

## Sample Dissertation Outline

Students and committee, please use this template as appropriate with your dissertations.

- Title (no more than 12 words)
- **The title, problem, purpose, method, and RQs must align**
- Paragraphs should be **at least 5** sentences, (which is a complete paragraph).
- Every heading should have a paragraph under it.
- Chapters 1-3 should have a chapter summary; chapter 4 should end with a conclusion/summary of the entire dissertation.
- All Chapters start on a new page.
- All chapters updated to past tense prior to the final defense.
- Transition sentences at the end of each section should be used to tie back into the topic.

### Dissertation Outline

#### **Chapter I: Introduction**

**An introduction paragraph can be written LAST, after the organization of the paper. It introduces the reader to the topic of the paper**

1. **Background of the Problem:** Begin with the early history of your topic, containing historical information. Aligns with the Title of the Dissertation
2. **Statement of the Problem**
3. **Theoretical Framework**
  - Selected Theory: Identify the main theory guiding the study.
  - Relevance to Research Problem: Explain how the theory provides insight into the research problem.
  - Guidance for Study: Describe how the theory shapes research questions, data collection, and analysis.
  - Key Concepts: Summarize core concepts from the theory that are relevant to the study.
4. **Purpose of the Study/Resource:** The purpose should align with the **main topics** of your Literature Review. Begin with “The purpose of this qualitative or quantitative study is.... And ends with 3 RQs
  - Research Questions

**(The problem, purpose, and research questions all align)**
5. **Significance of the Study/Resource** (what it is going to do): “The significance of this study (or resource) is...” then discuss what the expected information will provide for the field of psychology
6. **Definitions and Key Terms:** Only list non-lay-terms and constructs, not needed for all dissertations

#### **Literature Review**

##### **1. Topic 1**

- a. Subtopic a
- b. Subtopic b
- c. Subtopic c

##### **2. Topic 2**

- a. Subtopic a
- b. Subtopic b
- c. Subtopic c

### **3. Topic 3**

- a. Subtopic a
- b. Subtopic b
- c. Subtopic c

**Summary**

## **Chapter II: Methodology (Critical Analysis suggested topics, can vary or be added to)**

1. The methodology for your Dissertation:
  - a. **Research Design**
    - 1) **Inclusion**
    - 2) **Exclusion criteria**
  - b. **Literature Search and Selection**
    - 1) **Data Extraction and Synthesis**
    - 2) **Critical Appraisal**
    - 3) **Ethical Considerations**
  - c. **Other as appropriate**

**Summary**

## **Chapter II: Methodology (Program Development suggested topics, can vary or be added to)**

1. The methodology for your Dissertation:
  - a. **Program Overview**
    - 1) **Participants**
    - 2) **Facilitators**
  - b. **Target Audience**
  - c. **Objectives and Learning Outcomes**
  - d. **Assessments and Psychometric properties**
  - e. **Ethical Considerations**
  - d. **Other as appropriate**

**Summary**

HERE YOU WILL PRESENT YOUR **PROPOSAL TO YOUR CHAIR AND READER**

## **Chapter III: Results**

1. Describe and summarize the data
  - a. Detailed description of the results
  - b. Other pertinent information

**Summary**

## **Chapter IV: Discussion**

1. **Implications**- Review of implications of the resource for clinical practice
2. **Empirical Data** if gathered– discuss that here
3. **Limitations**
4. **Future Research** that needs to be done by others

## 5. Christian Integration

**Conclusion** (conclusion or summary of the entire dissertation)

### References

**(single or double-spaced within  
and no more than double-spaced between entries)**

### Appendix

Will include the Program developed or any additional essential data.

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### EXAMPLE

## **What is the Cause of Mental Illness? A Qualitative Literature Review**

**The title, problem, purpose, method, and RQs must align**

### **Chapter I: Introduction and Literature Review**

When a loved one is diagnosed with an illness, someone invariably asks, “what caused this?” Often, the implication grows from the person’s belief that someone did something to cause it, and had they known they could cause this, they would have done something to prevent it (Smith, 2022). In 2023, 3.5 million people were diagnosed with a mental illness for the first time (American Psychiatric Association, 2023). Mental illness costs the US Governments 10 billions dollars every day. Each day, 17 attempt or die by suicide. Children are at higher risk to be physically abused when they have a mental illness...lower academic achievement.. etc.

### **Background of the Problem**

The first reported instance of mental illness was in 1649 when physician Bob Smith posited that his patient was not feigning illness but instead suffering with an organic form of.... Later, ... we engaged in trephining. Subsequently, we performed lobotomies.... Today, we rely on the DSM-5-TR to ..... and provide sufferers with medication.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The Problem is that mental illness has no known definitive etiology; its cause is unknown. This is a problem because until people understand what causes mental illness, they will continue to fight medication use and will not be able to prevent mental illness.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative literature review is to describe what the literature has established as the cause of mental illness by addressing the following research question: What is our current understanding of the cause(s) of mental illness? Answering this question will help to...

**The problem, purpose, and research questions all align.**

### **Significance of the Study.**

When people are diagnosed with diabetes or arthritis, they do not question the medications they are prescribed. When told they have depression, anxiety, or bipolar, they often tell us they do not believe in medication. People need to understand what causes mental illness;

they will not fight medication use and will learn what to do and not to do to prevent mental illness.

**Definitions and Key Terms.** Only list non-lay-terms and constructs if necessary

Term 1.

Term 2.

## **Literature Review**

The Biopsychosocial model is the prevailing theory to explain the etiology of mental illness.

### **Biology**

Genetics plays a major role in .....

### **Psychology**

A person's personal psychology is based on their inherent traits

### **Social**

Individuals develop in part due to their environment. Twin studies, for example,...

## **References**

- Ord, A. S., Slogar, S. M., & Sautter, S. W. (2021). Lifestyle factors, cognitive functioning, and functional capacity in older adults. *International Journal of Aging and Human Development*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00914150211009467>
- Ord, A. S., Stranahan, K. R., Hurley, R. A., & Taber, K. H. (2020). Stress-related growth: Building a more resilient brain. *Journal of Neuropsychiatry and Clinical Neurosciences*, 32(2), 207-212. <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.neuropsych.20050111>
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2006). Self-regulation and the problem of human autonomy: Does psychology need choice, self-determination, and will? *Journal of Personality*, 74(6), 1557-1586. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6494.2006.00420.x>

## **Appendix**