Components of a Dissertation and their Characteristics at Different Quality Levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components</th>
<th>Outcome Quality Levels</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Outstanding - 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction/Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>• Compelling, original problem</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Makes a persuasive, convincing case of need for study</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Results will make a significant contribution to knowledge in field</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grounding in the Literature</td>
<td>• Places the work within a larger context</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Sophisticated integration, synthesis and critique of literature from related fields</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theoretical or conceptual framework</td>
<td>• Theoretical/conceptual framework is integrated with study, illuminating all aspects of study</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Sophisticated understanding of theoretical framework</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Application yields insightful findings</td>
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1 Evaluators should check “3” when the level of work in a particular area is better than acceptable/meets expectations but less than outstanding.
| Research Design and Execution | • Design and method are creative, sophisticated  
- Demonstrates novel or very effective use of methods  
- Nuanced understanding of methods and study limitations | • Research design and method are appropriate to question  
- Study executed competently  
- Limitations of study identified | • Uses the wrong methodology or tools  
- Data are not handled carefully; does not have appropriate controls or controls groups  
- Data seriously flawed |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| Presentation of Findings and Quality of Interpretation | • Robust, meaningful, interesting  
- Analyses map back to the hypotheses, theory/conceptual framework  
- Discusses the limitations of the analysis | • Findings are appropriately presented  
- Presents evidence to support conclusions  
- Findings interpreted correctly | • Results do not follow from the analysis and are interpreted incorrectly  
- Evidence does not support the conclusions  
- Analysis wrong |
| Discussion/Conclusion | • Findings clearly and elegantly synthesized  
- Situates the findings in larger context  
- Generates new knowledge  
- Ties to framework | • Results are synthesized  
- Conclusions are supported by the evidence  
- Research questions answered  
- Relates findings to literature | • Summarizes the results, little analysis or interpretation  
- Insufficient discussion of results  
- Misinterprets the findings  
- Shows lack of understanding and careful thought  
- Conclusions unsupported by data |
| Implications for Research | • Has implications for the future research in the field | • Indicates where future research might improve upon what was done | • Little understanding of or identification of implications of study for future research  
- Future research questions are unimportant |
<p>| Implications for Policy or | • Makes novel contribution to policy | • Findings and conclusions have implications for | • No or insignificant implications for |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice</th>
<th>development or practice and explains</th>
<th>educational policy or practice</th>
<th>educational policy or practice</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>implications are linked to data</td>
<td>Implications not based on findings</td>
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</table>
| Overall Writing and Organization | • Elegantly written  
• Writing fully engages and improves the study | • Competently written and organized  
• Follows appropriate style manual  
• Few if any typos, grammatical errors | • Poorly written  
• Poorly organized  
• Typographical errors |
| Overall | • Original & significant innovative  
• Moves field forward  
Publishable in high quality journal | • Solid  
• Well written & organized  
• Makes contribution but not field-changing  
• Publishable in 2nd or 3rd tier journal | • Makes insignificant or no contribution  
• Not publishable |

*Adapted from Barbara Lovitts & Ellen Wert, *Developing Quality Dissertations in the Social Sciences, 2009.*