

GUIDELINES FOR CTE QUALIFYING PAPER

I. Goals of the Qualifying Paper

The Qualifying Paper is intended to help ensure that students are prepared to undertake the substantial research project required of a dissertation by providing them with an opportunity to conduct an independent research study on a smaller scale in their second year. The QP might constitute a pilot study or preliminary investigation for what will eventually become the dissertation study, or it might arise out of independent work within the scope of another researcher's larger project. While the QP uses the journal article as a model for length and format, it is with an eye to articles reporting on relatively small or modestly scaled studies. Indeed, the QP could well end up as a publication (although that is not a requirement of this exercise). The QP's objectives are as follows:

- To demonstrate the candidate's ability to frame a research question
- To demonstrate the candidate's ability to conduct a thorough, critical, and succinct review of relevant literature that speaks to the framing of the research question
- To demonstrate the candidate's ability to develop or employ a conceptual framework suitable to addressing the research question
- To demonstrate the candidate's ability to use evidence to arrive at warranted claims that address the research question

II. Contents of the Qualifying Paper

The Qualifying Paper should follow the same structure as a standard journal article in the students' field of inquiry, which typically includes the following:

- A statement of the research problem and research question.
- A brief review of the relevant scholarship that situates the research problem in the literature, including the justification for the approach to the research question.
- The conceptual framework and method used to address the research question.
- The design of the study, including a description of the evidence that is used to make the argument and how that evidence has been gathered and analyzed
- A careful analysis of the evidence leading to a series of conclusions
- A discussion of the conclusions reached, including implications and limitations.

Each of these components has a number of functions which are delineated below as a further guide for students.

1. The *statement of research problem* and *statement of research question* typically will:

- State the problem or issue to be addressed and the research question to be posed as a result.
- Elucidate the basis on which the problem or issue and the research question have been identified.

- Show how the study is linked to prior knowledge and research on the topic (e.g., fills a gap, solves a puzzle, confirms or extends an important finding, overcomes major conceptual or methodological limitations of previous research on the topic).
- Justify the practical and/or theoretical importance of the question to be investigated.

2. The *critical review of literature*, in providing a basis for both the design and framing of the study (rather than a descriptive summary), typically will:

- Identify and comment on the theoretical or conceptual approaches that bear on the treatment of this topic.
- Identify the contributions and shortcomings of empirical research, theoretical contributions, and advocacy pieces on the subject, being clear to distinguish among these different types of work.
- Synthesize the major findings, in terms of the conceptual and methodological features and findings of prior research.
- Identify the major limitations of previous research on the topic.

3. The *conceptual framework* typically will:

- Identify the relevant concepts and theoretical perspectives.
- Make explicit the proposed linkages between concepts and justify those proposed linkages using knowledge from prior research or practice.
- Establish the connection between the research question and the evidence to be gathered and analyzed.

4. The *research design and methods*, in addition to specifying the study's structure and method(s), typically includes:

- A description of the evidence or data used to address the research question, how the evidence was gathered and analyzed, and why this source of evidence is appropriate for investigating the research question.
- The advantages and limitations of the approach and the data/evidence in addressing the research question.

5. The *analysis of the evidence* should present the results of analyzing the data or other evidence. The section should focus on presenting and interpreting the evidence and on making the argument regarding the research question. In the analysis of the evidence, the researcher tries to anticipate challenges to the validity of the analysis and to show how the analysis met those challenges.

6. The *discussion and conclusions* should summarize how the analysis of the data/evidence relates to the research problem and the *limitations* of the analysis, including:

- How the claims and interpretations address the research problem and question

- How the conclusions support, extend, or challenge conclusions in earlier scholarship
- Theoretical, practical, and/or methodological implications of the study

III. Qualifying Paper Format, Length, and Due Date:

Typed, double-spaced, twelve-point font, research paper format and style (APA or a style approved by your advisor).

- ✓ In structure, format, and length, the QP should be modeled on articles in a scholarly journal that the student, in consultation with the adviser, has identified as appropriate for the research undertaken.
- ✓ Except in exceptional circumstances that the student can justify, the QP should not exceed 60 double-spaced pages.
- ✓ Confer with primary advisor on expectations for format and length, as there is variation among faculty.
- ✓ Due before the end of the 6th Quarter of the doctoral program. See section in Doctoral Handbook for Sixth Quarter Review.

IV. Criteria For Evaluating the Qualifying Paper

1. Clarity And Importance Of Problem Statement

Is it clear what new knowledge is needed, what problems need to be solved, or what theory needs to be tested/developed, and why? Has the writer connected the reader quickly with the research problem or question?

2. Clarity of Research Question

Is it clear precisely what this study is intended to accomplish (e.g., is the purpose confirmatory, discovery or exploratory)? Is it clear how the study will advance our understanding of some education-related phenomena?

3. Adequacy Of Literature Review And Conceptual Framework

Is the context and “intellectual ancestry” of this study described in a clear, comprehensive, and coherent manner? Are the following things achieved?

- Conceptual framework is clearly identifiable with concepts and constructs defined.
- Research question is linked to conceptual framework
- Literature review is appropriately critical and selective.

4. Research Methods

Is the proposed research design/methodology section clear? Is there a clear and convincing rationale for the appropriateness of the data? Are limitations or trade-offs identified?

5. Analysis of Evidence/Discussion

Is the analysis of the evidence presented in a convincing fashion? Does it focus on the research question? Are potential challenges to the validity of the analysis adequately addressed? Does the discussion section address how the analysis of the evidence relates to the extant literature and the limitations of the findings?

6. Quality Of Writing

Is the prose clear, succinct, and coherent? Additional considerations: Does the author write in a succinct manner, avoid repetition, integrate different parts of the paper, use adequate citations, provide specificity without making the document overly lengthy?

7. OVERALL ASSESSMENT OF THE QUALIFYING PAPER

Not a summation or average of ratings of A-F, but an indication of the reader's overall impression of the quality of the qualifying paper. Each reader will judge the paper to be one of the following:

- A satisfactory or better completion of the QP requirement.
- Acceptable with completion of revisions to be agreed upon by the committee and provided to the student in writing, to the satisfaction of the advisor.
- Requiring revision and resubmission for review by the committee.
- Failure to demonstrate the capacity necessary to proceed to the dissertation, for reasons to be agreed to by the committee and provided to the student in writing.

V. Additional Considerations of Scope and Models

One key consideration in selecting your topic is scope. Given the intent of the QP (helping to ensure readiness to conduct original research for the dissertation) and the limited time set aside for this project, it is important that your research question and design be well-specified and address a relatively constrained question.

The best models for a good research paper are stellar published journal articles in the research area being addressed. Students should model their QPs on such journal articles, particularly those reporting on modestly scaled studies. Once you have picked your topic, you may want to discuss possible candidates for such model papers with your advisor.