

Thesis Checklist for the



WKU M.A. in Psychology Clinical Concentration

Date Last Edited: August 15, 2017

This is offered as a help to understanding the general thesis process. If any part of this checklist conflicts with official WKU policies, for example the Graduate Guidelines or College of Education and Behavioral Sciences Guidelines, the official policies should be followed and a correction for this checklist sent to the Director of the M.A. Program immediately.

Note: If you are viewing this digitally within Word, choose View in the top menu and then look for Navigation Pane in the “Show” section of the ribbon (2013). It was called the Document Map in earlier versions. This will open a menu to the left of the document that shows all topics (like a Table of Contents) and allows you to jump to the section of interest.

Introduction

There are many reasons for creating a thesis project.

- The project takes your intellectual and scholarship abilities to the next level.
- It gives you an opportunity to develop a specialization/expertise for your professional career.
- It teaches you how to manage large professional level projects.
- It demonstrates your readiness for professional life and
- It contributes new knowledge to science and the human pursuit.

This checklist is a rough guide to the process of doing a thesis. Each project will have unique qualities and challenges. This checklist can only be a structure or skeleton within which to develop your particular ideas. Procedures and rules do change periodically so check and double-check. I have provided URLs to encourage you to do so.

- ☐ After reading this, start at the end of the document filling in your target dates for each of the major stages of the thesis, examining the task description to make an estimate. Work up to the beginning based on your target graduation date. **Assume that unexpected life events will arise to delay you from your target date. Figure in at least a month lost to such obstacles.** For example, if you typically get a cold twice a year, then over two years you will not be at your best for one month. If your car needs repairs or a family member is sick then add more time lost. If you miss a deadline and cannot start data collection in the fall, you could be delayed until February because of final exams and winter term. Add at least 1 month to your estimate. A prior student suggested estimating four times longer than you think. And those two years are much shorter than you think.
- ☐ Practically speaking, your thesis has to be in final, final form, all revisions made, by the 4th week before the end of the semester in which you want to graduate.
- ☐ Most prior graduates say they wish they had started on the first day of the first semester. Or perhaps starting as soon as possible is one of the skills learned from a thesis.

Pre-Thesis Preparation. Date: _____

- ☐ Start a research journal for ideas you find in course readings, casual conversations, or extracurricular reading. Ordinarily one goes from “zero ideas” to “too many” to “none look okay” to “getting help from your chair in focusing the idea.” Your goal is a number of okay ideas that will sustain your interest and can be sculpted. None will or can be perfect so do not dither. Pick one that seems do-able and respond to each limitation with it.
- ☐ If you will use human subjects on your thesis (most do), complete the [CITI \(Collaborative IRB Training Initiative\) human subjects use training](#). This is a national program and transfers across schools. If you have not yet done it, create an account using your name (as known to WKU) and select WKU.

- Use your WKU email.
 - Complete: [1] Social/Behavioral Research Course (live human beings) & [2] Social and Behavioral Responsible Conduct of Research Course (RCR.) (Each of the two modules has been reported to take roughly 2-3 hours to complete, please consider this in your research time line.) There is a quiz on each section. Record this credential in your professional file (start a folder for professional materials—both digital and print folder) and on your vita with date completed.
 - If you go to a doctoral program you can affiliate your training with the new school and not have to re-take it (if it is within 3 years. Everyone renews every 3 years.)
- [Review WKU's procedures for research](#) and especially look at the [Institutional Review Board \(IRB\) procedure](#) so you have a sense of the process and *how long it takes.*
- Create [your IRBNet account](#) (link in the left menu) using your name known to WKU and select WKU for your human subjects review board process. Use your WKU email. You will submit your application for your project here. Eventually you will link your thesis advisor to your account and have him/her review your materials *before* submitting them to IRB.
- **Learn the research interests of the psychology faculty.** These are the persons who will be chairing your thesis. Talk with each faculty member to determine his or her research interests. Go to the [psychology faculty web page](#) and read the research interests posted there. Faculty will have more interests than those listed but this will give you an idea of general themes. It is okay to consider personality match factors in selecting your committee.

Read psychology journal articles. Read psychology journal articles. Read psychology journal articles. (And *Psychology Today* does not count.) They are the best source of research ideas. Discussion sections of articles often mention a specific need for additional research—and there is your thesis idea! Use a reference software, such as [Zotero](#), to keep track of your references and create bibliographies quickly. (You have to proof the reference software's style as everyone and their brother is entering the information. But it is still superior to doing it all yourself.)

- Consider using writing software such as [Scrivener](#) or [OneNote](#). These tools let you organize the many topics a large project will generate and then export into Word for formatting. If you tend to be disorganized in your writing it may be a good idea assuming you are comfortable with software. Do read reviews as folks tend to feel strongly about their choice of writing software.
- Alternatively the [classic outline](#) is an excellent method for organizing thinking. Tutorials are available online for your version of Word that will show you efficient steps. Practice with your course papers.

Beginning the Thesis. Date: _____

- **Select a general thesis topic and begin to focus your reading.** [See this resource for how to tackle this task \(except the "chapters" in a thesis already have the names Introduction, Method, Results and Discussion\).](#) Your goal is to develop several do-able ideas on a topic in

which you are interested in and enjoy reading. Finding do-able ideas depends on reading enough background on an idea to be able to visualize specific steps and needs and questions yet to be answered. Your idea will change through the course of the project but first target an area and sculpt it from there with the help of your thesis chair.

- Like any large task break it down into steps that are accomplishable. Do not try to change the world with your thesis or you will never get started. It is plenty to add one brick to the pile of knowledge.
- Use the **five-minute method**: Commit to working on a project for five minutes every day. If you get to the end of the five-minutes and want to continue, that's fine for another five minutes. If not, quit with the knowledge that you got five minutes done and over time, that will be enough.

___ A replication is a fine idea and your faculty may have ideas available for the taking. Don't delay. Time gets away! Study the [Graduate school requirements for the thesis](#).

___ I repeat: Use a reference software, such as [Zotero](#), to keep track of your references and create bibliographies quickly. (You have to proof the reference software's style as people from varied backgrounds are entering the information. But it is still superior to doing it all yourself.)

___ You can use 3x5 cards or sticky notes for organizing your thoughts. Record notes about each reference on a single card and you can arrange and rearrange them. Or you can do the same in a writing software such as Scrivener or OneNote (see above).

___ Check PsycInfo. Check WKU Libraries database. Use Interlibrary Loan as needed. And only then use Google Scholar. Much of what you need is not freely available.

___ Citations should be appropriate to the topic. They may be **from any time period**. Sometimes undergraduate students are taught to only use "current" citations. Graduate students are expected to know all the relevant literature, regardless of time frame.

- **Identify a thesis chair (aka research director, aka thesis advisor).** Discuss your ideas with potential chairs and look for someone who is interested in your topic and available to help. You are in the driver's seat so you need to specifically say if you want to work with a particular person or are still "shopping." They may refer you to someone who they believe would be a better fit. Usually there is some casting about before a "match" is made, like buying a car you have to live with. Your goal in a thesis chair is someone who will help you complete your thesis. Ideally the chair is knowledgeable in the topic as they can then guide you around problem areas and provide shortcuts.

- If no one on the faculty matches what you want to do, consider a) changing your area of interest to one that matches faculty, b) modifying your topic area so that it includes both your and faculty interests, or c) make a convincing case to someone that you can work more independently and that the idea will not fall apart. Option c requires that you be further along than a few general ideas.
- Note: The thesis members must have graduate faculty status—most of us do. The persons who are instructors or on transitional retirement may not. You'll have to ask the circumstances.

- ❑ **Write and discard several versions of an [Introduction paragraph](#)** for your thesis. Begin developing your reference (journal articles). Discuss with chair. Your goal is to have something, anything, on paper from which to build. The sooner you do it, the sooner you graduate. If your goal is to put perfect words on paper on an idea that has no flaws and will always seem the perfect idea, you will never finish. If your goal is to get words on paper that can be edited, about an idea for which you know and can address the flaws, and for which you are willing to ride a roller-coaster of emotion, then you are in good shape to finish.
 - Be learning oriented, not performance oriented.

Deepening the Project. Date: _____

- ❑ Once you have a chair and have developed your idea further with your chair, work with the chair to form a thesis committee. Chairs can be from any psychological area (clinical, school, experimental, etc.). Members can be from other departments but they must all be graduate faculty status. [Check this list of graduate faculty and look at expiration dates](#). It is common to have to substitute a person down the road. Inform the program chair of in writing of your committee so various criteria can be checked.
- ❑ **Complete the [Committee Selection Form](#)**. You will need to file the form with the graduate school in order to enroll in Thesis (PSY 599) classes.
- ❑ There are at least 2 approaches at this point (or more – take your thesis advisor’s advice):
Writing an introduction first or writing the method first.
 - a. Write a [draft full Introduction](#) and read more on your topic, checking the citations of the first set of references for more citations. Your goal is a draft that outlines the logic of your idea and gives the context, background and literature. This then guides your hypotheses and method.
 - b. Write a draft Method section which will then drive what you do in the Introduction and your hypotheses. It can be easier to work from the concrete back to the conceptual. Write a draft [Method section](#) (also see [this tutorial](#)) while consulting with your thesis chair. If you have done your background reading, a Method can be written in a few hours (and revised with discussion over time). Some suggest creating a [draft Institutional Review Board \(IRB\) proposal](#) (because the form asks you questions you need to consider) from which you modify your Method section. Others say start from the Method section and then write the IRB form. (Do not submit the IRB form. Give your chair access before you go further). Consider what manipulation checks you need to determine if the study unfolded as expected. **If you wish to give online questionnaires** to subjects, the university provides [survey software](#).
- ❑ Give the draft to your thesis chair. Remember that the chair has to fit reading your draft into a busy schedule. Keep track of his/her life and set your personal deadlines accordingly. The chair may guide your thinking toward a more finished product after reading your draft. The ideas are the main focus at this point.

- It is a good idea to write a brief summary of what you and your chair discussed—basically to keep a diary or journal. Then ~~if~~ when you get a bit lost you can look back at the development of the idea. And if you have to substitute a committee member you can more easily fill him/her in on the development of the ideas.
- ❑ **If you will use the undergraduate subject pool for your study**, learn about [the Study Board](#). Note the link for Researchers (that’s you) on the left. Your faculty advisor will be associated with your account as a researcher and get notices relevant to your research. Even if you are using only online questionnaires (more likely to be completed), you must set times for the study or the slots will not show to the students.
 - You need to provide an estimate of how many credits you will use each semester—that means planning ahead.
- ❑ **Polish your thesis proposal document with the help of your thesis director.** Some directors want you to include a discussion of possible analyses and discussion of possible outcomes, appendices and references. Others don’t want you to do that. Ask. The sooner you write it, the sooner you graduate, complete your license and find employment.
 - Assume that unexpected life events will arise to delay you from your target date. Figure in at least a month, even two lost to such obstacles.
 - A proposal is written in the future tense (“Subjects will be asked to…”).
- ❑ **Once you have your director’s approval, work with your committee to set a date for meeting for review of your proposal.** [Doodle](#) can make it easier to coordinate schedules. **PLEASE: Do not include times your committee has classes. (Look them up in TopNet). This saves everyone annoyances.** The date will be **2 weeks out** from when you can hand them your proposal. It can be especially challenging to find a date in the first week or within the last month of the semester or during the month of July. Work to avoid those crunch times or add a month to your schedule. Aim for a thesis proposal in the first summer or the 3rd semester as early as possible. Remember you will **also** be doing internship in the 3rd semester.

Have Thesis Proposal to Committee. Date: _____

- ❑ IF members of the committee changed from the original [Committee Selection Form](#), you must submit a revised form.

Thesis Proposal Meeting. Date: _____

Typically you will be asked to do a very brief overview (10-15 minutes max). Then committee members will ask questions and the group (that includes you) will discuss how to tackle the topic. Often creative ideas for making your project more efficient arise. And some that require more steps. The committee goal is that you have a successful project. You and your chair will take notes and after you will discuss the expectations with your chair.

- ❑ **After you meet with your thesis committee make the changes they require.**

- ❑ **Register for thesis hours Psy 599. These are usually taken during the second year of the program.** They should be scheduled when you are doing most of the work on your thesis. You should expect an Incomplete for the first three hours of Thesis that you take. The grade will be changed by the program coordinator when you have completed the thesis. If you have completed all of your course work, including thesis hours, but have not yet completed your thesis, you must register for an additional hour of coursework (called Matriculation Maintenance) every semester prior to and including the semester in which you have your oral examination.

Institutional Review Board Date: _____

- ❑ **Obtain Institutional Review Board (IRB; older term is Human Subject Review Board (HSRB) approval for your thesis. Complete [human subjects review application and process](#).** You may NOT collect data on human subjects until you have IRB approval. Use your chair if you have questions. Wording is important so have your chair review your application first. Approval may take a few days to a month, depending on your project and risk to participants. You **may not change any procedures** from what the IRB approved without filing a revision and submitting to another review.
 - Note that the Board is particular about the terms consent vs. assent. Assent is agreement by an individual not competent to give legally valid consent.
 - Note that the Board is also particular about the terms confidential vs anonymous. Anonymous means no identifying information is collected or the project cannot link an individual's identifiers with their responses. Confidential means information has been disclosed in a relationship of trust and that it will not be disclosed to others.
 - When working with outside organizations a letter of cooperation must be included from that organization.
 - ***The later it is in the term the harder it is to get undergraduate subjects from the pool who will take your study seriously.** If giving online questionnaires (which is faster data collection), build in a manipulation check so you can tell if they read your questions or just randomly checked them off. Time to completion can be a clue.

Collecting Data. Date: _____

- ❑ **After you have IRB approval, collect data and also work on formatting of your core document, references, and appendices.** Again, do not procrastinate on this. Data collection ALWAYS takes much longer than students anticipate. You are not in control of who signs up for your study.
 - Design your thesis study so that you are collecting your own data and do not have to rely on others. Remember, no one cares as much about your thesis as you do.
 - Study Board notes: Variable credit studies are not allowed (e.g., No "1-3 credits".) You may only award credit to those who have actually participated.
- ❑ Keep your chair informed of what is occurring.

Writing Steps. Date: _____

- ☐ **Review and rewrite Introduction and Method. Write Results and Discussion. Prepare appendices and do formatting. Your last step is completing the Abstract and the Table of Contents.** Review the following formatting issues. Be obsessive to save yourself revisions and time. Your document will come back to you for revision (and back and back) if you miss any of these.
 - The final thesis is written in the past tense (“The hypotheses were...” “Subjects did...”) and so the entire proposal must be modified.

Formatting Date: _____. Formatting cannot be done in a day as you will see when you read through it.

- ☐ Please be sure that you have the
 - APA Style manual and electronic citations in particular as we see many errors in those. [APA has a very helpful site](#). In addition [the Purdue writing lab also offers good information](#).
 - [Guidelines for Master’s Thesis & Specialist Project](#) from the Graduate School,
 - [Thesis and Specialist Project Guidelines](#) from the College of Education and Behavioral Sciences (CEBS),
 - [Thesis/Specialist Project Submission Checklist](#) for CEBS. It is no longer submitted to the Dean but given to your chair.
 - [College Reader Approval and Copyright Permission Form](#) from the Graduate School. You fill it out, no signatures.
- ☐ **Do NOT blindly follow the formatting of a prior student. The university and college requirements regularly change.**
- ☐ Check formatting and **page numbers** of the beginning pages—roman numerals then Arabic.
- ☐ **Page number font must match the font in the narrative**
- ☐ **Add a fly page (blank page) to the beginning and end of the document.**
- ☐ **Check that measurements are correct on the title page (use a ruler—the graduate school will). No page number.**
- ☐ ****Measurements are correct on signature page** (use a ruler); the signature page is more problematic since it requires new signatures if the formatting has to be changed. Get it correct! **Take out a ruler and measure a print copy. Incorrect measurements are the most common reason to return a thesis.** It is a nightmare to re-do because faculty may be unavailable. And bring 2 or 3 copies in case someone errs when signing.
 - Use the full names of faculty (my preference) and their degree (Ph.D. or Psy.D.) on the signature page and abstract). Use a ruler to measure it—that is what the reader is going to do.
 - **Do not trust** that simply copying and pasting will work as different Word programs with different settings can treat it differently.
 - You will give the original to the Graduate School. Keep several copies.

- The chair must complete the **Comprehensive Exam/Capstone form (formerly Form E)** which is on TopNet under “Advisors” tab. Remind him/her. The chair must do this no later than the day final grades are due. Ideally he/she does it upon successful defense. Remind him/her.
- ❑ **The Contents** section (you may use “Table of Contents”) must have all headings **exactly** as in the document with no extra headings. The Contents section does include the phrase “List of Figures” and/or “List of Tables” if you have those. The Contents page **DOES NOT** include the actual list of table headings (e.g., Figure 1: Illustration of X) and/or actual list of figures (those actual lists go in their own referenced List). Any other sections that follow the Table of Contents are to be included on the Contents page.
- ❑ **List of Tables, List of Figures.**
 - Titles of tables and/or figures must match exactly the title in the narrative. They drift. Check.
 - Tables take some finagling...usually a couple of iterations to get them done well. Read the APA style manual for directions.
 - Tables do **NOT** extend past the right margin and all need to be double spaced.
 - All fonts must match the font in the body of the thesis.
- ❑ **Correct spacing** on headings and paragraphs—no extra lines, no fewer lines. Word likes to insert extra lines when you aren’t looking.
- ❑ **Margins** correct everywhere.
- ❑ Do **page numbers** start in Roman on the correct page and in Arabic with the correct number?
- ❑ **Abstract** is less than 350 words according to the last college reader.
- ❑ Method, Results, Discussion sections start on **new pages**.
- ❑ **Numbers** are spelled out or in number form as per the APA rule.
- ❑ Follow APA for **proper citation** of **references** in the body of the paper and in the reference section, particularly in reference to multiple authors.
 - Use both names always if only 2 authors.
 - If 3 authors, the first time use all 3, then first name and et al. If 6 or more authors always use et al.
 - If listing multiple studies then they must go in alphabetical order.
 - If you use Zotero, it saves you time but is imperfect. You have to check its output even if it claims it is APA style.
- ❑ **Check that references in the body match the Reference section and that the Reference section list matches the body**—none missing, none extra.
- ❑ **Appendices** follow the References as per the college reader. **Do not trust the Graduate School example or peer examples. Follow the guidelines which are more frequently updated.**

- No extra page to identify the appendices. The word APPENDIX A, B, C... is at the top of the page of the actual appendix followed by the title.
- Use the actual document in the Appendices. Include the IRB approval, measures, perhaps additional analyses that didn't seem relevant for the main Results section but are interesting or answer a likely question. If you used the university online survey software then export a pdf for inclusion in your thesis. Try "print" and replace the destination from the printer to "Export to pdf". Sometimes that doesn't work and you just have to copy and paste.

☐ **Read at least one print copy.** You see different things in print than digital.

Turn thesis over to committee. Date: _____

- ☐ At least two weeks before you plan on defending, ask your committee if they want a print or digital copy to review and provide the format they desire.
- ☐ For degree completion in spring or summer, students must go to the Apply for Graduation via TopNet early in the fall term. You must do this even if you aren't planning on participating in Commencement.

Defend your thesis. Date: _____

- ☐ **Once you have your director's approval, work with your committee to set a date for meeting for your thesis defense (aka oral examination).** [Doodle](#) can make it easier to coordinate schedules. **PLEASE: Do not include times your committee has classes. (Look them up in TopNet).** It can be especially challenging to find a date in the first week or within the last month of the semester or during the month of July. Work to avoid those crunch times. Aim for a thesis defense in the 4th semester as early as possible or just after school is out.
 - ☐ If you have completed all of your course work, including thesis hours, but have not yet completed your thesis, you must register for an additional hour of coursework (called Matriculation Maintenance) in the semester in which you have your oral examination.
- ☐ [Reserve a room](#) for your defense.
- ☐ Remind your committee the day before of time and room number.
- ☐ Prepare a brief presentation on your thesis, maximum of no more than ten minutes. The committee has read it and just needs a reminder and wants to hear your voice, help you realize what you know.
- ☐ If members of the committee changed from the original [Committee Selection Form](#), you must submit a revised form.
- ☐ If you find you are anxious regarding your defense, ask Dr. Kuhlenschmidt for a copy of her article on coping with the oral defense.

- ☐ If you have NOT carefully done the above formatting, assume you will have to do many corrections and re-do corrections. This is painful. Better to avoid it and be obsessive on the formatting. The Graduate School will send it back to you to re-do pieces...and if you are cutting time close, which most do, it could cost you tuition dollars if you miss deadlines. Do not expect faculty to rush because you are in a rush. They have other tasks on their plate as well as yours. They are more likely to help if you have been hitting the markers all along.
- ☐ Make corrections, additional analysis and additional writing as indicated by your committee.
- ☐ Update number of pages on Abstract page.
- ☐ Update page numbers in Contents, Lists.
- ☐ Meet with director to review the college checklist items (linked under Formatting).
- ☐ Send the final copy to committee and submit all required pieces to the Graduate School about 4 weeks before the end of the semester. If you leave something out it will likely sit in the Inbox instead of being read. Visit [Disposition Process](#) for details.
 - **Hand carry** the original signature page to the Graduate School (Wetherby Administration Bldg, Room 207).
 - If you have not carefully checked all of the formatting and forms, you will have to update pieces to meet the criteria and resubmit, slowing your progress.

Graduate School Approval. Date: _____

- ☐ Materials must be to the Graduate School approximately four weeks before the end of the semester (last day of finals).
- ☐ The Graduate School will send you an email when they have approved it. It can take several weeks.
- ☐ Once you have Graduate School approval send that final copy to your thesis committee.
- ☐ Remind the M.A. Program Coordinator to record your grade :0) and to post a congratulations to the department website.

Professional Obligations. Date: _____

Welcome to the community of professional psychologists! You have 2 obligations and an opportunity

- ☐ Follow through on IRB ethical commitments. Typically the defense chair keeps the data for the required period of time so provide the raw data if that hasn't yet been done. Also send a

thank you note to any organizations that helped you is courteous and sustains good relations for future students wanting to use that population.

- ☐ Pat yourself on the back. Self-care is an important part of the professional role.
- ☐ Opportunity: Talk with your chair about publication outlets and completing a publication draft. This is ever so much easier to do the same week you are finishing the above. Keep in mind you are writing for a different audience and so you will edit out large sections of your thesis.
- ☐ Once your thesis and other course work are done and you have graduated you can begin your [licensing process](#).
- ☐ Once your license process is underway and you have supervision you can accept employment.



CONGRATULATIONS!