergent design and inductive logic. Your research questions will be open-ended, methodologically coherent, and allow for in-depth investigation. Your methodological approach will be encoded (Creswell, 2024) in your purpose statement and research questions. Keep in mind that not every topic, group, or experience can be explored in the depth needed for a credible and trustworthy qualitative study. At a minimum, Chapter I should include the following elements organized by subheadings:

1. **Introduction:** In the introduction, you provide relevant background information for the study. In this section, you summarize the literature and begin to build your rationale for conducting the dissertation.
2. **Statement of the Problem:** You describe the specific focus of the problem, issue, or area of study in broad terms.
3. **Need for the Study:** In this section, you cite the most current literature that specifically calls for further investigation into your area of study. You build a convincing rationale for the specific research study you plan, address how this study is relevant to the counseling profession, and highlight implications for the field.
4. **Purpose of the Study:** You clearly articulate the specific purpose of the study. Your purpose statement flows logically from the need for the study. You also briefly discuss your methodology here by encoding it within your purpose statement.
 - a. For example, the purpose statement might read, “The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the culture of a Juvenile Detention Center using ethnographic methods.” In each case, you would expand more on the methodology and purpose in this section.
5. **Research Questions:** You list the research questions that will guide the study. The questions are logically tied to the rationale and purpose of the study. The research questions reflect your research methodology and clearly address the purpose of the study.
 - a. For example, in a qualitative study, the research question might read, “What is the culture of a juvenile justice detention center?”
6. **Researcher Position in the Study:** For qualitative studies and mixed- or multi-method studies, you use this section to position yourself reflexively in the study by discussing your history with the topic, possible biases, expectations, and worldview.

7. **Assumptions of Study:** In this section, you discuss the assumptions guiding the study.
8. **Limitations of the Study:** You provide a comprehensive analysis of the limitations of your study, basing your discussion on the methodology used, research design, and limitations of the data analysis.
9. **Organization of the Study:** In this section you provide a summary of the five chapters of your dissertation.
10. **Definition of Terms:** You provide a definition of the terms and variables related to your study.

QUALITATIVE STUDY GUIDELINES FOR CHAPTER TWO – LITERATURE REVIEW

In Chapter II, you present a review of the existing literature that is detailed in breadth and depth. Your literature review synthesizes research, theory, and practice related to your topic. In this section, you articulate a deep understanding of your topic and communicate this understanding with clarity and organization. To write an excellent review of the literature, you:

1. Synthesize the full body of related literature. You may expand to other disciplines to communicate a full understanding of your topic in broader contexts.
2. Conduct a thorough search on your topic in the counseling literature and present a comprehensive summary of the perspectives and research in the field of counseling to communicate a clear understanding of your topic.
3. Identify and discuss relationships, contradictions, gaps, and inconsistencies in the literature.
4. Organize the literature review thematically using headings and subheadings.
5. Write this section using clear, concise, and engaging language.

In the final section of Chapter II, you summarize the literature review and focus on key issues. Present essential elements to be included in a qualitative investigation that were derived from the existing literature. This section communicates your grasp of the literature related to your topic and further establishes the rationale for qualitative investigation.

QUALITATIVE STUDY GUIDELINES FOR CHAPTER THREE – METHOD

In a qualitative dissertation, your methods section will meet the following minimum requirements detailed below. Additionally, you may also consult the [APA Journal Article Reporting Standards \(JARS\)](#) for additional recommendations. This may assist with post-dissertation writing when preparing your dissertation for publication.

1. **Introduction:** You introduce the chapter and restate your purpose statement. The purpose statement is methodologically coherent and is clearly appropriate for qualitative study.
2. **Theoretical Lens or Framework:** You discuss your theoretical framework in depth,

citing primary sources. This analysis addresses the varying methodologies and epistemic stances within broad qualitative methodologies and theories. Thus, you discuss the nuances in thought related to your approach and justify why you chose the particular approach. For example, in a grounded theory study, you describe why you followed the Charmaz social constructivist model as opposed to the traditional grounded theory approach. The theoretical framework makes clear and logical sense and is coherently reflected in your research questions, purpose, and analytic strategies. As Creswell (2024) noted, you also discuss any interpretive community guiding your work (e.g., critical race theory, feminism). Finally, you fully outline your rationale as to why this approach will best answer your research question(s). You become an expert on these methods and cite primary sources and scholars of qualitative research and your selected methodology.

3. **Research Questions:** Your research questions are methodologically coherent and broad enough to provide flexibility. Typically, you have a central research question (Patton, 2014), and follow with additional sub-questions. The research questions will guide your work and will be answered in the data analysis section.
4. **Participants:** You describe the specific type of purposive sampling strategy you will use. You discuss your population in detail and articulate why this group was strategically selected. You clearly describe the rationale for the sample size and the uniqueness of this sample for qualitative inquiry. You argue how this group is information-rich, and why the study of this group, in their natural environment, is warranted. You cite relevant studies and scholars to justify your sample selection and size.
5. **Data Collection Methods:** You outline any data collection methods you will use, including demographic forms, semi-structured interviews, field notes, etc. You discuss your rationale for using these methods and reasons for the questions included on your forms. You cite the literature related to the use of qualitative data collection methods. You include these forms in the appendices.
6. **Data Collection Procedures:** You discuss how you will collect the data. You provide a research- and theory-based rationale as to how many interviews you will conduct. You discuss in detail your data sources and endeavor to use multiple sources of data whenever possible. You provide details about how you will use individual interviews, focus groups, observations, written texts, archives, etc. You discuss observation approaches, and fully describe all your sources of data. Your rationale for data collection procedures is grounded in the literature and methodological theory. Your depth of engagement with the participants is more than sufficient to establish the credibility and trustworthiness of your study. Here you will also write about:
 - a. How your analysis will proceed during data collection.
 - b. How you will record and maintain field notes, journals, and theoretical memos and how they will inform your study.
 - c. How you will incorporate emerging ideas into your design.
 - d. How ethics, culture, power, politics, and language will frame your study and how you anticipate any risks to the participants based on their participation.
 - e. Your plans to protect participants' privacy and safety.
7. **Data Analysis Plan:** In this section, you will discuss how you plan to analyze the data. Your analysis plan is written in sufficient depth and detail to enhance the credibility of

your study. Specifically, you focus on:

- a. Any software you choose to use, and outline the specifics of the software use (e.g., using NVIVO to analyze the data from free nodes to tree nodes).
- b. Strategies of trustworthiness used to strengthen the credibility and trustworthiness of the study. You describe:
 - i. How you will triangulate your data with the literature.
 - ii. Member-checking procedures.
 - iii. The use of an external auditor, describing how this individual is qualified to review your study.
 - iv. The use of translators, if necessary, and how you will incorporate external auditors, reverse translation, or member checks.
 - v. Your coding strategies and code development process. This process must be methodologically coherent with your theoretical framework and interpretive community.
 - vi. Transparency and authenticity by describing how your worldview, experiences, and potential biases will inform the data analysis.

QUALITATIVE STUDY GUIDELINES FOR CHAPTER FOUR – FINDINGS

To communicate transparency in your research design, you describe in detail how you analyzed the data. Specifically, you will:

1. Provide a summary of all participant demographic variables collected.
2. Provide an overview of how you coded the data. You discuss any data that you chose not to include in the analysis and why.
3. Describe your process of initial data analysis and summary of initial findings.
4. Write a reflexive self-analysis that is coherent within your theoretical framework (e.g., bracketing strategies, heuristic analysis, self-reflections emerging during the constant comparative analysis).
5. Discuss how your theoretical memos and field notes contributed to your data analysis and provide examples of major themes from these documents.
6. Report how the feedback from external auditors, participants, and others involved in the study contributed to your development of the codes and themes.
7. Illustrate your process of refining the themes and developing increasingly complex and refined categories and themes.
8. Describe how you organized the themes and categories.
9. Present your data in a way that is methodologically coherent with your theoretical framework. Theme descriptions are supported by thick quotes.
10. Present your codes in a methodologically coherent manner. For example, a traditional Grounded Theory design will include data organized by open, axial, and selective codes. Phenomenological studies will describe bracketing, structural, and textural analyses.

11. Provide participant quotes that are thick, logical, clear, and descriptive examples of your major themes. There should be no doubt to the reader that your themes emerged from the participant statements.
12. Write Chapter IV in a compelling and professional narrative style that communicates a complex and deep analysis of your data.

QUALITATIVE STUDY GUIDELINES FOR CHAPTER FIVE – DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In Chapter V, you summarize the study and your findings, and link your findings to the broader literature base. This section is written in an engaging style using the rhetorical structure of qualitative research.

This section will consist of the following sections:

1. **Discussion:** In this section, you provide a summary of your study and a discussion of the major findings. This will usually require several subheadings. You describe how your findings answered your research questions, fulfilled the purpose of the study, and contributed to gaps in the literature. You discuss your findings from an inductive perspective, describing how they contribute to theory and research. You compare your findings with similar qualitative studies and discuss the transferability and uniqueness of your findings. You compare and contrast your findings with the related literature, discussing how your findings deepen the knowledge related to your area of inquiry.
2. **Implications for the Counseling Profession:** In this section, you discuss the specific implications and recommendations for the counseling profession. This should encompass several subsections, comparing and contrasting your findings with the related counseling literature. You elaborate on counseling practice, counselor education, and counseling supervision implications.

If your topic intersects with other disciplines, you may also be required to address interdisciplinary implications. Your Dissertation Chairperson and committee may request that you include additional subsections that reflect the broader relevance of your findings across fields. These interdisciplinary considerations should be clearly connected to your study's purpose, findings, and theoretical framework.

3. **Suggestions for Future Research:** Based on your findings, you provide recommendations for future research. You especially highlight any unexpected or surprising findings.
4. **Conclusion:** You summarize the entirety of your study in an engaging and comprehensive manner. You discuss the limitations in the study design and those that emerged during data collection and analysis.

APPENDIX B: GUIDELINES FOR WRITING A QUANTITATIVE DISSERTATION

QUANTITATIVE STUDY GUIDELINES FOR CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION

In Chapter I, you introduce your study, establish a strong rationale for the dissertation, and provide an overview of the research design. You provide a strong rationale as to the need for quantitative investigation of a population or intervention. Based on your rationale and purpose statement, you present research questions and propose hypotheses (or hypothesized relationships among variables) that are congruent with your purpose statement and address your rationale for the study. Your variables are clearly defined and can be adequately measured by your selected instruments. At a minimum, Chapter I should include the following elements organized by subheadings:

1. **Introduction:** In the introduction, you provide relevant background information for the study. In this section, you summarize the literature and begin to build your rationale for conducting the dissertation.
2. **Statement of the Problem:** You describe the specific focus of the problem, issue, or area of study in broad terms.
3. **Need for the Study:** In this section, you cite the most current literature that specifically calls for further investigation into your area of study. You build a convincing rationale for the specific research study you plan, address how this study is relevant to the counseling profession, and highlight the implications your answers hold for the field.
4. **Purpose of the Study:** You clearly articulate the specific purpose of the study. Your purpose statement flows logically from the need for the study. You also briefly discuss your methodology here, by encoding it within your purpose statement.
 - a. For example, in a quantitative study, the purpose statement might read, “The purpose of this study is to estimate the impact of marital counseling on relationship satisfaction” (for an experiment) or “The purpose of this study is to examine whether undergraduate and graduate students differ in achievement motivation” (for a descriptive study).
5. **Research Questions:** You list the research questions and hypotheses that will guide the study. The questions are logically tied to the rationale and purpose of the study. The research questions are reflective of your research methodology and clearly address the purpose of the study.
 - a. For example, the research question guiding an experiment might read, “This study tests whether participation in ten sessions of couples counseling yields statistical differences in marital satisfaction for participating couples compared with a control group.” And, “Based on prior research, it was hypothesized that participation in ten sessions of marriage counseling would result in a moderate, positive improvement on indices of marital satisfaction relative to the scores of a control group.”
6. **Hypotheses** (if appropriate): In quantitative studies, you present your hypotheses and articulate the reasoning behind the need to test the hypotheses and how your methodology will best answer these hypotheses. Hypotheses provide greater specificity regarding the independent and dependent (predictor and criterion) variables than do

research questions or purpose statements (which are the most general).

7. **Assumptions of Study:** In this section, you discuss the assumptions of the study, researcher, or the sample.
8. **Limitations of the Study:** You provide a comprehensive analysis of the limitations of your study, basing your discussion on the methodology used, research design, and limitations of the data analysis.
9. **Organization of the Study:** In this section, you provide a summary of the five chapters of your dissertation.
10. **Definition of Terms:** You provide operational definitions of the terms and variables related to your study.

QUANTITATIVE STUDY GUIDELINES FOR CHAPTER TWO – LITERATURE REVIEW

In Chapter II, you present a review of the existing literature that is detailed in breadth and depth. Your literature review synthesizes research, theory, and practice related to your topic. In this section, you articulate a deep understanding of your topic and communicate this understanding with clarity and organization. This section communicates your grasp of the literature related to your topic and further establishes the rationale for quantitative investigation. Both competing theoretical perspectives and evidence (prior studies) supporting all viable and relevant theoretical positions should be presented in a fair, balanced, and impartial manner. You introduce the rationale behind the specific research questions/hypotheses you test in the study by revealing specific questions left untested in the wake of prior research. To write an excellent review of the literature, you:

1. Synthesize the full body of related literature. You may expand to other disciplines to communicate a full understanding of your topic in broader contexts.
2. Conduct a thorough search on your topic in the counseling literature and present a comprehensive summary of the perspectives and research in the field of counseling to communicate a clear understanding of your topic.
3. Identify and discuss relationships, contradictions, gaps, and inconsistencies in the literature.
4. Organize the literature review thematically using headings and subheadings.
5. Write this section using clear, concise, and engaging language

In the final section of Chapter II, you summarize the literature review and focus in on key issues.

QUANTITATIVE STUDY GUIDELINES FOR CHAPTER THREE – METHOD

In a quantitative dissertation, your methods section will meet the following minimum requirements detailed below. Additionally, you may also consult the [APA Journal Article Reporting Standards \(JARS\)](#) for additional recommendations. This may assist with post-dissertation writing when preparing your dissertation for publication.

1. **Introduction:** You introduce the chapter and restate your purpose statement.
2. **Research Questions and Hypotheses:** Your research questions and hypotheses are well developed, clearly stated, and are appropriate for the statistical analysis you plan to use. Your research questions can be clearly answered by statistical analysis. You provide a rationale for each hypothesis you plan to test. You also describe which statistical analyses will be used to answer specific research questions and hypotheses.
3. **Participants:** You conduct power analysis and sample size estimations. You describe the specific sampling strategies you will use and provide a rationale for their use (e.g., simple random sampling, convenience sampling, cluster sampling). You delineate clear inclusion and exclusion criteria for participation in your study. You discuss how your proposed sample is representative of the larger population under study.
4. **Instruments:** You outline any instruments you will use, including demographic forms, assessments, psychological tests, and surveys. It is essential that you describe the reliability and validity of your scales. State the nature of each type of validity by specifying the populations and criterion variables in each prior study. Evidence of validity of scales for use with populations similar to those in your study is critical. Once the data have been collected, you also include estimates of reliability (and validity if available) of the scales in the current sample.

You document that you have sought and provide evidence of permission to use previously published instruments. This documentation should also be added as an appendix. Each scale description should include the authors' names, date of publication, names of scales and subscales, number of items, and method of computing (sum of scores, averages, cutoff scores).

If you are developing or modifying an instrument for use in your study, you describe how you will measure the psychometric properties of your scale including the use of CFA, EFA, invariance testing, and other factor analytic and reliability measures as requested by your Dissertation Committee.

5. **Data Collection Procedures:** You discuss how you will collect the data. You describe the conditions of data collection and how you will maintain a consistent data collection environment to reduce error variance. You discuss any limitations to the data collection approach and setting.
6. **Statistical Analyses:** You describe your methodological and statistical plan to test your hypotheses. You clearly describe the rationale for this approach.

You describe in detail (a) how you will enter, clean, and explore your data, (b) what tests you will conduct to ensure meeting necessary data analytic assumptions, and (c) what data analyses you will conduct, including the rationale and method for including any mediators, moderators, and covariates used.

You describe how you will address (as applicable): (a) assumptions of normality, (b) Type I and Type II errors, (c) power, (d) external and internal validity, (e) attrition, (f) treatment fidelity, (g) missing variables, (h) potential Hawthorne and halo effects, (i) counselor skill variables, etc.

QUANTITATIVE STUDY GUIDELINES FOR CHAPTER FOUR – RESULTS

You present your data analyses and results. Your tables and statistical notation follow APA formatting guidelines. You write your results in a narrative that conveys a solid grasp of the methodology and a sophisticated understanding of your data. You report the data in sufficient detail to justify your conclusions. Mention all relevant data, regardless of whether your findings were significant. Findings should not be omitted. When reporting the results, ensure that you follow reporting procedures outlined by APA guidelines. At a minimum, your Chapter IV Results include:

1. An overview of your data analysis including any other analyses recommended by your Dissertation Committee, scholarly literature, or needs of your study. This overview summarizes the research project, data collection, and data analyses you performed.
2. A summary of all participant demographic variables collected and reported. This includes reporting the final sample size of the study after completing all relevant data screening procedures, and the post-hoc power estimations (if applicable).
3. An evaluation of missing data. If applicable, you evaluate if missing data revealed any consistent patterns and describe how you addressed missing data (e.g., imputing missing data such as using ML, Full Information Maximum Likelihood procedures, or other analytic methods to address these issues). Deleting cases with missing data is not appropriate.
4. A discussion of how your analysis met the criteria for the statistical methodology you chose. This includes appropriate reporting of all relevant assumptions (e.g., normality, homogeneity of variances, linearity, independence) for statistical tests. Sufficient detail is reported for each. For example (this is not a comprehensive list):
 - a. Analysis of the normality of the distributions of your data by calculating and reviewing the values for skewness, kurtosis, and homogeneity tests. If applicable, the discussion of appropriate data transformation for variables that failed to meet the assumptions of normality and discussion of data-transformation procedures and the values for skewness and kurtosis for the transformed variables.
 - b. Analysis of outliers. If applicable, this analysis includes how you addressed outliers in the study.
 - c. Analysis of independence of the independent variables, discussing correlations among variables, and other measures of independence and correlation.
5. All relevant analyses and supporting information related to your selected statistical tests. For example:
 - a. An evaluation of whether pre- and post-scores on the dependent variable(s) are different between demographic, treatment, or other key variables by using *t*-tests, analysis of variance, regression analyses, or other analytic techniques.
 - b. Factor analyses and reliability measures of your dependent variables and independent variables. You describe evidence of construct validity. You provide reliability coefficients of the measures used and check whether the internal consistency estimates of the measures reach appropriate levels. You develop CFA, EFA, and other factor analytic models and results to test the structure of the variables.
6. Results of the research questions and hypotheses of the study. You present the results

of each research question and hypothesis and demonstrate whether they are supported. As needed, provide measures of association (i.e., effect size) and their interpretation.

In the final section of Chapter IV you summarize the results section.

QUANTITATIVE STUDY GUIDELINES FOR CHAPTER FIVE – DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In Chapter V, you summarize the study and results, and link your results to the broader literature base. This section will consist of the following sections:

1. **Discussion:** In this section, you provide a summary of your study and a discussion of the major results. This will usually require several subheadings. You describe how your results answered your research questions, fulfilled the purpose of the study, and contributed to gaps in the literature. If applicable, you discuss whether your hypotheses were confirmed or not. You describe the implications of your statistical analysis in plain and clear language. You discuss the implications of your effect size and discuss potential sources of the unexplained variance. You discuss how your results contribute to understanding the population under study. You use language that is reflective of the effect size and measures of association obtained from your study. You compare your results with other similar studies and discuss how your results generalize to your population of study.
2. **Implications for the Counseling Profession:** In this section, you discuss the specific implications and recommendations for the counseling profession. This should encompass several subsections, comparing and contrasting your findings with the related counseling literature. You elaborate on counseling practice, counselor education, and counseling supervision implications. You compare and contrast your findings with quantitative literature, discussing how your results empirically support knowledge, practice, and theory related to your area of inquiry.

If your topic intersects with other disciplines, you may also be required to address interdisciplinary implications. Your Dissertation Chairperson and committee may request that you include additional subsections that reflect the broader relevance of your findings across fields. These interdisciplinary considerations should be clearly connected to your study's purpose, findings, and theoretical framework.

3. **Suggestions for Future Research:** Based on your results, you provide recommendations for future research. You especially highlight any unexpected or surprising results.
4. **Conclusion:** You summarize the entirety of your study in an engaging and comprehensive manner. You discuss the limitations in the study design and those that emerged during data collection and analysis.

APPENDIX C: GUIDELINES FOR WRITING MIXED METHOD DISSERTATIONS

In addition to meeting the general dissertation requirements and requirements for both qualitative and quantitative studies, mixed-method studies will include additional elements. Mixed-method studies are inherently more complex and require high levels of sophistication and clarity in their design and presentation. Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2010) developed comprehensive guidelines for conducting mixed-methods research in counseling. You will be expected to address each of their recommendations in your study. The following recommendations are summarized by Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2010), and represent minimum standards for mixed methods dissertations:

1. In Chapter One, you include the rationale and goals for using mixed methodology and how a mixed method approach is justified for your study. You address participant enrichment, instrument fidelity, treatment integrity, and significance enhancement.
2. In Chapter Two, you provide a mixed research synthesis.
3. In Chapter Three, you:
 - a. Discuss sampling designs, discussing whether your sample will be based on a parallel, nested, or multilevel methodology.
 - b. Address the timing of the sampling, discussing if data collection is sequential or concurrent.
 - c. Discuss the level of mixing in your data analysis plan.
 - d. Discuss data collection strategies and instrumentation, interview, and process to collect data and how these data collection strategies are congruent with your sampling approach.
 - e. Describe your data analysis strategies and discuss your plans to qualitatively analyze, quantitatively assess, consolidate, compare, and integrate your data.
 - f. Address all data preparation, trustworthiness, credibility, reliability, and validity expectations.
4. In Chapter Four, you follow your mixed data analysis plans and present the data in a clear, logical manner. You use text, figures, statements, themes, tables, etc. that convey your mixed method results.
5. In Chapter Five, you summarize the study and findings, and link your results to the broader literature base. In general, this chapter includes your discussion of findings, implications, suggestions for future research, and conclusion. Other requirements will depend on your selected methodology.

APPENDIX D: REFERENCES AND DISSERTATION RESOURCES

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