

How to Prepare the Idea Paper

(Revised from the documents developed by [Dr. Tim Ellis](#))

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1. In General ...

- 1.1. Be succinct
 - 1.1.1. 25 pages (double spaced) should be enough
 - 1.1.2. 40 pages (double spaced) absolute maximum
- 1.2. Be thorough
 - 1.2.1. Include all required sections
 - 1.2.2. Cover each section completely (as outlined below)
- 1.3. Be scholarly
 - 1.3.1. Support statements of fact with citations from appropriate literature
 - 1.3.2. Clearly distinguish between facts and theories/opinions/beliefs/aspirations
 - 1.3.3. No grammatical errors
 - 1.3.4. No format errors
- 1.4. Should
 - 1.4.1. Represent significant research – minimum of 25 appropriate references
 - 1.4.2. Demonstrate that the proposed focus for the dissertation has been examined thoroughly

2. Problem Statement and Goals

- 2.1. First and foremost, you must identify a research-worthy problem
 - 2.1.1. Problem =
 - 2.1.1.1. Something going wrong
 - 2.1.1.2. Active, not passive (i.e. a missed opportunity is not a problem)
 - 2.1.1.3. Impacts people
 - 2.1.1.3.1. Identifiable, meaningful population
 - 2.1.1.3.2. Not just a single person or specific company or organization
 - 2.1.1.4. Generalizable
 - 2.1.1.5. No “adequate” solution currently available
 - 2.1.2. Research = original contribution to the body of knowledge
 - 2.1.2.1. Original =
 - 2.1.2.1.1. Individual work
 - 2.1.2.1.2. Something new, however small, added to our understanding
 - 2.1.2.1.3. Explore the unknown
 - 2.1.2.1.4. If the answer is already known, not research
 - 2.1.2.2. Body of knowledge =
 - 2.1.2.2.1. Applicable to the domain of your discipline (i.e. computing technology in education, information systems, etc)
 - 2.1.2.2.2. Anchored in previous research and/or theory

- 2.1.3. Research-Worthy =
 - 2.1.3.1.Theoretical basis for the problem's
 - 2.1.3.1.1. Cause(s)
 - 2.1.3.1.2. Impact – who it effects
 - 2.1.3.1.3. Intensity – why it causes so much “pain and suffering”
 - 2.1.3.2.Implies an appropriate solution
 - 2.1.3.2.1. Within the domain of your discipline
 - 2.1.3.2.2. For which you have adequate resources
 - 2.1.3.2.3. For dissertation-level scholarship
- 2.2. Problem statement
 - 2.2.1. Make a succinct, clear statement of the problem
 - 2.2.1.1.Succinct = 25 words or less
 - 2.2.1.2.Clear = direct and to-the-point
 - 2.2.2. Follow the statement of the problem with a well-supported discussion of its scope and nature. Well supported entails:
 - 2.2.2.1.Peer reviewed sources such as edited journals or conference proceedings
 - 2.2.2.2.Recent sources – generally speaking, nothing over 3 years old
 - 2.2.2.3.Applicable sources – sources germane to your topic.
 - 2.2.3. The discussion of the problem should include
 - 2.2.3.1.What is the problem
 - 2.2.3.2.Why is it a problem
 - 2.2.3.3.How did the problem evolve/develop – issues and events leading to the problem
- 2.3. Goals
 - 2.3.1. Make a succinct statement of the goal for your study
 - 2.3.1.1.Succinct = 25 words or less
 - 2.3.1.2.Goal = solution you propose for the problem you've identified
 - 2.3.2. Establish a conceptual and/or theoretical framework for the proposed work
 - 2.3.2.1.Why would your approach have a realistic chance of addressing the problem
 - 2.3.2.2.Provide adequate support for that goal.
 - 2.3.2.2.1. Effective use of the proposed solution in other instances
 - 2.3.2.2.2. Ideally, instances of similar solutions used to solve similar problems
 - 2.3.3. Research questions
 - 2.3.3.1.Serve as the ‘glue’ that binds the problem identified with the goals (solutions) proposed
 - 2.3.3.2.Your research questions should be appropriate to the type of study you propose.
 - 2.3.3.2.1. Research
 - 2.3.3.2.2. Developmental problem solving
 - 2.3.3.2.3. Evaluative problem solving

3. Relevance, Significance, and Brief Review of the Literature

- 3.1. This section must provide the necessary support for both your problem statement and goals.
- 3.2. All statements made must be supported by citations from appropriate literature.
- 3.3. Make Relevance, Significance, and Brief Review of the Literature each a separate subsection of this section
- 3.4. In Relevance section, you need to address three topics
 - 3.4.1. The scope of your problem
 - 3.4.1.1. How far-ranging is the problem
 - 3.4.1.2. How great is the impact of the problem
 - 3.4.2. Why is it a problem
 - 3.4.2.1. What has been tried without success to correct the situation
 - 3.4.2.2. Why have those attempts not been successful
 - 3.4.3. Why does your proposed solution (the goals for your study) offer promise as a resolution to the problem
- 3.5. In Significance section, you need to address how your study will add to the knowledge base
 - 3.5.1. Show potential generalizability of your results
 - 3.5.2. Show potential for original work
- 3.6. In Brief Review of the Literature section, you need to
 - 3.6.1. Select key words from your problem statement, and do a search of those words/phrases using library and possibly Internet sources.
 - 3.6.2. After conducting an initial search, go through the abstracts to see which are the most noteworthy or helpful to you. For example, 12 articles that are opinions and none that are research won't usually do much for you in terms of credibility.
 - 3.6.3. After acquiring relevant literature, look for other resources mentioned in the literature that may be relevant to your study that you did not find initially.
 - 3.6.4. Organize articles, draft an outline of the literature review, and mark which articles fit where. If you have gaps then you may need to get more articles.
 - 3.6.5. Clearly identify the major areas on which you will need to focus your research.
 - 3.6.6. Include at least 3 or 4 citations for each major area
 - 3.6.7. Write the review, and remember—
 - 3.6.7.1. Don't just "point" to the literature; it is supposed to be a critical review
 - 3.6.7.1.1. Describe each article completely
 - 3.6.7.1.2. Analyze each article and compare and contrast the findings with those of other articles you have read
 - 3.6.7.1.3. Evaluate the impact of the article on the body of knowledge in general and on your proposed study
 - 3.6.7.2. Organize your review by topic/ideas/variables. Make sure your transitions between each are cohesive and tie together.

4. Barriers and Issues

- 4.1. In this section you must substantiate that the study you are proposing is of adequate scope to warrant dissertation level work
 - 4.1.1. Dissertation level work entails at least 1 year of full time work for 1 person
 - 4.1.2. Dissertation level work also entails a certain depth of analysis – you must discuss how your proposed project is not superficial
- 4.2. You should show how the problem is inherently difficult to solve
- 4.3. You should also show how the solution you propose on effecting is likewise difficult.

5. Approach

- 5.1. Your approach must be appropriate for the type of study you propose
 - 5.1.1. Research
 - 5.1.1.1. Experimental
 - 5.1.1.2. Historical
 - 5.1.1.3. Descriptive
 - 5.1.2. Developmental problem solving
 - 5.1.3. Evaluative problem solving
- 5.2. Your approach section must provide a detailed, step-by-step description of how you will conduct your study to
 - 5.2.1. reach the goals identified
 - 5.2.2. address the problem identified
- 5.3. The approach section must provide adequate detail to demonstrate
 - 5.3.1. The feasibility of the proposed study
 - 5.3.2. The appropriateness and rigor of the proposed methodology

6. Milestones

- 6.1. Essentially a project management instrument
- 6.2. Identify the critical points for your dissertation development.
- 6.3. Do not confuse these steps with the steps I mentioned in reference to the Approach section.
 - 6.3.1. In the Approach section you discuss only the steps you will follow in conducting your experiment, developing your product, etc.
 - 6.3.2. In this section, you discuss the steps necessary to complete the dissertation.
- 6.4. You may use an accepted project management tool for this section, if you desire
 - 6.4.1. Gantt Chart
 - 6.4.2. PERT Chart
- 6.5. Precise detail is not necessary at this stage – just identify the major steps.

7. Resources

- 7.1. Your list of resources should be appropriate to the type of study you are proposing.
- 7.2. You must include all resources you will need, such as
 - 7.2.1. Hardware
 - 7.2.2. Software
 - 7.2.3. Networks
 - 7.2.4. Data communications
 - 7.2.5. Access to students
 - 7.2.6. Access to experts in the field
 - 7.2.7. Access to peers
 - 7.2.8. Standardized tests, surveys, or other forms of instrumentation

8. Annotated Bibliography (**Note: This section is NOT required in the Dissertation Guide, but it IS required for all my advisees.**)

- 8.1. Use the correct format
 - 8.1.1. For citation
 - 8.1.1.1. Be in accordance with the GSCIS Dissertation Guide and APA (5th ed)
 - 8.1.1.2. Listed in alphabetical order by primary author last name
 - 8.1.2. For annotations
 - 8.1.2.1. No more than two paragraphs
 - 8.1.2.1.1. One paragraph describes the cited work
 - 8.1.2.1.2. Another paragraph addresses how the cited work is related to your proposed study
 - 8.1.2.2. Use complete, well-written sentences
 - 8.1.2.3. Summarize and paraphrase – avoid direct quotes unless absolutely necessary
- 8.2. Suggestion: Use a reference management program
 - 8.2.1. Commercial products
 - 8.2.1.1. Endnote (**Free for all NSU registered students**)
 - 8.2.1.2. Reference Manager
 - 8.2.2. Free, unsupported, product available from Dr. Ellis' Links page (<http://scis.nova.edu/~ellist/abdb.htm>)