

Guidelines for Three-Article Dissertations

Objectives for a Three-Article Dissertation are:

- To support doctoral students who are interested in publishing their research;
- To offer the student guidance and mentoring in the publication of their research;
- To provide the student who is interested in pursuing a career in higher education an opportunity to add to their CV; and
- To assist the student in immediate application of their programmatic research foundations.

Contents of a Three-Article Dissertation:

- Front Matter (e.g., title page, abstract, etc.) See [MSU guidelines](#) for all dissertations and the Graduate School's template for a 3-article dissertation format.
- Introduction (Chapter 1), which explains the importance and coherence of the collection of articles, including conceptual and/or theoretical links across the articles.
- Middle chapters, which consist of articles suitable for publication.
- Concluding chapter (Chapter 5), which discusses findings and implications of the collection of articles, making clear the coherence of the work.
- References and appendices that are not included within each article should be compiled at the end of the dissertation.

Together, the student and their committee decide on the format of the articles of the dissertation in light of the student's project and career goals. Three-article dissertation configurations might include:

- 1 literature review article (similar to those in [Review of Educational Research](#))
2 empirical, theoretical, or methodological articles
- 1 literature review article
1 empirical, theoretical, or methodological article
1 practitioner article
- 1 or 2 empirical, theoretical, or methodological articles
1 or 2 practitioner articles
- Three empirical, theoretical, or methodological articles
- Another format that committee members agree is acceptable.

A certain amount of overlap between the three articles may be inevitable and is therefore acceptable. For example, portions of the literature review may need to be cited in the various articles because it delineates the entire historical background of the study's focal topic. Redundancy can be carefully reduced by citing one's own work. However, self-plagiarism - reusing one's own previously written work or data in a 'new' written product without letting the reader know that this material has appeared elsewhere - is prohibited.

Dissertation Proposal:

The student should obtain committee approval for the dissertation structure at the proposal stage. The proposal should include a synthesis of literature to set the stage for the work being proposed, an outline of each proposed article, and details of the proposed methods for each scholarly article. Non-student co-authors, if any, must be identified at the proposal defense.

The dissertation proposal must include:

1. An introductory chapter
2. A literature review chapter
3. A methodology chapter
4. An outline of any articles in progress
5. A list of proposed journals
6. A timeline for completion of the work

The dissertation proposal defense is expected to parallel the proposal defense for a traditional dissertation. The three-article dissertation alters the format, but not the content, expected in the dissertation research. [Similarly, the final defense will mirror that of the traditional dissertation defense.]

General Notes:

1. The dissertation must form a coherent body of work, with the introduction and concluding chapters making this coherence clear. The dissertation must include an abstract that synthesizes the articles, as well as an introduction (Chapter 1) and a conclusion (Chapter 5) that discusses the synthesis of what is learned from the three articles.
2. The **introduction** should function as the cord that weaves the various manuscripts together and describes, for the reader, their 'collective meaning' and 'combined contribution' to the field. It should include:
 - a. A definition or statement of the problem.
 - b. The importance of the problem, i.e., why it's worth researching, why it matters to the field.
 - c. The theoretical foundation(s) supporting the problem/issue.
 - d. An overview of the important literature (overview, because each article will have its own unique literature review).
 - e. The research questions.
 - f. The methodology used to answer those questions.

3. The **conclusion** will briefly summarize the dissertation’s major findings, limitations, discussion, and recommendations. It will also present and discuss linkages between the separate manuscripts that are included in the dissertation, striving as much as possible to present the document as representative of a coherent body of work. The conclusion chapter ties everything together and helps the reader see how the various manuscripts, taken together, contribute to the knowledge base regarding the problem. The conclusion chapter should present/discuss research imperatives, or knowledge gaps, not visible when each manuscript is considered individually and should articulate how the findings from the three articles guide practice, policy, and education, and set an agenda for future research on the issues addressed in the dissertation.
4. The student must be the first author on all articles and must clearly contribute the majority of the original conceptual and intellectual work for each article. Non-student co-authors must be identified at the student’s proposal defense. The role of these co-authors on each article must be presented to and approved by all members of the dissertation committee. The student’s committee must approve any changes in co-authorship.

Publication Guidelines:

1. Articles must be of publishable quality, but submission and publication are not required for final dissertation approval. The student should seek committee advice on publication outlets (even in the case of rejections and revise-and-resubmits), which might include scholarly journals, practitioner journals, edited books, or other venues. Journals to which articles are being submitted must be approved by the dissertation committee. Serving as an “editorial board” for the student, the committee will help select journals that will challenge the student and offer a reasonable chance of publication success.
2. If the journal reviewers suggest modifications to any of the three submitted manuscripts prior to the dissertation defense, a plan for addressing those suggestions should be shared with dissertation committee members and approved by all of them before the changes are enacted. Changes can be made to any of the three manuscripts if the dissertation committee members are aware of and agree to the changes being made and their rationale. Students may opt to defer changes requested by a journal to which they have submitted an article until their dissertation has been successfully defended.

These guidelines were developed from those at [Indiana University Bloomington](#), [The University of Texas at Austin](#), and [The University of Tennessee at Knoxville](#).