

Recommendations for PhD Article Dissertations

The article dissertation is a compilation of submitted or journal-ready scholarly articles on a unifying topic typically bookended by an introduction and a conclusion, to form the PhD dissertation itself.

The PhD dissertation written in the traditional “treatise” form – that is, as one long document – requires distillation of research into academic publications either in parallel with dissertation preparation or subsequent to dissertation completion. The article dissertation, in contrast, merges creation of academic research publications with creation of the dissertation itself.

Advantages:

- Synthesizing research in publications teaches PhD students the essential skill of condensing research findings into clear, defensible, and publishable articles, early in their program of study.
- Creation of a timeline for completion and submission of articles that meet the advisor and PhD dissertation committee’s expectations can help both the advisor and the PhD student evaluate if satisfactory progress is being accomplished early in the process and through to completion.
- Early publication of meaningful breakthroughs in knowledge allows those breakthroughs to be evaluated and tested by other researchers with a minimum of delay. This accelerates advances in that and related fields, and invites input toward new avenues for inquiry from a community far larger than a PhD dissertation committee.
- Early publication establishes the researchers’ leadership in rapidly evolving fields of study. For the student, this can vastly improve post-graduation employability. For the PhD advisor, this can accelerate professional advancement, including for securing new research funding and recruiting research students.

Typical guidelines for an article dissertation:

The article dissertation is not ideal for all PhD research, nor for all faculty, nor for all PhD students. Neither is it intended to eliminate traditional treatise dissertations nor to constrain academic choices.

The article dissertation PhD is not awarded simply on the basis of any three articles. It is a compilation of published, submitted, or journal-ready scholarly articles on a unifying topic. The unifying topic and the article dissertation plan, including requirements and guidelines, must be approved by the student’s PhD dissertation committee at the time of the PhD research proposal. Furthermore, the research must be conducted by the student while registered in the PhD program and under the supervision of the PhD advisor.

The following requirements and guidelines are typical for article dissertations.

- The usual minimum number of articles acceptable for an article dissertation is three, although more may be required to achieve coherence and sufficient contribution to knowledge to earn the PhD. The PhD dissertation committee is the final judge in this regard.

- The list of approved journals for publication should be discussed and agreed by the PhD dissertation committee at the time of the PhD proposal defense, balancing journal reputation, time for the journal review cycle, and reasonable chance for acceptance.
- The required publication status for articles at the time of the PhD defense, is defined by the PhD dissertation committee. Articles not accepted for publication at the time of the PhD dissertation defense must meet the expectations of the PhD dissertation committee.
- The student must be first author on all articles included in the article dissertation. As first author, the student is responsible for:
 - Development and articulation of the concept or idea for research.
 - Development of the research design.
 - Conducting the research and analysis, reaching conclusions, and writing major portions of a manuscript.
 - When an article is co-authored, the student's distinct contribution to the article must be established and the roles of the co-authors explained to the PhD dissertation committee. The committee determines if the student's research contribution to the article meets their expectations.
- The student is responsible for securing necessary permissions from the copyright holder and other authors for articles used in the article dissertation.

Typical components of an article dissertation:

- Prefatory Material, including:
 - Copyright information
 - Abstract
 - Acknowledgments and dedication
 - Table of contents
 - Lists of tables and figures and abbreviations
- Main Body:
 - Chapter 1: The introduction includes a clear statement of the student's purpose or specific research hypothesis to be tested. It provides necessary background information and a broad statement summarizing the findings of the study. It explains how the articles relate to each other and establishes their distinct contributions to the purpose or hypothesis tested, justifying them as separate and distinct articles.
 - Chapter 2: Article 1 (including reference list and appendices).
 - Chapter 3: Article 2 (including reference list and appendices).
 - Chapter 4: Article 3 (including reference list and appendices).
 - Chapter 5: The concluding material includes:
 - The overall conclusions for the dissertation, with a general discussion, applications, and ideas for future research that emerge from the separate articles as well as from the dissertation as a whole.
 - References relevant to the introduction, overall conclusion, and any supplementary sections.
 - Appendices, if relevant and essential, related to the manuscript as a whole.