Odds and ends:

Getting your thesis, project or dissertation finished, defended and accepted

Your dissertation or project is the capstone of your degree. It has many of the characteristics of a publication and is likely to be referenced later in your career. It needs to be honest in its reporting of your work, technically clean, simple and direct in word choices and grammar, and sufficiently detailed so it can be used in replications and extensions of the research. Because of the way dissertations archived they are readily available. Several issues need to be considered in crafting your strategy for completion: writing, editing /reviewing, safety, attention to detail, going forward, defending, corrections and submission.

Writing: Keep writing even when you are discouraged—

- Work on your reference list and edit to the style your program recommends. Find the Doi’s and other details.
- Put your appendices together: instruments, supplementary tables, IRB exemption or approval.
- Carefully read your proposal’s review of literature and slim or edit out what is no longer relevant and decide on critical additions. Do the library research.
- If you are doing the analysis, you can start your methods chapter.
- You do not have to write in the sequence and order of the results chapter. But be sure to read the completed chapter to make certain you don’t repeat sentences or sections. Keep all drafts, your committee may request what has been excised. Also they may form the basis articles.

Editing and reviewing: Clean up as you go; cite correctly, get the page number, find the doi’s.—

- Editing can help you keep working when you are stuck. Get rid of the very, often and other writing crutches; think of them as 4 letter words. Use the find function.
- Check the punctuation and spacing.
- You want your product to look good. Be accurate and not too flowery, mushy, or verbose.
- Check with your advisor about sending sections to be reviewed as you go.
- When you get a complete draft, check your references for being in the document and your text for having the references in the bibliography. Use find and a hard copy to track your checkoff.
- Don’t waste your committee’s time and attention by circulating drafts with many errors.

Safety: I have known many large and minor tragedies in which data and drafts were lost or damaged.
Keep an on line and a hard copy notebook on your data decisions and analysis so you know what you did and in what order. Qualitative data can be handled in software programs, but keep a hard copy of the transcripts under lock and key.

Keep your drafts on several devices and in several places. Keep hard copy, too.

Hand carry and make sure that the people in the bureaucracy get your paperwork, make copies and keep.

**Attention to detail:** if you don’t have a picky advisor or committee member, recruit/pay a reader to check grammar, punctuation, format, etc,

- If you are not a native English speaker or have been reading a lot of British or other out of country literature remember to check spelling and usage and accept suggestions for avoiding stilted or foreign colloquial examples.
- Get the signature pages correct with the names as preferred by the person and on the right paper.
- Get your title so it will help searches for your work. Don’t be cute.
- There is some argument over when to put into the template. I find that many students do better to get a good draft before they start playing with it and others like to start using it. In any event the margins must be as stated, no exceptions. If you have exhibits you may want to check with the graduate office before you send them up the line.
- There are many supportive services including the writing center, the reference librarians, refworks, and the counseling center. Use them.

**Going forward:** keep notes on ideas you discard for later use.

- Identify possible articles and where you need co-authors and start on them.
- Speedy publication is a goal. Do at least one article by yourself.
- Develop your job talk.

**Defending:** Keep calm and be prepared.

- Your short powerpoint or handout should point out the achievements and any adaptations you did since the proposal was approved. Focus on discussion and interpretation as your committee has read your paper.
- Be prepared for questions on topics other than the dissertation. If the committee is satisfied with the dissertation they may move on to asking about your future plans, other research interests, what you learned, etc. Be aware that news on campus or in the world may also find their way into the conversation.
- Food and drinks may be helpful as it gives everyone a chance to catch a breath and you to understand what has been asked.

**Submission:** make all corrections and follow procedures. Keep a copy of paperwork. Follow up and track the process.