



Goal Setting Guide with Samples

There are two methods you might use to split your dissertation or thesis work into achievable goals: it could be process-based, in which you complete one stage in the writing process at a time, or it could be section-based, in which you complete one section of a chapter fully at a time.

- The **process-based strategy** is more useful when you do not yet know the individual sections of the chapter and need to come up with them during your writing process. With this strategy, you will likely work chronologically.
- The **section-based strategy** is more useful when you already know the sections of your chapter based on looking at other dissertations or based on what your advisor has recommended. With this strategy, you can start in any section; you don't need to write them in order.

See below the samples for each strategy and modify the categories and individual goals according to your needs. Whichever strategy you use, you may want to include specific dates for certain items in your list, for instance emailing your advisor for a check-in.

Each of these samples is intended to take 4-6 weeks to complete if you check off 1-2 individual items each weekday, Monday through Friday. Both samples assume you will meet with your advisor every 2-3 weeks, sending them a progress check-in email on off weeks. Maintaining consistent communication with your advisor is a good practice to establish, but you could substitute some of these meetings or progress check-ins for meeting with a committee member or other professor, another graduate student, or writing tutor.

These samples assume you are writing a monograph-style dissertation with a layout roughly resembling an Introduction/Literature Review chapter, Methods chapter, Results and/or Discussion chapters, and Conclusion Chapter. You can adjust accordingly based on your own dissertation layout.



Example: Process-based goals for a Results Chapter

Data processing

- Look through data or evidence, mark major thematic categories
- Sort data files into thematic categories
- Digitize data categories; organize digital data into categories
- Email Dr. Advisor with updates on data processing; schedule meeting to go over outline (by Fri., Oct. 1)

Revising Draft #1

- Print Draft #1
- Read through full draft; mark any confusing sections
- Cut chapter into individual paragraphs; reorganize paragraphs
- Reorganize digital draft
- Add new transitional pieces
- Write Chapter concluding section

Outlining Draft #1

- Look through Data Category #1 and sort into subcategories by similarity
- Look through Data Category #2 and sort into subcategories by similarity
- Look through Data Category #3 and sort into subcategories by similarity
- Digitize outline (or format in a way that is legible to Dr. Advisor)
- Meet with Dr. Advisor
- Revise/take notes on outline after meeting

Editing revised Draft #1

- Print revised Draft #1
- Read through, mark grammar mistakes
- Apply grammar edits to digital draft
- Check for consistency of terminology
- Check citations
- Look at thesis guide table formatting, format tables accordingly
- Send Draft #1 to Dr. Advisor; schedule meeting time to review draft feedback

Writing Draft #1

- Write Data Category #1 section, based on subcategories
- Write Data Category #2 section, based on subcategories
- Write Data Category #3 section, based on subcategories
- Add transitional paragraphs between sections
- Draft Chapter introduction
- Outline Chapter concluding takeaways (bullet point form)
- Email Dr. Advisor with updates on draft; schedule a turn-in time for Draft #1

Miscellaneous

- Plan for unscheduled things to come up as you write your chapter and leave space for them; for instance, you might realize you need to read a newly published article or redo a particular test with your data

- Something fun for after this page is complete 😊



Example: Section-based goals for an Introduction & Literature Review Chapter

Chapter Introduction

- Draft opening paragraph: introduce your research area
- Draft “gap statement”: explain a problem or lack that exists in the research area
- Draft “contribution statement”: explain how you will address the problem/lacking area
- Draft research questions
- Email Dr. Advisor with updates

Key Terminology

- Make list of key terminology used/introduced in dissertation
- Draft key term definitions (bullet point form)
- Draft section introduction; point out connection of key terms to your RQs
- Draft chapter conclusion; transition to lit review
- Meet with Dr. Advisor; ask if definitions make sense
- Revise definitions after meeting

Literature Review

- Compile source notes in one document
- Organize notes according to major research categories
- Draft Category 1 section
- Draft Category 2 section
- Draft Category 3 section
- Add transitional paragraphs between sections
- Draft lit review introductory paragraph
- Draft lit review concluding paragraph
- Email Dr. Advisor with updates

Significance/Contribution of Research

- Reread lit review; make a list of research areas discussed that your research contributes to
- Draft explanation of contribution #1
- Draft explanation of contribution #2
- Draft explanation of contribution #3
- Write transitional sentences between contributions
- Draft a section introduction
- Draft a section conclusion

Final Revisions

- Print Draft #1
- Read through, look to places that need to be reorganized or better explained
- Apply organization edits to digital draft
- Reread, correct grammar mistakes
- Add citations list
- Draft “outline of chapters” section
- Submit to Dr. Advisor; request a meeting time to review their feedback

Miscellaneous

- Plan for unscheduled things to come up as you write your chapter and leave space for them; for instance, you might realize you need to read a newly published article or redo a particular test with your data

- Something fun for after this page is complete 😊