

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE SLAT DISSERTATION

The SLAT dissertation can be completed as a traditional monograph, as a series of three articles or as a multi-modal project.

FAQ #1: I have heard that SLAT students may submit more than one type of dissertation. What are the different types?

The SLAT program accepts three types of Ph.D. dissertation:

- Traditional monograph
- 3 article dissertation
- Multi-modal project

FAQ #2: How does one decide which type of dissertation to write?

The decision about which type of dissertation to write should be made jointly by you and the chair of your committee. Special consideration should be given to:

- The scope of your research and fit of your topic with the type of dissertation
- How your academic field within SLAT views the different dissertation types
- The practical considerations regarding the (job) positions you wish to apply for when you finish your training (academia or private sector).

FAQ #3: What does the traditional dissertation look like?

The traditional dissertation is a monograph consisting of five chapters, most commonly organized in the following sequence:

- Chapter 1 - Introduction
- Chapter 2 - Literature Review
- Chapter 3 - Methods
- Chapter 4 - Results
- Chapter 5 - Conclusions/Discussion
- References
- Appendices

In the traditional dissertation, the student describes and discusses a focal research question/topic and the steps undertaken to answer that specific question. When the focal question comprises sub-questions, all questions (focal and sub-) are addressed in tandem in the dissertation reporting. For instance, the methods chapter describes all methods employed to collect and analyze data to answer the focal question as well as the sub-questions even if different data sets are employed.

The number of chapters may vary according to disciplinary fields and/or methodological approaches. For example, historical studies or critical analyses could comprise seven or

eight chapters. The five-chapter dissertation, however, has been the most common within SLAT.

FAQ #4: What does the journal articles approach look like, and how does it differ from the traditional dissertation style?

Structuring your dissertation around journal articles allows the presentation of dissertation research in the format of three journal manuscripts to be submitted for publication following dissertation defense proceedings.

The doctoral candidate decides, in agreement with his/her dissertation chair and committee, on the particular type of dissertation. The decision regarding the format is inseparably tied to the number and types of research questions being posed and how closely related they are.

The 3 article dissertation contains the following sections:

- Chapter 1 - Introduction and literature review
- Chapter 2 - Manuscript # 1
- Chapter 3 - Manuscript # 2
- Chapter 4 - Manuscript # 3
- Chapter 5 - Conclusion
- References
- Appendices

As a corollary, the 3 article dissertation may also be structured as follows:

- Chapter 1 - Introduction
- Chapter 2 - Critical literature review (journal quality)
- Chapter 3 - Manuscript # 1
- Chapter 4 - Manuscript # 2
- Chapter 5 - Conclusion
- References
- Appendices

FAQ #5: What does the multi-modal dissertation look like?

- The multi-modal dissertation is still a research project or collection of 2-3 projects with scope similar to that of monograph or journal article dissertations. The defining characteristic of the multi-modal dissertation is that part of the research is presented in a mode other than expository text. Most multi-modal dissertations in SLAT are presented in a hybrid of expository text and other modes, such as video, computer programming language, audio, 3-D physical objects, etc. Some examples of what may be included in a multi-modal dissertation include the development of a new instructional or research computer software; research on multi-modal instruction and development of video/podcast teaching materials; research using public video records (e.g. You Tube) as data and

analyzing results via text and video; research that includes mapping and/or 3-D modeling of data, etc.

FAQ #6: What is the purpose of the Introduction chapter in the journal article dissertation?

- It describes the broad research question/topic being investigated
- It presents the over-arching goal of the study (of the individual research reports, considered in tandem) as well as the specific objectives of each individual study report (each “piece”)
- It functions as the chord that weaves the various manuscripts together and describes, for the reader, their “collective meaning” and “combined contribution” to the field
- It allows the reader to connect the various manuscripts in the dissertation in a logical and meaningful manner
- Without the introduction, a journal article dissertation would read as a “pile of articles,” apparently related but not intimately linked

FAQ #7: What is the purpose of the Conclusion chapter in the journal article dissertation?

- The conclusion chapter “ties” everything together
- The conclusion chapter focuses, as does the introduction chapter, on helping the reader see how the various manuscripts, taken together, make a contribution to a particular field
- The conclusion chapter may present/discuss research imperatives, or knowledge gaps, not visible when each manuscript is considered individually

FAQ #8: Does SLAT have a required or preferred approach to the dissertation?

No. The SLAT faculty believes that having alternatives provides much-needed flexibility for doctoral candidates, yet the goal remains that of excellence in second language acquisition and teaching research. The format for disseminating such research should reflect the best choice, the best “match” for the type of study or set of studies being conducted.

FAQ #9: My dissertation chair and my committee have no experience working with the journal article or multi-modal dissertation. What should I do?

Not all faculty members have experience using the journal article or multi-modal approaches to the dissertation. Nonetheless, faculty who wish to learn about one of the alternatives to the monograph may do so, through the SLAT director, and/or by working collaboratively with other faculty who have directed alternative dissertations. More experienced faculty can mentor those desiring to master this approach.

If your chair/committee members do not feel comfortable advising a dissertation in one of these formats, you have three options:

1. to adapt your research question and project to the traditional dissertation format, knowing that your chair and committee members will be able to contribute more successfully to this format, given their experience and expertise; or
2. to consult the SLAT Chair or Graduate Advisor about who might be able to advise your committee on how to work with your proposal; or
3. to consult with other faculty members who do have experience with the journal article or multi-modal dissertation.

FAQ #10: What are the strengths and limitations of each approach?

Traditional dissertation strengths

Some scholars argue the traditional dissertation mirrors the scientific process itself: identifying and stating a problem and hypotheses, situating the problem within the current scientific dialogue, developing a plan to collect and analyze data, and conducting the analysis and critical interpretation of the findings.

Many studies have a single focal question that does not lend itself, easily, to reporting in separate manuscripts. In this case, the traditional dissertation is well-suited for reporting on a single study.

Traditional dissertation weaknesses

The amount of rewriting and reshaping required to publish a traditional dissertation as journal article(s) or a book is the monograph's major drawback. The rewriting demands, coupled with recently graduated students' new professional roles, oftentimes preclude publication of the dissertation.

"Thus, most theses [and dissertations] are not submitted for publication. Ironically, the time-honored, scholarly style of the conventional thesis/dissertation actually acts as an impediment to one of the integral parts of the research process, which is the dissemination of the results" (Thomas, Nelson, & Magill, 1986, p. 118).

Recently, the availability of dissertations on the Internet has minimized the problem of disseminating dissertation findings through publication (as dissertations become more widely available). Nevertheless, distribution of the dissertation through electronic means does not usually carry the same weight as refereed publications do. Authors, therefore, are often eager to enhance their chances of "getting published."

Journal article dissertation strengths

The journal article dissertation allows candidates to write in a format with which they are familiar. As the currency in most research-intensive/extensive universities is refereed journal publications, the sooner doctoral students learn to master this format for communicating their inquiry, the easier it will be to become productive academics.

This format increases the odds that the dissertation (or portions of the dissertation) will be published soon after defense/completion (and, oftentimes, prior to defense).

Journal article dissertation weaknesses

The journal article format is inappropriate for some types of research questions and topics that do not involve multiple experiments, various data sets, or different types of analyses.

The journal article dissertation follows specific journals' formatting and word/page limitations. Oftentimes, authors are not allowed to provide as much detail as they would be able to in a traditional dissertation. However, such weakness can be compensated by attaching appendices to the dissertation text, with reviews of the literature, methods or procedures, and analytical techniques, written in elaborate detail for committee members and other interested scholars.

The journal article dissertation requires careful consideration of authorship and copyright issues (see these topics addressed in other FAQs).

Multi-modal dissertation strengths

- Allows the candidate to include a format which will more effectively present analyses of non-textual components of language acquisition or language pedagogy
- Increases the odds that the dissertation (or portions of the dissertation) will be usable as instructional or research material soon after defense/completion (and, oftentimes, prior to defense).

Multi-modal dissertation weaknesses

- The multi-modal format is inappropriate for some types of research questions and topics
- The multi-modal dissertation may require more time to develop, and require more work from authors in order to provide as detailed an analysis as they would be able to in a traditional dissertation. Without the more traditional approach to presenting and discussing relevant literature, evidence, analysis and conclusion, the multi-modal dissertation may not be acceptable to some potential future employers.

FAQ #11: What type of study is best-suited for the journal article dissertation?

- A study involving more than one focal/substantial research question. The questions are related, but each can “stand alone” and have its own research report.
- A study involving mixed methods (e.g., qualitative and quantitative) for which the author does not want to aggregate findings (i.e., wishes to report findings separately for each approach/method).
- A study involving more than one experiment.

In summary, studies requiring more than one journal article to be fully described because they contain multiple dimensions, data sets, sub-questions, or analyses are best in the journal article

dissertation. Determining whether a study is suited for the journal article approach requires careful consultation with the dissertation chair and committee members.

FAQ #12: When should I decide which approach I will use for my dissertation?

- As early as possible because the dissertation structure and the research design oftentimes go hand-in-hand.
- The decisions regarding format should not drive the research, however. It is not recommended that a doctoral student choose the format first, then attempt to “fit” his/her research question into that format. The format choice should follow the development and framing of the research question(s).

FAQ #13: Can I change my mind concerning the type of dissertation I submit?

Yes. Keep in mind, however, that changing from one format to another will require reorganizing your thinking about the reporting of the study. It can be challenging to move from one format to another but not impossible.

FAQ #14: Does the journal article format generate redundancy?

It may. For instance, 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 avoided by citing one's own work. For instance, in a literature review, the author might mention, “For a more detailed treatment of this topic, see So-and-So (candidate's name and year of publication).” At the very least, you can cite your own dissertation (if no publications are yet available for referencing).

Avoid self-plagiarism. Authors self-plagiarize when they "reuse their own previously written work or data in a “new” written product without letting the reader know that this material has appeared elsewhere."

FAQ #15: May I publish a “piece” of my dissertation before the defense?

Yes. More than one article may have been published prior to the defense. The author of that “piece” must be you, the doctoral candidate. Also keep in mind that all research that is described in the published papers that are part of the dissertation must have been conducted during the time the candidate was enrolled in the SLAT program and cannot have been submitted toward any other degree at the University of Arizona or elsewhere. Also be aware that some employers may not consider research published before starting an academic position in the same way as research published while in the position.

Other things to keep in mind:

- You must request copyright permission from the publishing journal to include the article in your dissertation. If you do not request permission, you will be breaking U.S. copyright laws.
- When asking for permission to include the article in your dissertation, you should notify the journal editor that University of Arizona “publishes” (or posts) completed dissertations on the World Wide Web (Internet).
- Make sure you have all copyright permissions before you finalize the proposal and formatting of your dissertation. You may run into copyright peculiarities with your journal and decide it's not worth the trouble to include that specific “piece” in your dissertation. Consider all of these issues early on in the process.
- UA Degree Certification recommends you have all the permissions necessary, in case you are utilizing an already-published manuscript, before you submit the final manuscript of your dissertation for approval and graduation.

FAQ #16: If I want to submit a manuscript from my dissertation for publication prior to defense, what happens to authorship?

You, the doctoral candidate, must be the author on all dissertation articles, whether previously published or to be submitted for publication. Your chair and committee are not considered to be co-authors of your dissertation articles.

FAQ #17: What if journal reviewers want me to make changes to a manuscript I have submitted, but I still haven't defended my dissertation?

Reviewers' comments, suggested changes and your plan for addressing those suggestions should be shared with your dissertation committee members and approved by all of them before you enact the changes.

Changes can be made to the manuscript, as long as the dissertation committee members are in agreement (and are aware) of the changes being made and their rationale.

FAQ #18: What about authorship issues if I plan to submit AFTER defense?

You, the doctoral candidate, should always be the author of your own dissertation. Keep this in mind when publishing with your dissertation chair or with members of your dissertation committee. Your dissertation work must be clearly distinct from any co-authored research.

Some journals are now asking for a clear explanation, in writing, of each author's contribution to the manuscript (see, for instance, recent issues of the *American journal of Public Health*). Make sure you can clearly state each author's main contribution without difficulty. Your contribution to a co-authored manuscript may derive from your dissertation; however, the work presented in your dissertation must be solely your own, or appropriately cited among your references.

FAQ #19: Do I need to be careful regarding copyright issues with the journal article format?

Yes. If after you follow the steps outlined below in question # 21 you still have questions or need clarification regarding copyright issues, you should contact UA Degree Certification. They will help you navigate through the copyright issues.

FAQ #20: Regarding copyright issues, what must I do, when I am ready to submit my manuscripts for publication?

Before anything else, check Appendix B in the dissertation style guide published by UA degree certification at http://grad.arizona.edu/system/files/etd_Diss_Manual.pdf. The guide contains general information about how to obtain permissions, and some links to UA library guides to copyright law. It is important to contact the specific journal you will work with regarding their policy on the dissertation. Some journals have given “blanket approval”, so there is no need to mention to the editor of the journal that the manuscript was part of your dissertation. Some journals have imposed serious restrictions and will not allow releasing the dissertation on the Internet if they publish one of your dissertation pieces. You must know where your particular journal stands before publishing a chapter from your dissertation. You have two options:

1. Submit the article and wait for its acceptance. When accepted, you'll need to sign a copyright release form. At that time, contact your journal and explain that your text is part of your dissertation and has already been released on the Internet by UA.
2. When submitting the manuscript, describe on the submission/cover letter to the editor the status of the manuscript as a piece of your dissertation, which has been posted on the Internet. Better yet, contact the journal, directly and in person, and ask how you should proceed.

The issue - some journals are not familiar with this dissertation format and are not ready to have their manuscripts “published” both in their journals and on the World Wide Web. Most journals (especially those in the science fields) are very familiar with this format, having dealt with this type of formatting for over two decades.

The strategy - when in doubt, *ask*. Ask the journal to which you've submitted. Do not ignore these copyright issues. It is unethical and can be illegal to do so. UA Degree Certification can sometimes help navigate through the copyright issues. Dan Lee, Director, Office of Copyright Management & Scholarly Communication, (520) 621-6433, leed@u.library.arizona.edu

FAQ #21: Is the journal article format easier than the Traditional Format?

Not at all. Some claim it may be more difficult to conceptualize and to write in this format than in the traditional manner (given the page restrictions articles impose). Candidates writing in the Traditional Format need worry only about satisfying their program's requirements and the dissertation committee members. Candidates writing in a journal article format must consider, alongside their program and committee members, the audience for whom they are writing, the

journal reviewers who will scrutinize their work, and the journal editor making final dispositions about the manuscript.

FAQ #22: Is there anything written about the journal article format in UA's Graduate Catalog?

Yes. In Appendix A of UA's on-line *Manual for Electronic Submission for Theses and Dissertations* you'll find the following statement:

“At the option of the student and the program of study committee, an alternate format permitting inclusion of papers published or accepted for publication in scholarly journals may be used.

The decision to allow the inclusion of previously published or submitted work in a dissertation or thesis is left to the candidate's degree-granting unit...

The alternate format for the dissertation or thesis is based on the philosophy developed by the Council of Graduate Schools: The published work must be logically connected and integrated into the dissertation in a coherent manner. Simply binding reprints or collections of publications together is not acceptable as a dissertation in either format or concept.”

Appendix A also goes on to detail how to handle formatting such publications in the dissertation.