

A Guide to Writing Chapter One of Your Dissertation

By Gian Pagnucci and Ben Rafoth

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Use Correct Formatting

- Number your pages
- Highlight research questions in list

Audiences for Your Dissertation

- First, your director; they are your ally
- Second, who is interested in this topic; who has published on this; these are your readers and your allies
- Your director tries to help you write for your committee members
- Participants in your study may read sections; this entails certain responsibilities for you as a writer
- Explaining key terms and how you specifically are using key terms
- Write for those who use this theory and this methodology

What is the problem?

Discuss the basic social issue your dissertation is trying to address

- For example: Why do multilingual writers who did well in introductory composition courses struggle to do writing in advanced courses? Your dissertation could try to help us understand how to solve this problem.

Why should we care?

- Link your study to what people care about
- Uncover a basic truth that we assume and explore it—unpack an accepted belief (trouble this belief, good rhetorical move)
- Originality of the topic/buzz words
- Link to greater social problems (immigration reform issues)
- Other dissertations set the standards
- Ambitious scope
- Demonstrates lots of work—what does this set you up for long term
- Explicitly made argument for its impact beyond the immediate context
- Are we finding out something we don't know?

Justify Your Study

- Researcher A (published in *CCC* or *TESOL Journal*)—makes a call for this type of research
- Last chapter of dissertations
- Introductions to volumes on the topic
- Even in an online forum you might find discussions of needs to study this (WPA listserv)
- Time frame how old is the issue?
- Claiming there's a need for this work
- Stronger to have 2 or 3 people make the same claim
- Weak claim—I searched and couldn't find anything on this

Ask Clear Research Questions

- Can you envision specific data which would help you to answer these questions?
- Avoid yes/no questions—think about what you can **describe** from your data
- Again, look to other dissertation questions to help you ask your own research questions
- You can say, my questions are an adaptation of this author's questions

Explain Key Concepts

- What major issues are you examining in the dissertation
- This helps define your literature review
- what do I expect to see in the data? Will my data match the published research
- Link the research to your own study (so authors Smith and Anderson and Williams say this, and I think that relates to my study in this way....)
- These terms help limit the scope of the study

Discuss Scope of Data Collection

- Explain the type of data you are looking at including
- Terminology
- Pseudonym use for people and places and other identifying information
- Specific names rather than Teacher X (follow ethnic, gender patterns with names)
- Any method is possible

- Field research
- Archival research—data is documents (Pat Thatcher looked at NCTE position statements over a 30 year period)
- Theoretical research (Steven Reagles looked at the literature of smell and how that has been understood in various fields advertising, product development, sensory stories—synthesize and then talk about how we might make use of this sensory topic in composition classes—a Rhetoric of Smell); Stephen Schwartz Composition and Identity (looked at how the literature on identity in psychology and talked about how we understand the term “identity” and how to bring this into composition)

Discuss Implications of Your Study

- What does this study have to tell us?
- What’s the relation to teaching? (for most studies)