

Walden University

# Dissertation Premise

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# The Premise

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

- To **identify a preliminary topic** for your dissertation. This topic should be the product of initial investigation on your part, but will be subject to change and refinement as you develop your prospectus and then your proposal.
- To help **identify 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 can be used to create your premise document. You will also find a sample premise herein to serve as a guide for your work.

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. At this point, you do not need to know everything about the research project, especially the details of your methodology.

Your document should follow APA sixth-edition guidelines 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* at the end of this guide.

## Submitting the Premise

Every doctoral student's journey is a little different, so it is difficult to say exactly when to start the *Dissertation Premise*. Be sure to check your Program of Study. Because the premise is used to form your supervisory committee, however, you should plan to start the premise toward completion of your core research sequence, and at least two quarters before beginning the *Dissertation Prospectus*, either in a companion or dissertation course, or in the SBSF 7100 research forum. In the quarter prior to starting your prospectus, you will submit your premise to the faculty member who you nominate as chair of your supervisory committee.

**To nominate a committee member** you must also send the *Committee Member Nomination Form* along with your premise document to the nominee. More information is available on the form, which can be found in the [Forms](#) area of the [Office of Student Research Administration](#).

**Note:** The *Dissertation Premise* will be used to help you form your dissertation supervisory committee, but you will confirm your committee structure and finalize your topic at the end of the prospectus development process.

# An Annotated Outline

## Title Page

The recommended title length is 12 words 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.

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

## Title

The title as it appears on the title page, double-spaced if over one line of type and centered at the top of the page. The title follows the word Premise and a colon.

## 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 three to five key citations that highlight the relevance and currency of the problem.

## Approach for the Study

Select a possible research approach that is appropriate for the tentative topic identified in the problem statement:

- Quantitative**
- Qualitative**
- Mixed Methods, primarily quantitative**
- Mixed Methods, primarily qualitative**
- Other: Specify**

## References

Include APA-formatted references for all citations made within the *Dissertation Premise*.

# 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 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.

# Sample Premise

Updated May 30, 2012.

Premise

How Online Doctoral Students Develop a Dissertation Problem Statement

Alpha B. Gamma

General Studies program – General specialization

Walden University

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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; Lim, Dannels, & Watkins, 2008). 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. 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 environment. Hence, this research will fill this gap in understanding by focusing specifically on the development of problem statements by students in online doctoral programs.

### **Approach for the Study**

Mixed methods, primarily qualitative

## References

- Baltes, B., Hoffman-Kipp, P., Lynn, L., & Weltzer-Ward, L. (2010). Students' research self-efficacy during online doctoral research courses. *Contemporary Issues in Education Research, 3*(3), 51–58.
- Lim, J. H., Dannels, S. A., & Watkins, R. (2008). Qualitative investigation of doctoral students' learning experiences in online research methods courses. *Quarterly Review of Distance Education, 9*(704), 223–236.
- Lovitts, B. (2008). The transition to independent research: Who makes it, who doesn't, and why. *Journal of Higher Education, 79*(3), 296–325. doi:10.1353/jhe.0.0006
- Walker, G. E., Golde, C. M., Jones, L., Conklin-Bueschel, A., & Hutchings, P. (2009). *The formation of scholars: Rethinking doctoral education for the twenty-first century*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.