

Abstract

[Abstract title page]

Abstract

The text of the Abstract is double-spaced with no paragraph breaks or citations. Briefly describe the overall research study problem you are addressing in the first couple of sentences followed by the purpose of the study. Do include a general introduction of the need for the study (identify the problem) in the first sentence, then move to a clear statement of the research problem (your specific research problem, central research question) being addressed. Identify the purpose and theoretical foundations of the study. When applicable, summarize the key research question(s), and briefly describe the overall research design, methods, and data analysis procedures. [This part of the abstract should be completed at the proposal stage]

Once Chapters 1-5 are complete, add the following:

Identify the key results, one or two conclusions, and recommendations that capture the heart of the research. Conclude with a statement on the implications for positive social change.

Note: See APA 6th ed. Handbook for further instruction on writing the abstract section.

[Dissertation Title Page]

Dedication

[This is an optional page for a dedication. It does not have a page number. The dedication appears with normal formatting: left justified, indented paragraphs, standard punctuation, etc.]

Acknowledgments

[As with the Dedication page, the Acknowledgments page is optional. It is a nice place to thank the faculty, friends, and family members who have helped you reach this point in your academic career. This section should be no more than one page in length.]

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Note: Not all headings will be the same for every paper/study.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Describe the topic of the study, why the study needs to be conducted (gap), and the potential implications. Preview the major sections of the chapter. *Notes:* If you have any questions on completing this section, consult your Senior Research Associate. This introduction to the chapter should be **less than 1 page in length**.

Each of the following sections contains a suggested page length; however, the length of each section should be determined by sufficiency, completeness, and the specific guidelines of your individual school.

Background of the Study

Briefly, summarize the research literature that outlines the scope of the study topic and indicates that this is a current problem. You can use this literature to trace the problem from its initiation to its current state. Describe the gap in the literature that the study will address. End the section on why the study is needed; this must go beyond just filling a gap in the literature. *Notes:* Should any questions arise while you are completing this section, consult your Senior Research Associate. This section should be **2-4 pages in length**.

Problem Statement

Offer a strong opening here with a powerful (cited) statement that will grab the reader's attention. Follow the opening statement with a staggering statistic that validates the existence of the current problem (also cited). State the research problem. Frame the problem in a way that builds upon or counters previous research findings focusing

primarily on research conducted in the last 5 years. Address a meaningful gap in the current research literature.

You may choose to include both the general problem statement (a broad concept of the problem), and the specific problem statement (the focus of the study). Use key words such as “the specific problem is ...” and be sure to indicate a problem as a gap between the current state of a situation and the desired state of a situation (current status of the topic in the literature). Your sentence that directly states the research problem should be a variation of your central research question to ensure alignment. *Notes:* Check your specific school’s guidelines and adhere to their formatting and wording suggestions where applicable. Consult your Senior Research Associate for questions pertaining to this section. This section should be concisely written and in **about a half a page in length.**

Purpose of the Study

Provide a concise statement that serves as the connection between the problem being addressed and the focus of the study. The purpose contains: (a) an indication that this is a qualitative/quantitative study, (b) the study intent (indicate whether the study will describe, compare, correlate explore, and develop), and (c) the independent, dependent, and covariate variables. *Notes:* see Creswell’s *Research Design*, Chapter 6, for scripts on writing purpose statements. Consult your Senior Research Associate for assistance with completing this section if you are unsure of its content. This section should be succinct and **about a half a page in length.**

Research Question(s) and Hypotheses

State the research question(s). State the null and alternative hypotheses (where applicable) that identify the independent and dependent variables being studied, the association being tested, and how the variables are being measured. *Notes:* If necessary, consult your statistician for assistance in completing this section. This section should be 1-3 pages in length.

Theoretical Foundation

Studies must include either a theoretical foundation or a conceptual framework section; studies may include both or just one.

Identify the theory or theories and provide the origin or source. State concisely the major theoretical propositions and / or major hypotheses with a reference to a more detailed explanation in Chapter 2. Explain how the theory relates to the study approach and research questions. *Notes:* Typically, qualitative studies have a conceptual framework while quantitative studies have a theoretical foundation. Consult your Senior Research Associate for questions and theory suggestions if necessary. This section should be about 1 page in length.

Conceptual Framework

This applies to qualitative studies. Identify and define the conceptual framework (a description of the research that supports the need for the study) as derived from the literature - a more detailed analysis will appear in Chapter 2. State the logical connections between the tenets of the theory and the purpose of your study in order to justify the use and research design with multiple references - a more thorough and in depth explanation

will appear in Chapter 2 so excessive detail is not necessary. State how the framework relates to the study approach and key research questions, as well as to the instrument development and data analysis where appropriate. *Notes:* Consult your Senior Research Associate for guidance with completing this section as well as with any questions that you may have. This section should be **1-3 pages in length**.

Nature of the Study

Provide a concise rationale for selection of the design and / or tradition. Briefly, describe the key study variables (independent, dependent, and covariates). Briefly, summarize the methodology (from whom and how data are collected and how data will be analyzed). *Notes:* Your Statistician can offer further guidance on this section. This section should be **1-3 pages in length**.

Definitions

Define terms used in the study that have specific meanings in this context. Do not include common terms or terms that can easily be looked up in a dictionary. Include citations that identify support in the professional literature for the definition or operational definition. All definition citations should be from peer-reviewed literature. *Notes:* Definitions should be formatted according to your school's guidelines as well as alphabetized. Contact your Senior Research Associate for guidance with completing this section. This section should be between **1-3 pages in length**.

Assumptions

Clarify aspects of the study that are believed but cannot be proven to be true. Only include assumptions critical to the meaningfulness of the study. Describe the reasons why

the assumptions were necessary in the context of the study. *Note:* Consult your Senior Research Associate for further guidance with this section. This section should be around 1 page in length.

Scope and Delimitations

This section speaks to the specific boundaries (geography) of your study (what is and what is not included). Describe specific aspects of the research problem that are addressed in the study and why the specific focus was chosen (issue of internal validity). Define the boundaries of the study by identifying populations (including demographics such as socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and gender when applicable) included and excluded. Address potential generalizability. *Notes:* Consult your Senior Research Associate for further guidance on completing this section. This section should be around 1 page in length.

Limitations

Describe limitations of the study related to design and / or methodological weaknesses (including issues related to limitations of internal and external validity, construct validity, and confounding variables). Describe any biases that could influence study outcomes and how they are addressed. Describe reasonable measures to address limitations. *Notes:* For further guidance on this section, consult your Senior Research Associate or Statistician. This section should be around 1 page.

Significance of the Study

The Significance of the Study is described in terms of (a) advancing theory, (b) advances in practice, and (c) filling a gap in the literature. Be certain to address and

include the phrase *positive social change* in this section if indicated by your school's template and/or guidelines. *Notes:* Your Senior Research Associate can offer further guidance on completing this section. This section, including the three subsections, should be 3-5 pages in length.

Summary and Transition

Summarize main points of the chapter. Provide a transition to Chapter 2. *Notes:* Consult your Senior Research Associate for further clarification on this section. This section should be around 1 page in length.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Restate the problem and the purpose in an introductory manner. Provide a succinct synopsis of the current literature that establishes the relevance of the problem. Preview major sections of the chapter including headings and main points to be covered.

Note: Consult you Senior Research Associate on assistance with the compilation details of this chapter, as various strategies are available. This introduction to the chapter should be **less than 1 page in length**.

Literature Search Strategy

List accessed library databases and search engines used. List key search terms and combinations of search terms in italics. Be sure to indicate that current literature and sources were searched (those within the last five years), as well as seminal literature. In cases where there is little current research, and few (if any) dissertations and / or conference proceedings describe how this was handled after discussing the situation with your chair as well as your Senior Research Associate. Italicize the search terms (except the final “and”, which is not italicized). *Note:* This section should be **1-3 pages in length**.

Theoretical Foundation

Clearly outline the theory or theories and corresponding theorists. Provide historical background or source of the theory and any applicable underpinnings. Describe major theoretical propositions and/or major hypotheses, including delineation of any assumptions appropriate to the application of the theory where applicable. Provide a literature and research-based analysis of how the theory has been applied previously in ways similar to the current study (3-4 current studies, minimum). Provide the rationale

for the choice of this theory – outline how this theory, specifically, will enhance the design of the study. Describe how and why the selected theory relates to the present study and how the research questions relate to, challenge, or build upon existing theory. *Note:* This section should be 3-6 pages in length.

Conceptual Framework

Approach this section in the same way as a Theoretical Framework.

Literature Review

Provide an exhaustive review of the current literature that includes the following information:

- Identify and describe studies related to the study topic and chosen methodology that are consistent with the scope of the study.
- Explore ways in which researchers in the discipline have approached the problem. Outline the strengths and weakness inherent in each of their approaches.
- Justify, from the literature, the rationale for selection of your operational variables as well as concepts where necessary.
- Review and synthesize studies (under each heading) related to the key variables in order to produce a description of what is known about the study topic, what is controversial, and the remaining gaps in the literature to be studied.

Note: This section should be 20-40 pages in length.

Summary and Conclusions

Succinctly summarize major themes outlined in the literature. Briefly summarize what is known and what is not known (this frames the gap in the literature). Directly describe how the present study fills the gap in the literature and will extend knowledge in the discipline. Provide transitional material to connect the gap in the literature to the methods described in Chapter 3. *Note:* This section should be around 1 page in length, but may be shorter.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Restate the study purpose as described in Chapter 1. Preview the major sections of the chapter. *Note:* This introduction to the chapter should be less than 1 page in length.

Research Design and Rationale

Concisely state the study variables (independent, dependent, covariate, mediating, and/or moderating variables) as appropriate. Identify the research design and its connection to the research questions. Explain any time and resource constraints consistent with the design choice. Describe how the design choice is consistent with research designs needed to advance knowledge in the discipline. If conducting an intervention study, defend the choice of intervention. *Note:* This section should be 1-3 pages in length.

Methodology

Needs to be described in sufficient depth so that other researchers can replicate the study.

Population

Define the target population. State target population size (if known) or approximate/estimated size. *Note:* This section should be less than 1 page in length.

Sampling and Sampling Procedures

Identify and justify the type of sampling strategy. Explain specific procedures for how the sample will be drawn. Describe the sampling frame (inclusion and exclusion criteria). Use a power analysis to determine sample size and include (a) justification for the effect size, alpha level, and power level chosen; and (b) cite the source for calculating

or the tool used to calculate the sample size. *Note:* This section may be about 1 page in length.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection (Primary Data)

Thoroughly describe recruiting procedures and particular demographic information that will be collected. Describe how participants will be provided informed consent. Describe how data will be collected. Explain how participants exit the study (for example, debriefing procedures, etc.). Describe any follow-up procedures (such as requirements to return for follow-up interviews, treatments, etc.). *Note:* This section may be about 1 page or more in length.

Pilot Study

Delete this section if there will not be a pilot study. Describe the relationship of the pilot study to the main study (for example, what is the purpose of the pilot study?). Include the IRB approval number (completed dissertation). *Notes:* This section may not be appropriate for all studies, but if provided should be 1-3 pages in length. Many of the techniques used in the primary study and the pilot study may be the same.

Intervention

If conducting an intervention, provide the following information. Otherwise, do not include this section. Describe clearly and thoroughly the nature of the treatment, intervention, or experimental manipulation, how it will be designed and administered, and by whom and to whom it will be administered. *Note:* This may be 1-2 pages in length.

Archival Data

Include this section if archival data will be used in the study; otherwise, delete.

Include all procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection associated with the main study. Describe the procedure for gaining access to the data set. Describe necessary permissions to gain access to the data (with permission letters located in an appendix. If historical or legal documents are used as sources of data, demonstrate the reputability of the sources and justify why they represent the best sources of data. *Note:* This section may be 1-3 pages in length.

Instrumentation and Operationalization of Constructs

For published instruments, provide:

- Name of developer(s) and year of publication
- Appropriateness to the current study
- Permission from developer to use the instrument (permission letter should be included in an appendix).
- Published reliability and validity values relevant to their use in the study.
- Where and / or with what populations the instrument was previously used and how validity / reliability values were established in the study sample.

For all researcher instruments provide:

- Basis for development (literature sources or other bases for development such as a pilot study).
- Plan to provide evidence for reliability (for example, internal consistency and test / retest).

- Plan to provide evidence for validity (for example, predictive and construct validity).
- Establish sufficiency of instrumentation to answer research questions.

Operationalization. For each variable describe:

- Its operational definition.
- How each variable is measured or manipulated.
- How the variable / scale score is calculated, what the scores represent, and an example item.

Note: This section may be 2-4 pages in length.

Intervention Studies or Those Involving Manipulation of an Independent Variable

If there are no materials / programs required for the study, then delete this subsection on material / programs, but provide a discussion on the operationalization of variables. Otherwise, provide the following information regarding materials / programs:

- Identify materials / programs applied as treatment or manipulation
- Provide information on the developer of the materials and / or programs
- If published, state where, how, and with what populations the instrument was previously used.
- If researcher-developed materials, state the basis for development and how the materials were developed.
- Provide evidence that another agency will sponsor intervention studies (such as clinical interventions).

Note: this section may be 1 page or more in length.

Data Analysis Plan

Identify software used for analyses. Provide an explanation of data cleaning and screening procedures as appropriate to the study. Restate the research questions and hypotheses here as written in Chapter 1.

Describe in detail the analysis plan including the elements below.

- Statistical tests that will be used to test the research question(s)/hypothesis(es)
- Procedures used to account for multiple statistical tests, as appropriate
- Rationale for inclusion of potential covariates and / or confounding variables
- How results will be interpreted (e.g., key parameter estimates, confidence intervals and / or probability values, odds ratios).
- Assumptions related to the selected hypotheses

Note: This section may be 3-6 pages in length.

Threats to Validity

External Validity

Describe threats to external validity (e.g., testing reactivity, interaction effects of selection and experimental variables, specificity of variables, reactive effects of experimental arrangements, and multiple-treatment interference, as appropriate to the study) and how they will be and / or were addressed. *Note:* This section may be 1-2 pages in length.

Internal Validity

Describe threats to internal validity (for example, history, maturation, statistical regression, experimental mortality, and selection-maturation interaction as appropriate to the study) and how they will be and / or were addressed. *Note:* This section may be about 1 page in length.

Construct Validity

Describe any threats to construct or statistical conclusion validity. *Note:* This section may be about 1 page in length.

Ethical Procedures

Agreements to gain access to participants or data (include actual documents in the IRB application). Describe the treatment of human participants including the following (include actual documents in the Institutional Review Board (IRB) application):

- Institutional permissions, including IRB approvals that are needed (proposal) or were obtained (for the completed dissertation, include relevant IRB approval numbers in the final dissertation).
- Ethical concerns related to recruitment materials and processes and a plan to address them.
- Ethical concerns related to data collection/intervention activities (these could include participants refusing participation or early withdrawal from the study and response to any predictable adverse events) and a plan to address them.

Describe treatment of data (including archival data), including issues of:

- Whether data are anonymous or confidential and any concerns related to each.
- Protection for confidential data (data storage procedures, data dissemination, who will have access to the data, and when the data will be destroyed).

Other ethical issues as applicable (these issues could include doing a study within one's own work environment; conflict of interest or power differentials, and justification for use of incentives). *Note:* This section should be 1-3 pages in length.

Summary

Summary of design and methodology of the method of inquiry. Provide a transition statement to Chapter 4. *Note:* This section should about 1 page in length.

Chapter 4: Results

Review briefly the purpose, research questions, and hypotheses. Preview the organization of Chapter 4. *Note:* This introduction to the chapter should be about 1 page in length.

Pilot Study

Concisely report the results of the pilot study, if applicable. Otherwise, this section should not be included in the dissertation. Report any impact of the pilot study on the main study (for example, changes in instrumentation and / or data analysis strategies, etc.). *Note:* This section should be about 1 page in length.

Data Collection

Describe the timeframe for data collection as well as actual recruitment and response rates. Present any discrepancies in data collection from the plan presented in Chapter 3. Report baseline descriptive and demographic characteristics of the sample. Describe how representative the sample is of the population of interest or how proportional it is to the larger population if nonprobability sampling is used (external validity). Provide results of basic univariate analyses that justify inclusion of covariates in the model, if applicable. *Note:* This section should be 2-3 pages in length.

Treatment and/or Intervention Fidelity

This section may not be required in all dissertations and if not required, do not include it. Describe whether the treatment was administered as planned and any challenges that prevented planned implementation as described in Chapter 3. Describe

any adverse events (those with serious consequences) related to the intervention. *Note:* This section may be 1-3 pages in length.

Study Results

Report descriptive statistics that appropriately characterize the sample. Evaluate statistical assumptions as appropriate to the study. Report statistical analysis findings, organized by research questions and/or hypotheses, including:

- Exact statistics and associated probability values.
- Confidence intervals around the statistics, as appropriate
- Effect sizes, as appropriate.

Report results of post-hoc analyses of statistical tests, if applicable. Report any additional statistical tests of hypotheses that emerged from the analysis of main hypotheses, as appropriate for the study.

Include tables and figures to illustrate results, as appropriate, and per the current edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. *Note:* This section should be 5-12 pages in length.

Summary

Summarize answers to research questions. Provide transitional material from the findings and introduce the reader to the prescriptive material in Chapter 5. *Note:* This section should be about a page in length.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Think of this chapter as a bookend to Chapter 1. Summarize the problem and purpose with similar language to what you used in the introduction of Chapter 1. *Note:* Consult your Senior Research Associate for further assistance with any of the sections in this chapter. This introduction to the chapter should be less than **1 page in length**.

Summary of the Findings

This is where you will summarize the findings in your own words. You may find it useful to revisit the summaries presented in Chapter 4. Think of how you would describe your study findings to an interested colleague or family member. Keep the writing scholarly, but not overly technical or statistically heavy. *Note:* The length of this section varies depending on the study and design.

Interpretation of Findings

Describe in what ways findings confirm, refute, or extend knowledge in the discipline by comparing them to the literature featured in Chapter 2. Please note: you may **not** introduce new literature in Chapter 4 or 5. Analyze and interpret the findings in the context of the framework as appropriate. Ensure interpretations do not exceed the data, findings, and scope. Anything that you feel is important to note that is beyond the data and findings can be included in the recommendations section. *Note:* This section should be **3-7 pages in length**.

Limitations of the Study

This section is similar to what appears in earlier chapters, however, it is from a different angle. Describe the limitations to generalizability, trustworthiness, validity, and

reliability that arose from execution of the study. There may be many, or they may be few limitations in this regard. These particular assumptions should be used to revise what was written in Chapter 1 for the proposal if your school's template outlines as much. *Note:* This section should be about 1 page in length.

Recommendations

Describe recommendations for further research that are grounded in the strengths and limitations of the current study as well as the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. This is where you can bring a bit of yourself into the dissertation. Think of ways that, in hindsight, you may have approached the study to elicit different results. Ensure recommendations do not exceed study or ethical boundaries. *Note:* This section should be 2-4 pages in length.

Conclusions

Close with a strong "take away" message where you capture the key essence of the study for your reader. *Note:* This section should be less than 1 page in length.

References

Appendix A: Title of Appendix