

Best Practices for Concept Paper Development

Before beginning please read this article.

[Conceptualizing and Conducting Meaningful Research Studies in Education](#)

Navigate to a best practices list by clicking on a link below.

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If the links above do not work, please read this.

Microsoft Word has a setting which allows you to choose between clicking to follow a hyperlink or using CTRL + Click to follow a hyperlink. If the links in this manual are not working when you click them, try holding down the control key and then clicking.

If you wish to change this option in your Microsoft Word 2007 program, click on the Orb displaying the Microsoft Office logo in the upper right corner. Click on *Word Options* at the bottom of the window that opens. Click on *Advanced* on the left side of the window that then opens. Make sure *the fourth box down* is unchecked (beside the box it says "Use CTRL + Click to follow hyperlink.")

Note: Most of the information found in this document comes from a review of the feedback offered by the Northcentral University Office of Academic Research (OAR) to over one hundred Concept Papers. By following the guidance found in this document you will avoid the most common errors made while developing a Concept Paper.

Title

Concept Paper

Submitted to Northcentral University

Graduate Faculty of the School of XXXXXXXXXXXX
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF XXXXXXXX

by

NAME

Prescott Valley, Arizona
Month Year

Comment [OAR1]: Title is indicative of the contents of the study, and should be from 10-15 words in length.

Comment [SoE2]:

Best Practices for Developing the Title

1. Review section 4.3 *Title and Title Page* of the PhD Dissertation Handbook available in the [Dissertation Center](#). You will find a sample of a good title and a poor title in this section.
2. Summarize the main idea of the dissertation simply and, if possible, "with style" (Publication Manual of the APA, 2010, p. 23).
3. Avoid words that serve no useful purpose since they can mislead indexers. Examples of words and phrases to avoid include *method, results, A Study of,* and *an Experimental Investigation of*.
4. Explore the article available at: [Tips for Writing an Effective Title and Abstract for your Dissertation](#)

Comment [OAR3]: For PhD learners, please ensure that the study meets the heightened theoretical requirements for a PhD study. See the NCU Dissertation Handbook for more information.

Comment [SoE4]: Be sure to read Differences Between the PhD and Applied Doctorate found in the [Dissertation Center](#).

Comment [SoE5]: Change XXXXXXXX to either Doctor of Philosophy for the PhD degree or Doctor of Education for the EdD degree depending on which program you are in.

Table of Contents

[Note: this is a non-inclusive sample and will vary depending on your subheadings]

Comment [SoE6]: You can add additional subheadings. See best practices list below.

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1. Please note that only two heading levels are included in the Table of Contents.

The Microsoft Help Menu will enable you to learn how to modify the presentation of a table of contents in a Word document. Click the question mark in the small blue circle at the upper right corner of the screen. Use *Create a table of contents* as your search phrase. Click on the link to Create a table of contents that appears along with other links. Scroll down to *format the table of contents* for detailed instructions.

2. View your table of contents as a valuable resource during dissertation development. It is an evolving outline that helps you organize your thoughts. In its final form it will help the reader understand at a glance the contents and how you are making your argument. Keep in mind that, as the dissertation is being reviewed and after it is completed, many informed readers will consult the table of contents to assess the value of the dissertation and to decide if they wish to read further.

3. Most emerging scholars would do well to spend time learning some of the advanced features of Microsoft Word, particularly those relating to the creation of a *dynamic* table of contents such as the one included in the Northcentral University

dissertation template. A dynamic table of contents allows you to move to parts of the document that are of interest by clicking on headings or subheadings within the table of contents. It can be used to great advantage as your dissertation grows to several hundred pages, allowing you to swiftly navigate from one part of the document to the others. In order to create this type of table of contents, you need to develop two sets of skills. First, you will have to learn how to automatically format headings using the Styles menu in Microsoft Word. Second, you will have to learn how to automatically create and format a table of contents in Microsoft Word. You may find the following demo helpful.

[Let Word manage your Table of Contents](#)

4. As you extend the subheading structure of the literature review, you can automatically update your Table of Contents to include new headings and revise page numbers as your dissertation grows. If you are using Microsoft Word 2007, all you have to do is right click on the table of contents (assuming it is a dynamic table of contents as described above), select the *Update Field* option and then select *Update Entire Table*. If you are using an earlier version of Word, use the help function to learn how to do this in the program you are using. If you discover that text that is not part of your headings and subheadings appears in your table of contents, it is because that text has been formatted as a heading instead of normal text. If you [reformat](#) the offending text as *normal text* and update your table of contents, it will disappear.

5. As noted above, you will most likely add additional subheadings to your Brief Review of the Literature and the Research Method section. See [Best Practices for developing the Research Method section for suggestions on additional subheadings](#). Refer to page 62 of the 6th edition of the *Publication Manual of the APA* for guidance on

properly formatting APA headings. Page: 9

Introduction

[Text... Dissertation topic is introduced in one or more paragraphs (2 pages maximum).

The study topic is briefly described to establish the main ideas and context. Note: Topic must reflect doctoral level study and the specific program.]

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Best Practices for Developing the Introduction of a Concept Paper

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1. Note: you are given length guidelines for this section of your concept paper, i.e. a two page maximum. It is important to follow every detail of guidance presented in the blue text of the Concept Paper template. A common mistake learners make when developing their Concept Paper is to extend it beyond the recommended length guidelines. This may result in your Concept Paper being returned after an Office of Academic Research review with a *Resubmit* disposition.

2. Although the introduction is expected to be brief, it should be thoughtfully grounded in the current scholarly literature related to your topic. You should offer [citations](#) for carefully selected [quality sources](#) for all assertions made in the introduction.

It is important to clearly understand what an assertion is and why they can cause problems for academic writers. An [assertion](#) is a statement or declaration that something is true or accurate that is presented without sufficient supporting evidence. In everyday conversation, we often make assertions that are without support as a part of normal communication based on facts that everybody knows. One of the many challenges faced by emerging scholars learning the art of academic writing is to break out of the habit of communicating opinions in favor of arguments for which supporting evidence is

Comment [NCU7]: Refer to the Dissertation Handbook, the DRF, Dissertation Center and course resources for additional concept paper information.

Comment [SoE8]: DRF refers to **Dissertation Review Form**. It contains the same information found in the blue type of the template for the Dissertation Proposal and the template for the Dissertation Manuscript. The DRF is used when members of the Office of Academic Research (OAR) or members of your committee review your Proposal and your Dissertation Manuscript.

Comment [NCU9]: The proposed topic must directly reflect the learner's program of study.

available. Reviewers will often challenge unsupported assertions with comments like: “how do you know this is true,” “sources please,” “do not make unfounded assertions,” “this is a bold claim, how can you back it up with evidence” and so on. Before you submit any documents to your chair, reflect on each sentence you wrote to insure that either the views offered are universally understood (though few are) or are supportable with evidence from [scholarly sources](#) or data.

3. The introduction section should conclude with a brief overview of the remainder of the paper’s contents, including a listing of the sections that will follow.

Statement of the Problem

[Text... Present general issue/observation that in theory or practice leads to the need for the study (in most cases scholarly citations within the last 5 years are included). Present focused problem that leads to the need for a research response. Clearly describe and document the problem that directly leads to the study purpose. For some degree programs (DBA, EdD) the problem identified might be a practical problem or issue in an organization or school.]

Comment [NCU10]: PROBLEM STATEMENT
(approximately 250 to 300 words) *Note:* Articulation of a concise problem statement is key to a successful proposal/dissertation manuscript. The problem statement is a brief discussion of a problem or observation succinctly identifying and documenting the need for and importance of the study. Clearly describe and document the problem that prompted the study. Include appropriate sources to document the existence of a problem worthy of doctoral level research.

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Best Practices for Developing the Statement of the Problem

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1. Developing an acceptable Statement of the Problem for the concept paper is challenging for many learners; however, it is one of the most critical elements of the document. If a solid problem statement is not developed for the Concept Paper it is nearly impossible to develop an acceptable Dissertation Proposal. A great deal of angst can be avoided and significant time can be saved by carefully reviewing the guidance of the blue text above and the best practices for Problem Statement development offered below. You

should plan to invest a significant amount of time and energy in developing your problem statement.

2. All Northcentral University doctoral learners are encouraged to begin work on their problem statement by reading a particularly helpful article entitled: [Framework of Problem-Based Research: A Guide for Novice Researchers on the Development of a Research-Worthy Problem](#). (Note: this same link is provided in the [Dissertation Center](#) School of Education Resources.) The following quotes from this article underline one of the most important aspects of problem statement development - its reliance on preexisting literature.

The presence of the research problem **is almost always established through the literature review**. However, there are occasional visionaries who see research problems long before others; the vast majority of research is built upon problems that are well documented. (Ellis & Levy, 2008, p. 22)

In the quest for a research-worthy problem, novice researchers should first understand what are not research-worthy problems (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). First, research-worthy problems should not be based solely on personal observations and/or experiences. Although a researcher may have a “hunch for the problem”, ... **literature that documents the problem or literature that documents conflicting results should be the basis for a research-worthy problem** (Kerlinger & Lee, 2000). (Ellis & Levy, 2008, p. 24)

3. To develop an acceptable problem statement, learners must manage the tension between their personal interests and what the literature says about their research topic. You will find it of benefit to review section 3.1 of the 2010 PhD Dissertation Handbook for guidance in choosing a Dissertation topic. Your personal passions in and of themselves may not allow you to frame a problem that is appropriate for study and that can be successfully studied. At the same time, the literature alone will not necessarily fire your passions as a researcher to the extent necessary so that you must feel a sense of investment in the problem. As a result, you need to keep reading until you find an

intersection between your passion as a researcher and a research problem other scholars have identified as needing resolution. The following links will be of benefit as you search the literature for good quality sources that help to validate your problem statement.

[Finding Sources](#)

[Identifying Scholarly Sources](#)

[Keeping Track of Sources](#)

4. One of the most common reasons the Statement of the Problem section of the Concept Paper is not accepted by committee members and the Office of Academic Research is a lack [citations](#) backing up each assertion, a sense that too few come from [scholarly sources](#), or if a clear connection is not made as to how the citations offered contribute to validating the assertions made. As suggested in the article discussed above, the problem statement cannot be adequately developed until the learner has developed a strong awareness of the current literature relating to the research topic. Keep in mind that at the doctoral level, offering critically reflective paraphrases is preferred to offering direct quotes and that direct quotations should be used very sparingly, i.e. about one for every ten pages. Developing papers that rely too heavily on quotations indicates an overreliance on the published works of others and shows less of your ability to explain, interpret and critically reflect on the writings of other scholars as you shape your argument.

5. The most effective way to demonstrate you have found a dissertation worthy research problem is to cite other scholars who have recently pointed out the issue needs further research. Often learners will assume that, if they find a gap in the literature associated with a particular topic, they have found a research problem. While this may be

an important reason to choose a problem to address, it is not sufficient in and of itself.

The reason for the gap could be that the issue is not worthy of research. Explain why a lack of research is a problem, or better yet, cite authorities who have noted the need for research on the issue you have chosen.

6. The following set of questions may help to build a logical case that a particular issue constitutes a research worthy problem.

- Why is it a research worthy problem?
- What are the potential negative consequences if this topic is never studied?
- Whose problem is it?
- Is it an economic problem?
- Is it a social problem?
- What is the nature of this problem and whom does it affect?

The brief article entitled [Research Problem Exploration](#) provides another set of questions which may help you articulate your problem statement. You will note this article also steers you toward grounding the research problem in the literature.

7. As noted in the blue text above, you are to clearly and specifically identify the problem that forms the basis of the proposed study using a sentence, "The problem is...[followed by a succinct identification of a research worthy problem]."

8. A sample problem statement that illustrates some (but not all) of the concepts discussed above is presented below.

Statement of the Problem (Example)

Employee turnover rates increased in all industries between 1997 and 2000

(Martel, 2002); and increased turnover reduces organizational profitability, due to

Comment [SoE11]: This statement of the problem is well within the 250-300 word guide line mentioned in the marginal note beside the blue text above.

Comment [SoE12]: Note that this is a clearly stated general problem – employee turnover.

Comment [SoE13]: This is what is meant by documented – here is a recent citation (given the date of this dissertation.)

the related high recruitment and training costs, which can reach or even exceed a worker's annual salary (Hillmer, Hillmer, & McRoberts, 2004; Sanford, 2005). Replacing an employee requires advertising the position, time and effort in interviewing and reference checking, time and effort identifying skill shortfalls, and supplying the necessary training (Lazar, 2004; Piotrowski & Plash, 2006; Sagie et al., 2002; Sanford, 2005). With the increasing turnover rates (Martel, 2002), the specific problem was to investigate whether the emotional intelligence of the leader (Goleman et al., 2002) influenced employees' affective commitment, thereby affecting turnover and related loss in profitability (Gardner & Stough, 2003; Morrow, 1993). Knowledge gained about this phenomenon would enable organizations to focus training in this avenue and reduce the costs associated with employee turnover (Lazar, 2004; Piotrowski & Plash, 2006; Sagie et al., 2002; Sanford, 2005).

Stephens, B. W. (2007). *A phenomenological study: Human resource professionals' perceptions of leader emotional intelligence and employee affective commitment*. (Doctoral dissertation, University of Phoenix). Retrieved from <http://gradworks.umi.com/3292918.pdf>

It is clear that the author was well versed in the relevant literature. Although he most likely had a strong personal interest in this research topic, his problem statement is not based on his personal interests and observations alone. Instead, his interest in the topic guided his reading of the literature until he identified a thoroughly validated research problem that was also identified by several other scholars.

9. You should have at least 5 - 10 [good quality sources](#) such as peer reviewed journal articles. In this case, more is better and newer is better than older. You may find it helpful to create an early draft of your problem statement and strengthen it as your

Comment [SoE14]: The general problem is described in more specific terms and more citations are offered to thoroughly ground all assertions it in the literature.

Comment [SoE15]: The process of providing more details associated with the problem continues and these details are backed up by ample citations.

Comment [SoE16]: In the blue text above you are asked to begin with a general issue that leads to the need for the study followed by a focused problem statement as is found here. The wording used is a little different than the phrase "The problem is..." because this example comes from another institution; however, the intent is the same.

Comment [SoE17]: The specific problem the research project will address is identified and validated by more citations.

Comment [SoE18]: A clear explanation of why this is a research worthy problem is presented and backed up by the generous use of citations.

Comment [SoE19]: Fifteen citations were used to validate this brief problem statement.

literature review advances. Be prepared to abandon all or part of this early draft as master the literature related to your topic come to more fully understand the research worthy problems associated with it.

10. Keep careful notes of sections of peer reviewed articles and other sources that may help you develop a logical argument that you have identified a research worthy problem. Finding this kind of material should be a high priority as you begin your dissertation process and you should consider each source that indicates you have a research worthy problem to be a precious find. As you move forward, you should look for better, clearer and more current sources and when you find them you should discard less relevant information.

11. Many learners are surprised, puzzled and discouraged by the initial feedback they receive from their committee and the Office of Academic Research (OAR) on their problem statement. For many, it is the first time in their advanced academic journey they have encountered feedback that indicates they have not been able to meet an important expectation after several attempts to do so. Here is an example of the kind of feedback you can expect.

Your Statement of the Problem section offers interesting background information on this subject; however, the Learner only makes implications regarding the problem that is prompting this study. The Learner indicates that this area has not been studied previously. Please note that many topics are not studied, but it does not necessarily mean it is a problem. The Learner is encouraged to explain why a lack of research in this area is a problem or to restate the problem, as appropriate. Please consider: Whose problem is it? What are the potential negative consequences if this study is never conducted? What is the nature of this problem and whom does it affect? Is it an economic problem? Is it a social problem? Is it an organizational problem? Describe and document the problem that directly prompts the need for research. Include appropriate high quality and recent sources to support the existence of a problem worthy of doctoral level research.

If you feel discouraged by this kind of feedback, or if you find yourself discouraged for other reasons as you work on your dissertation, you may find the following articles to be of help.

[The Dissertation Workshop: Sorting out Sources of Discouragement](#)

(Helps you to analyze sources of discouragement giving you power over them.)

[Taming a Dissertation](#)

(Offers research based advice about how to keep going.)

12. If you receive feedback similar to this despite your best efforts (and you probably will even after trying to write a strong problem statement several times) your most productive response is to continue exploring good quality and recent literature that is relevant to your topic. If you persist, you will eventually discover a research worthy problem that has been identified by numerous scholars, and you will be able to develop a problem statement that will form a strong foundation for a successful dissertation. When your problem statement is deemed to be appropriate by your committee and the OAR, there is cause for celebration. You are off to a great start on your dissertation journey. Your next challenge will be to insure your problem statement, purpose statement, research questions, and research design are in complete alignment with your problem statement.

Purpose of the Study

[Text... Research method is identified as qualitative, quantitative, or mixed method.

Research design is clearly stated and is aligned with the problem statement.

Identification of variables/constructs and/or phenomenon/concept/idea:

Quantitative research variables/constructs are briefly identified (including potential confounding variables, covariates, mediating variables, etc.). Research variables/constructs are identified and cited, if appropriate.

Qualitative research identifies a single phenomenon, concept, or idea that will be studied.

Mixed Method research includes all of the above.

Specific population of proposed study is identified. The number of participants that will serve as the sample should be estimated based on a power analysis (quantitative/mixed method) or conventions (qualitative) as detailed in chapter 3. Geographic location of study is identified.]

Comment [NCU20]: PURPOSE STATEMENT

The purpose statement should be a concise paragraph that describes the intent of the study and it should flow directly from the problem statement, specifically address the reason for conducting the study and reflect the research questions.

Begin the purpose statement with a succinct sentence that indicates the study method and overarching goal. 'The purpose of this [quantitative, qualitative] study is to... (describe the study goal that directly reflects and encompasses the research questions). Follow with a brief, but clear overview of how, with what instruments/data, with whom and where (as applicable). This information will be presented in greater detail under the Research Method heading.

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Best Practices for Developing the Purpose of the Study Section

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1. There is a great deal of guidance offered in the blue text above and the extensive marginal note that accompanies it. Your first step should be to analyze this guidance point by point. We will begin with the information found in the marginal note and then move on to the additional information found in the blue text.

a. Your purpose statement should consist of a single, concise paragraph. That is more challenging to achieve than you might realize depending on your learning style. Some learners write extensively in order to clarify their thinking. There is nothing wrong with this process provided you engage in extensive editing after it is over in order to make your written work concise and clear for your readers.

b. Your purpose statement should flow directly from the statement of the problem section. This is the first step in achieving *alignment* between key components of the concept paper; eventually you will be expected to achieve clear and obvious alignment throughout the Concept Paper. Without a carefully developed statement of the problem section serving as a solid foundation upon which to build the other components of the dissertation, it will not be possible to develop an adequate and carefully aligned purpose statement.

Here is an example of how misalignment can occur. Let us assume you have developed a thoughtful and well substantiated statement of the problem that illustrates bullying is a significant issue in urban schools in the USA. You have found great supporting evidence in the literature that this is a problem that deserves to be researched, and you have cited a dozen respected scholars who are urging other scholars investigate the issue more fully. You write the following purpose statement: *The purpose of this multiple case study is to identify key factors that enable gang incited violence to persist in three urban high schools located within School System ABC.* Unfortunately this purpose statement is not well aligned with a problem statement related to bullying. Of course there is a connection between *bullying* and *gang incited violence* but the two phenomena are not tightly aligned. As a consequence of this misalignment your mentor may tell you to either rework your statement of the problem or your purpose statement until they are in alignment. Since you have worked very hard on your statement of the problem you might rewrite your purpose statement several times until it settles into the following wording. *The purpose of this multiple case study is to identify key factors that enable bullying behavior to persist in three urban schools located within School System ABC.* The chair

of your committee now agrees your statement of the problem and your purpose statement are in alignment, and you are able to continue working on other components of your Concept Paper. Of course, this is an obvious example and your actual challenges in this regard will be more nuanced; nonetheless the above example serves to illustrate how careful you must be in achieving complete and obvious alignment of all components of your Concept Paper.

c. The marginal note beside the blue text above points out that the purpose statement should specifically address the reason for conducting the study. You should offer a concise distillation of the points you developed in your description of the research problem. To extend the example offered above you could write the following. *Once the key factors that enable bullying behavior to persist have been identified, school administrators can take steps to remove or diminish these factors in their schools and create a safer and more conducive learning environment for the students they serve.*

d. To some extent, your purpose statement is to be formulaic in that it complies with the following guidance: *Begin the purpose statement with a succinct sentence that indicates the study method and overarching goal. 'The purpose of this [quantitative, qualitative] study is to... (describe the study goal that directly reflects and encompasses the research questions).* If you may not want to be constrained by a formula but this is not the best place to exercise your creativity. Here is a sample purpose statement from a published Northcentral University dissertation that illustrates the pattern you are to follow.

The purpose of this quantitative correlation study is to examine the impact of leadership styles on student academic achievement among practical nursing programs in the District of Columbia and Fairfax County, Virginia.

e. Once a sentence similar to the one offered above has been presented, you are expected to provide a brief and clear overview of the following points:

- how the purpose will be fulfilled
- what data collection instruments or archival data will be used
- who the participants will be, and
- where the research project will take place.

For example, let us say your research purpose statement reads as follows. *The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study is to identify key factors that enable bullying behavior to persist in three urban high schools located within School System ABC.* Immediately after this statement you could add the following statement. *Interviews and focus groups will be held with administrators, teachers, and students in these schools in order to gather data relevant to fulfilling the purpose of the study.* This same information will be presented in far greater detail under the [Research Method](#) heading.

2. In the blue text above you are given additional guidance which has been distilled into the following check list. Remember you are to present all of this information in a single concise paragraph.

- ✓ identification as qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods
- ✓ for a quantitative study: variables/constructs including potential confounding variables, covariates, mediating variables etc. (include citations if appropriate)

- ✓ for a qualitative study: identify the single phenomenon, concept or idea to be studied
- ✓ specific population for the study
- ✓ estimation of the number of participants (as verified by a power analysis for a quantitative or mixed methods study and conventions for a qualitative study)
- ✓ geographic location of the study
- ✓ the instruments to be used

Example Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study is to identify key factors that enable bullying behavior to persist in three urban high schools located within School System ABC located in East Texas. A group of 10 teachers, 10 grade eight students, and three administrators will be interviewed from each school using a semi-structured interview protocol in order to gather their perceptions of factors that enable bullying behavior in their respective schools. A cross case analysis will be conducted to identify common and diverging themes associated with this phenomenon at the three research sites.

3. Your purpose statement should flow clearly and obviously from your problem statement. The clear and obvious alignment of your research response to the problem should be evident. Examine the examples offered above to see what this level of alignment looks like.

4. Your purpose statement should not imply that you are going to *prove* something. You may be surprised to learn that we cannot prove anything in scholarly research for two reasons. First, in quantitative analyses, statistical tests calculate the

Comment [SoE21]: The purpose statement is a single concise paragraph

Comment [SoE22]: The statement begins with "The purpose of this..."

Comment [SoE23]: The research method is identified as qualitative, quantitative, or mixed.

Comment [SoE24]: Research design is clearly stated.

Comment [SoE25]: Identification of single phenomenon/concept/idea

Comment [SoE26]: Geographic location of study is identified

Comment [SoE27]: The purpose statement begins with a succinct sentence that indicates the study method and overarching goal

Comment [SoE28]: The specific population is identified and the number of participants is estimated

Comment [SoE29]: The opening sentence is followed with a brief but clear overview of how, with whom and where the study will be carried out.

probability that something is true rather than establishing it as true. Second, in qualitative research, the study can only purport to describe what is occurring from the perspective of the participants. Whether or not the phenomenon they are describing is *true* in a larger context is not knowable. We cannot observe the phenomenon in all settings and in all circumstances.

We can provide evidence to support a theory or interpretation of a complex process unfolding in the social world. We can isolate and operationally define an individual variable and determine if a null hypothesis can be rejected. We can gradually build up the knowledge base in a particular field of inquiry. However, there are many potentially confounding variables in all studies in the social sciences that cannot be controlled for, a reality that makes proof an elusive goal.

Research Questions

[Text...]

Q1.

Q2.

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1. In addition to the guidance offered in the blue text and marginal notes above, many learners find it helpful to review chapter 7 of Creswell's (2009) book entitled *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* before they attempt to write their research question list. A more advanced discussion of research questions is available in the book [Research Questions by Richard Andrews](#).

2. Before presenting your first research question you are to offer some "introductory information presented in a discussion context" as mentioned in the blue text

Comment [NCU30]: Introductory information presented in a discussion context rather than simply stated or listed.
Research questions are distinct and answerable, given the identified constructs/phenomenon and population.

Quantitative
Research questions are included and the questions include corresponding proposed hypothesis(es)

Research questions and hypothesis(es) are aligned with problem statement.

Qualitative
Proposed research questions that are related to the phenomenon are stated.

Proposed research questions are aligned with problem statement.
The qualitative method(s) by which the research questions will be/are answered are included.

Mixed Method includes all of the above]

above. This should be a concise paragraph that bridges between the research purpose statement and the research question list. It should be a meaningful contribution to your paper and not merely repeat concepts you have already offered. Ideally it should illustrate how the research questions are [aligned](#) with the research purpose statement. For example, the following introductory comments would serve to bridge the gap between the sample purpose statement offered above and the list of research questions that are associated with it.

The following research questions elaborate on how the research purpose will be fulfilled. These questions ensure that the process of identifying key factors that enable bullying behaviors to persist within School System ABC is accomplished by viewing the phenomenon from several important perspectives.

3. Research questions are to be *distinct* from one another. In other words they should not overlap. Keep in mind that eventually your research questions will provide the structure for the fourth chapter of your dissertation as you fully elaborate on the answers you have developed for each question. You need to ensure that each question leads to a distinct answer that you can elaborate on without repeating what you discovered as you answered your other research question(s).

4. There are no official Northcentral University guidelines as to how many research questions you should have. At the time this document was being prepared the ten most recently published Northcentral University dissertations had the following numbers of research questions: 2, 3, 4, 4, 4, 4, 5, 5, 6, 8. As pointed out above, keep in mind that each research question must be thoroughly answered in the fourth chapter of your dissertation. Too many research questions will make this an overwhelming task. On

the other hand, too few will also make it difficult to construct a substantial and meaningful dissertation. Developing three to five research questions is a reasonable range to strive for but the number of research questions you develop should not be forced. They should emerge logically from the research problem and research purpose statement, and they should each be meaningful in light of the literature that addresses the research topic. More importantly, they should each be answerable within the constraints of the research design, constructs/phenomenon and population that will be utilized during the study.

5. Research questions should not be written so as to lead to a "Yes" or "No" response.

6. It is redundant to include the phrase "... is there a statistically significant difference..." when writing a research question. The process of hypotheses testing always checks for statistical significance. You need only say, "... is there a difference..."

Hypotheses (*Quantitative/Mixed Studies Only*)

H10. [Null Hypothesis Text...]

H1a. [Alternative Hypothesis Text...]

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1. For quantitative and mixed methods studies you are to offer a null hypotheses and alternative hypotheses for each research question. Creswell's (2009) seventh chapter offers guidance on developing hypotheses although you should also consult more advanced textbooks that explore quantitative research and the specific research design you will be using.

2. Qualitative studies and [descriptive studies](#) do not include hypotheses or [hypotheses testing](#).

Comment [NCU31]: Quantitative Hypotheses:

Both null hypothesis and alternative hypothesis are stated. Hypotheses stated in testable, potentially negatable, form with each variable operationalized. *Note:* Each hypothesis represents one distinct testable prediction. The phrasing of each hypothesis clearly reflects the nature of the statistical analysis used to test each hypothesis (i.e., comparisons, relationships, associations, model prediction).

3. Always state the [null hypothesis](#) first. Begin your research journey assuming the null hypothesis is true and that you will not be able to reject it. Good quantitative research is carefully designed to avoid assuming that the findings suggest something is true when it is in fact not true. As a researcher you may hold a pet theory but do your best to set it aside and maintain an open mind. Keep in mind that [we cannot prove anything during a research project](#).

4. Remember that [hypotheses should be quantifiable, testable and statistical in nature](#). Here is an example of well-developed null and alternative hypotheses:

H10. For women over 30 dealing with depression, after 10 sessions of brief cognitive therapy, the average the total score on the Beck Depression Inventory will remain the same.

H1a. For women over 30 dealing with depression, after 10 sessions of brief cognitive therapy, the average the total score on the Beck Depression Inventory will be reduced.

Definition of Key Terms

Term 1. Definition (APA citation).

TOC	Best Practices for Defining Key Terms	Menu
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1. Scholarly sources should be used to support definitions. Dictionaries are not considered to be scholarly sources in this context. Wikipedia is not considered to be a scholarly source at the dissertation level and should not be referenced at any point in a Concept Paper or a Dissertation.

2. Definitions should be in your own words, quotations should not be used in a definition; although, as noted above, citations should be used. Direct quotations should not be used because they indicate an overreliance on the published works of others and

Comment [SoE32]: Each hypothesis represents one distinct testable prediction.

Comment [SoE33]: Each variable is operationalized.

Comment [NCU34]: Definitions given represent key operational terms or words used in a unique way or that are not commonly used or understood. Definitions might include terms related to research design, qualitative inquiry, and/or analytical strategy. Definitions are supported with citations and/or noted as being those of the researcher.

Comment [NCU35]: Replace with the term name/label

shows less of the author's ability to explain and interpret the words that are being defined.

3. As illustrated above, the terms being defined should be presented as a level three heading (see page 62 of the 6th edition of the *Publication Manual of the APA*.) The term should be indented, in bold, followed by a period, and the definition should begin on the same line as the heading.

4. Arrange definitions alphabetically.

5. Be consistent in the way you structure and format each entry in your definitions list.

6. Use complete sentences and observe all other rules of grammar when developing your definition list.

Brief Review of the Literature

[Text... Discussion has depth and presents a critical analysis and synthesis of the literature that provides a context for the dissertation study. Discussion is comprehensive, organized, and flows logically. Use themes and/or subtopics as headings. Identify the themes or sub-topics around which the literature review has been organized into a coherent narrative discussion. In the review, at least 7 to 10 of the most important works or studies that touch upon the dissertation topic or problem are discussed. Be sure to include works that provide alternate or opposing perspectives on the proposed topic area to demonstrate unbiased research. Learners focus particularly on those works that address main ideas in the field, describe areas of controversy, and indicate areas of incomplete knowledge and relate them to the envisioned study's problem, purpose, and

Comment [NCU36]: Please note the literature review will contain several headings that will be specific to the topic. If appropriate, the majority of references should be published within the last 5 years.

research questions. Include historical and germinal works as well as current works (within the last 5 years).

Theme/Sub-Topic 1 [Repeat, as needed...]

[Text...]

Summary

[Text...]

Comment [NCU37]: Replace with the theme name/label

TOC	Best Practices for Developing the Literature Review	Menu
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1. Note the emphasis on using works that were published in the last five years.

You will need to conduct an ongoing [literature search](#) throughout the time you work on your dissertation in order to find current [scholarly sources](#) to show your mastery of the literature. Since the literature search and literature review you will conduct for your dissertation will most likely be the most advanced undertaking of this nature you have experienced, it would be very helpful to insure you begin with a solid foundation.

Library searching is change as technology improves and you need to make sure you are skilled at using the most current techniques in order to achieve the best result. The Northcentral University Library offers a helpful [Information Literacy Tutorial](#) that will insure you begin your work on a solid foundation. You will find it helpful to review the [Search like an Expert Tutorial](#). You should also be aware of the [Research Process](#) materials available at the Northcentral University Library. Spending time exploring these materials and tutorials at the beginning of your literature review work will save you time in the long run.

2. The blue text above points out that the *Brief Review of the Literature* should have depth and present a *critical analysis* of the literature. Critically analyzing sources is

one of the most demanding expectations of the entire dissertation process because it requires considerable insight and academic capacity to write about the quality of an article or book and the insights drawn from the author's perspective and conclusions. Fortunately, the process of developing a critical analysis of a source is a well developed art. The following sites will introduce you to this important scholarly skill.

[Guidelines for a Critical Analysis](#)

[Critically Analyzing Information Sources](#)

3. The blue text above points out that the *Brief Review of the Literature* should have depth and present a *synthesis* of the literature. The level of literature review expected at the Concept Paper stage should not be a series of mini-book reports presented sequentially, it should provide an integration of information. Do not simply summarize each study or article, but rather synthesize by taking a group of studies and looking for areas of convergence and divergence. You will find it helpful to create a [synthesis matrix](#) as you accumulate sources and research reports. Also, Aveyard's (2007) book *Doing a Literature Review in Health and Social Care: A Practical Guide*, available as an e-book from the [Northcentral University ebrary](#), provides a thorough explanation of how to achieve a meaningful synthesis of a variety of research reports. Once you have it open in the ebrary reader, Navigate to chapter six: *How do I synthesize my findings?* for guidance. In that chapter Aveyard points out that the goal of synthesizing literature is to produce a new and integrative interpretation of findings that is more substantive than that found in the individual sources.

4. The blue text above points out that the *Brief Review of the Literature* should be *comprehensive*. In order to insure all pertinent topics are covered, carefully examine the

research question list and the concepts and/or variables being examined in the study. At the same time it is important to insure irrelevant topics are not being covered in the literature review. You may have to edit your literature review to insure that all key concepts are included and material that is no longer relevant is removed. Keep a file of this material as it may become relevant as you move on to the Proposal.

5. The blue text above points out that the *Brief Review of the Literature* should be *organized and it should flow logically*. One of the most important tasks associated with developing a literature review is to develop a heading and subheading structure. However, that is not easy for everyone; it depends on your learning style. Exploring [prewriting strategies](#) may help. Be sure to refer to page 62 of the 6th edition of the *Publication Manual of the APA* to properly format each heading level. Your heading and subheading structure should evolve as your literature search advances. Review the blue text above for additional thoughts on keeping your review organized and logical.

6. The blue text above points out that the *Brief Review of the Literature* should *include works that provide alternate or opposing perspectives on the proposed topic area to demonstrate unbiased research*. As you conduct your literature search take special note of opposing points of view for each topic or theme you are developing. Finding differences of opinion between scholars is very valuable to your work so don't lose track of the sources where you discover them. Bring these scholarly tensions to light as you write your review so you can add depth to your literature review.

7. The blue text above points out that the *Brief Review of the Literature* should *indicate areas of incomplete knowledge and relate them to the envisioned study's problem, purpose, and research questions*. Once you have established your research

topic, look for comments by other scholars that indicate issues that need to be researched within this topic. As noted previously, comments of this nature are very valuable to you as you develop your problem statement. They should be cited and briefly mentioned in your Statement of the Problem and elaborated more fully in your literature review.

8. As you develop your literature review you should remove the emphasis from the authors (e.g., “Smith noted” or “Smith and Jones found”) and instead focus on the ideas, citing the authors parenthetically. See [Common CP Writing Problems](#).

9. Use direct quotations very sparingly in order to improve scholarly quality and originality. You should have only one direct quotation for every ten pages of written material. Offer an original paraphrase of main ideas and cite sources parenthetically.

10. Avoid secondary source citations. Read the [primary source](#) and cite it.

11. Keep the review in the past tense. Instead of writing: “A number of scholars are writing about researcher reflexivity” you should write: “A number of scholars have written about researcher reflexivity.” By the time a source is published, the author’s actions are in the past. See [Common CP Writing Problems](#).

12. Take your time developing the literature review summary. Learners are often asked to expand their summaries. Include appropriate citations. Highlight contradictions and uncertainties that emerge from your review. Identify overarching themes that run through your literature review.

Research Method

[Text... Here discuss the proposed research method (quantitative, qualitative, or mixed).

In this section the appropriateness of the method and design are substantiated and includes a brief discussion of why the method/design(s) was/were chosen over others.

Comment [NCU38]: Because the research plan is in the concept paper stage, a highly detailed research design is not expected. The concept paper, however, provides a foundation for the next step in the dissertation process, the development of the proposal. A well-conceived and well written and researched concept paper serves as a foundation or blueprint for the remainder of dissertation work.

Discussion is not simply a listing and description of research designs; rather, elaboration demonstrates how the proposed method and design accomplish the study goals, why the design is the optimum choice for the proposed research, and how the method aligns with the purpose and research questions. Be sure to provide a brief discussion of the proposed data collection and analysis procedures. Provide appropriate foundational support for the proposed study design; for example, refer to Moustakas and other appropriate authors to describe a phenomenological design.

Note: Avoid introductory research design and analyses descriptions as well as excessive reference to textbook authors such as Creswell and Trochim.

TOC	Best Practices for Developing the Research Method Section	Menu
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The blue text above indicates you need to address two topics in this section:

- research design
- data collection and analysis

Each topic is addressed under the subheadings below. You may wish to use these same subheadings in this section of your concept paper. Since the template already has three additional subheadings under the heading Research Method, you could use a five subheading structure which looks like this.

Research Method

Research Design

Data Collection and Analysis

Operational Definitions of Variables

Measurement

Summary

Although this subheading structure is not mandated in the CP template (except for the last three subheadings) it provides a logical outline for the information you are to provide in this section. You can explore a more elaborate set of headings and subheadings for this section by reviewing the Dissertation Template available in the Dissertation Center. The following list of best practices is organized according to the subheading list provided above.

Research Design (This is not a required heading for the Concept Paper)

1. There is an important difference between a research *method* and a research *design* although various scholars define them in different ways. In the context of a Concept Paper, the phrase *research method* refers to the three general classifications all research falls into: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. It is important to declare which category your research falls into; however, keep in mind there are several *research designs* to choose from within each of these broad categories. In the Research Methods section there should appear a clear identification of your research method *and* your research design. Each of the two should be discussed with regard to appropriateness. You should discuss why your method is superior to other methods for your dissertation and why your design is preferable to other possible designs in order to fulfill your research purpose and answer your research questions.

To gain a sense of the number of research designs you have to choose from you can go to the [Sage Encyclopedia of Research Design](#) available through the Northcentral University library. Enter the word “design” in the search box and well over 200 entries will appear. In the following chart, Creswell (2008) provides a basic breakdown of various research designs into their quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods

categories. Please note his listing of research designs is by no means complete but it makes the point that you must be more specific than just declaring your research project is qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods.

Quantitative Research Designs			Qualitative Research Designs			Mixed Methods Research Designs	
Experimental Chapter 11	Correlational Chapter 12	Survey Chapter 13	Grounded Theory Chapter 14	Ethnography Chapter 15	Narrative Chapter 16	Mixed Methods Chapter 17	Action research Chapter 18
Between Group designs such as true experiment, quasi-experiment, and factorial	Explanatory	Cross - Sectional	Systematic	Realist	There are numerous types of narrative designs including autobiographies, biographies, life writing, personal narratives, narrative interviews, oral histories, ethno histories and so on.	Triangulation	Practical
Within Group or Individual Designs such as time series, repeated measures or single subject	Prediction	Longitudinal studies such as trend studies, cohort studies, and panel studies	Emerging	Case Studies		Embedded	Participatory
			Constructivist	Critical		Explanatory	
						Exploratory	

Creswell, J. W. (2008). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education Inc.

Additional information on the variety of research designs is available at the [Research Methods Knowledge Base](#).

2. You should carefully build a case showing that the design you have selected is the *optimum choice* in light of your research problem, research purpose and research questions. You should provide substantiation from authorities specializing in the research approach you are proposing. As you study your research design options, take careful note of the occasions when scholars discuss design limitations. You will need this type of insight from other scholars to satisfy this criterion for your Concept Paper.

3. At this point in your dissertation journey, you should leave general research text books such as those written by Creswell or Trochim and Donnelly behind and use

more advanced sources, preferably sources devoted to the specific research design choice you expect to use. For advanced quantitative research books, commonly referenced sources are Black's *Doing Quantitative Research in the Social Sciences* and Vogt's *Quantitative Research Methods for Professionals*. Qualitative research sources include Shank's *Qualitative Research: A Personal Skills Approach* and Patton's *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*. For mixed methods studies an advanced source is Teddlie's and Tashakkori's *Foundations of Mixed Methods Research: Integrating Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches in the Social and Behavioral Sciences*. Examples of single design books include Yin's *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, Stake's *The Art of Case Study Research*, Moustakas' *Phenomenological Research Methods*, Charmaz's *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide through Qualitative Analysis*.

4. Resist the temptation to provide a general discussion of research methods used in the field of educational research. An example of a general comment about research methods would be: *The independent and dependent variables must be measured separately in order to reinforce the cause-and-effect logic of quantitative research* (Creswell, 2009). Assume your readers have a basic understanding of research methodology and you should focus on in-depth concepts which are specific to your research project. Make this section conceptually rich, concise and to the point by discussing offering an in-depth discussion of the specific the research design that directly relates to the envisioned study. Provide a clear and accurate overview of intended procedures for the envisioned study and avoid writing about general research procedures.

5. Clearly explain how your proposed research design will enable you to fulfill your research purpose statement and answer your research questions. If you can do this well you will have demonstrated your research design choice is in [alignment](#) with the other components of your research project.

6. The significance of the study should be clearly articulated in terms of how the findings of the study will fill the gap in the current literature and generate new knowledge or improve professional practice.

7. Include a discussion of the ethical protection of participants, consent forms and so on.

Data Collection and Analysis (This is not a required heading for the Concept Paper)

1. Since this is the Concept Paper stage, your discussion of data collection and analysis issues will be tentative. However, that does not mean it cannot be both concise and detailed. Providing insight into your plans related to the issues mentioned below will enable your Committee and the Office of Academic Research (OAR) reviewers to offer clear and cogent feedback on the feasibility of your study. It is vital that you receive robust feedback in this regard at the Concept Paper stage before investing the time and energy needed to develop your Proposal, so provide as much clarity and details about your plans as possible.

2. If you will be using an instrument such as a survey to gather your data you should identify it in this section although there will be a fuller discussion of the instrument offered in the *measurement* section.

3. If you are doing a qualitative study, you will most likely be conducting interviews. You should describe your [interview guide](#) either in its entirety or at least

provide sample interview questions, keeping in mind that your goal is to provide enough information so that your research project could be duplicated by your readers. If interviews are in your future you should locate some good quality books that will thoroughly inform you about the interview process such as *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data* by Rubin and Rubin (2005).

4. Review the article entitled [Triangulation](#). Note: this article is also located in the Dissertation Center under Research Methods Help. Exploring triangulation early in your dissertation journey is particularly important if you are planning a qualitative study.

5. You should offer a detailed description of the sample of the population you will recruit for the study. The following questions will help to guide your discussion.

- How will participants be recruited?
- If you are using purposeful sampling, what characteristics or criteria must potential participants meet?
- How large will your sample be and how you will determine the appropriate size?
- If you are planning a quantitative or mixed methods research project include the results of your [power analysis](#) using [G*Power](#) with the power level set at .80 (instead of the default value of .95). Additional information about power analysis is available in the Dissertation Center.

Note: when navigating the links in the Dissertation Center you will notice your mouse pointer does not change as it does when navigating links in most websites. Even though your mouse pointer does not change, hover it over the phrase *Help with Statistics* on the left side navigation panel in the Dissertation Home Page and click. You will then

find links to statistics workshops, when to use what statistic, power analysis, help with SPSS, help with Excel, and online statistical textbooks.

5. Discuss which variables or constructs will be measured and how will they be measured. You will provide a more detailed discussion of some of these issues in the [Operational Definitions of Variables](#) section, but you should briefly and clearly address them in this section as well.

6. Describe and justify the context of the data collection process. The following questions will help to guide your discussion.

- Where will data collection take place?
- Who will be involved?
- What is the estimated time frame?
- Why is your data collection plan appropriate in light of the purpose and setting of the study?

7. If you are doing a quantitative or mixed methods study, elaborate on the statistical tests that will be used to analyze the data. Discuss which software packages, if any, will be used to help with data analysis (applies to both quantitative and qualitative studies). If you are doing a qualitative study you should discuss [coding](#) procedures and how you plan to reduce the data you have collected into categories and themes.

8. Assumptions and [limitations and delimitations](#) should be clearly articulated. Identify which facts of particular relevance to the study are assumed to be true. List the potential weaknesses of the study in a logical manner. In most cases you can find information about the inherent weaknesses of each research design by reviewing the writings of scholars who are experts for each design.

Operational Definition of Variables (Quantitative/Mixed Studies Only)

[Text (optional)... Identify each of the primary constructs associated with the proposed topic, problem, research question(s), and hypotheses. Include a brief overview of how each will be operationally defined for the proposed study]

Construct/Variable 1. Description/Operational Definition.

Describe each variable, the nature of the variable (e.g., nominal, ordinal, interval), how each variable will vary (e.g., the range (1 – 5, 0 – 100) or levels (low, medium, high; male, female) and the data sources (e.g., archival data, survey items, and if appropriate, how the items will be combined to form the variable construct). Consult research design sources and ensure that the nature of each variable is appropriate to the proposed statistical analyses.

Comment [NCU39]: Replace with the variable name/label

TOC	Best Practices for Developing Operational Definitions of Variables	Menu
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1. Note the careful detail that is required for this section. Without clear and concise operational definitions of variables the feasibility of a proposed quantitative or mixed methods research project cannot be adequately assessed. Note: this applies to quantitative studies only.

2. To operationally define a variable means to offer a description of the way you will measure it in your study. For example, you could operationally define anger as the number of times a child hits another child in a specified period of time. Of course this is not a particularly good way to define anger but it makes the point. More likely you would use a score on an anger inventory. An operational definition of aggressive driving could include the number of times a driver exceeds the speed limit during a period of thirty minutes. An operational definition relies on observable behaviors that can be reliably

counted and recorded. By defining a concept using an observable behavior, researchers can make it clear to other scholars what the variable means and how they will measure it with enough clarity that their research could be duplicated.

Palys (2003), in his book *Research Decisions: Quantitative and Qualitative Perspectives*, points out operational definitions are different than nominal definitions. A nominal definition expresses what is meant by a concept under scrutiny during a study. It is similar to a dictionary definition although it could be closely tied to the theoretical framework associated with the study. On the other hand, an operational definition is more closely tied to what the researcher plans to do. An operational definition discusses how the researcher will derive, create, identify, or measure one or more indicators that best approximate the nominal definition i.e., an indicator of anger is hitting another child. It might not be the best indicator of anger but it is easy to measure. A major challenge researchers face is identifying meaningful indicators of the concept they wish to research. In summary, a nominal definition describes what you are after, and operational definition clearly describes how you will capture it.

3. As you do your literature search, pay particular attention to how other scholars have operationally defined variables and concepts you are interested in as you develop your research project.

4. When appropriate, include [levels of measurement](#) in your operational definitions of variables i.e. nominal, ordinal, interval, or ratio. (Note that Likert and Likert-type scales yield ordinal, rather than interval, level data, which call for nonparametric statistics.)

5. When appropriate, describe the coding procedures or how the variable will be collected. For example, the gender of participants might be obtained from a survey and coded 1=male, 2=female. Keep in mind you must include enough detail so your research project could be duplicated.

6. Consult research texts for additional information on operational definitions. The information included in this section is only introductory and is intended to give you a good understanding of what to look for in more advanced publications.

7. The following examples of the operational definition sections of two Northcentral University are available in the Northcentral University library. They illustrate some but not all of the points that have been made above.

Operational Definition of Variables

For this study both job motivation and job satisfaction were considered to be the independent or predictor variables. Job performance was considered to be the outcome or dependent measure. Gender, age, salary, and stress were additional independent variables that were tested as potential confounding variables for their effect on job performance.

Job motivation was operationally defined using the Ray-Lynn motivation scale by Ray (1980), presented in Appendix B. Job motivation was assessed by participants' response to a 3-point Likert-type response format scale answering questions that defined job motivation.

Job satisfaction was operationally defined using the job satisfaction instrument developed by Spector (1994), presented in Appendix C. Job satisfaction was assessed by participants' response to a 6-point Likert-type response format scale answering questions that defined job satisfaction.

Job performance, operationalized for this study as customer service, was operationally defined using the BANKSERV customer service instrument developed by Avkiran (1999), presented in Appendix D. Job performance (self-reported by the employees) was assessed by participants' response to a 4-point Likert-type response format scale answering questions that related to customer service.

Gender was operationally defined as the choice selected by the respondent given the following choices: male or female.

Age was operationally defined as the choice selected by the respondent given the following choice ranges, 19-25, 26-35, 36-45, 46-55, 56+.

Springer, G. J. (2010). *Job Motivation, satisfaction and performance among bank employees: A correlational study*. (Doctoral dissertation, Northcentral University). Retrieved from http://library.ncu.edu/ncu_diss/display_abstract.aspx?dissertation_id=1185.

Operational Definition of Variables

The study had four variables: (a) family cohesion, (b) gender, (c) level of acculturation, and (d) depression. An operational definition of each variable is described below. Also described is how the primary investigators of the Latino Adolescent Development project measured and collected their data.

Cohesion. Cohesion involves a oneness or solidarity of a group where the members experience a sense of belonging and are motivated to adhere to group standards (VandenBos, 2007). To assess family cohesion, the Latino Adolescent Development researchers used a nine-item modification of the Cohesion subscale of the FES created by Moos and Moos (1994).

Gender. Gender was identified on a nominal scale by asking the adolescents "What is your gender?" (0 = Female, 1 = Male).

Acculturation. Acculturation occurs over a process of time where a group of people integrates a different culture's social values, beliefs, and behavioral patterns with those from their culture of origin (VandenBos, 2004). Level of acculturation was measured by assessing generation status. Generation status involves a person's nativity and the number of generations that have lived in a particular culture. The first person of a family to be born in a particular culture is considered first generation. When that person has children they are considered second generation, and the numerical sequencing continues with each subsequent generation living in that particular culture (Lee et al., 2006).

Depression. Depression involves negative thoughts and a change in mood that can range from sadness to despondency (APA, 2000). A mild form of depression is depressed mood, which includes depressive symptoms such as change in affect, sleep, or appetite, but not severe enough to warrant a clinical diagnosis of Major Depression (Georgiades, et al., 2006). More severe forms of depression often involve sadness, specific criteria can be found in the *DSM-IV-TR* (APA, 2000). To assess depression, the primary investigators used Radloff's (1977) 20-item CES-D for depressed mood.

Williams, M. W. (2010). *The relationship among family cohesion, gender, level of acculturation, and depression in Latino adolescents*. (Doctoral dissertation, Northcentral University). Retrieved from http://library.ncu.edu/ncu_diss/display_abstract.aspx?dissertation_id=1022.

Measurement

[Text...Provide a brief description of how study data will be collected, measured and analyzed. Describe the proposed instrument. Please note that survey self-development should be considered only after an exhaustive search for an existing validated instrument and will require a multi-step pilot and validation process. Although

a detailed description is not required at the CP stage, the variables must demonstrate appropriateness to the study purpose and meet the assumptions of the proposed statistical tests. For qualitative studies, describe the proposed instrument or collection (e.g., interviews, observations), and how concepts will be coded and analyzed as appropriate to the proposed design. Include appropriate support for the application of the proposed design. Consult research design and analysis sources including those available in the Dissertation Center for guidance.]

TOC	Best Practices for Developing the Measurement Section	Menu
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1. If you are planning a quantitative study, one of the most important points to consider in this section is the comment that “survey self-development should be considered only after an exhaustive search for an existing validated instrument and will require a multi-step pilot and validation process.” Developing your own survey is an extensive and demanding process and will add a significant amount of work to your dissertation process. Although you are strongly encouraged to use a published instrument that is already validated, *Designing Surveys: A Guide to Decisions and Procedures* by Czaja and Blair (2005) is a good book to explore the process of developing your own instrument. Hopefully it will motivate you to seek out a published survey and abandon the idea of creating your own. If you do create your own, it must be thoroughly validated, if you use an instrument that has never been validated there will be a huge looming question throughout the study: are the findings valid and reliable?

2. The [Quick Guide to Finding Tests and Measurements](#) is the best place to locate a previously published data collection instrument. If you scroll down you will find a link

to [Buros Center for Testing](#) which is particularly helpful but don't neglect the other links as well.

3. When you locate a previously published instrument, explain how it measures the variables you will be studying. Provide relevant details about the instrument such as: who developed it

- how many question items it includes
- how many subscales it contains
- what is the response format (i.e. Likert scale or other)
- what its scores mean
- its [psychometric properties](#)
- how its reliability and validity was confirmed

and so on. Below is a sample description of an instrument write up. It contains some, but not all, of the information mentioned above.

Victimization experiences with physical violence will be measured by using the Physical Violence Subscale of the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) (Straus, 1979). The 8-items measuring physical acts of aggression are delineated into minor and severe forms of physical violence. Respondents will be asked to select how often they sustained various forms of minor and severe physical violence in their relationship by their spouses/intimate partners during the last 12-months and during their lifetime. Frequency for the last 12-month time period will be measured by a 7-point scale ranging from "never" to "more than 20 times." Lifetime prevalence will be measured by a dichotomous response ("yes" or "no") to each

act of physical aggression. The Cronbach alpha found for the Physical Violence Subscale was .90 (Straus, 1979).

4. Explain how the data will be recorded and protected. Also, explain how the confidentiality of the participants will be protected and the anonymity of individual respondents maintained.

Summary

[Text...]

References

Reference 1

Reference 2

Reference n...

Instructions: This section of the Concept Paper is a list of references cited in text, including the literature review. All resources cited in the concept paper must be included in the list of references.

List all references in APA format with the exception noted below. For each reference listed, there should be at least one corresponding citation within the body of the text, and vice-versa.

Formatting: Single space each reference citation, along with a .5 inch hanging indent; double space between consecutive references in the reference list (See the Dissertation Handbook located in the Dissertation Center for Northcentral University exceptions to APA format).

Tips: Sort in alpha surname/title order. Only capitalize the first word of the title and of the subtitle, if any. Do not bold the title. Know when to italicize and when not to (i.e., periodical/non-periodical/publication versus book/report/paper). Italicize volume (i.e., Journal Name 4, pp. 12-22.)

Note: APA6 Requires Digital Object Identifier (DOI), if one has been assigned (see page 191).

Example (note single-space references, with double-spacing in-between):

Winslade, J., & Monk, G. (2001). *Narrative mediation: A new approach to conflict resolution*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Ahn, J. (2004). Electronic portfolios: Blending technology, accountability and assessment. *T.H.E. Journal*, 31(9), 12-18.

U.S. Government Printing Office. (2006). *Catalog of U.S. Government publications: New electronic titles*.

Appendix

Annotated Bibliography

Reference 1

Annotation 1

Reference 2

Annotation 2

Reference n...

Annotation n...

Comment [NCU40]: Annotated bibliographies should include information that will help to inform the literature review, such as the purpose, method and key findings.

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Best Practices for Developing the Measurement Section

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1. The [Northcentral University Writing Center](#) contains recommendations for the following links in order to find guidance in developing an Annotated Bibliography.

[Annotated Bibliography](http://guides.library.cornell.edu/annotatedbibliography) (<http://guides.library.cornell.edu/annotatedbibliography>)

Cornell University has an excellent site on writing an annotated bibliography, and an especially useful link on How to Critically Analyze Information Sources.

[Annotated Bibliographies](https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/614/01/) (<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/614/01/>)

Another helpful source from the OWL at Purdue. Contains advice and examples.

[Writing an Annotated Bibliography](#)

(<http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/specific-types-of-writing/annotated-bibliography>)

Emphasizes critical reading of your source, explains kinds of bibliographies, and gives visual examples. From the University of Toronto.

2. When developing an annotation for a research report, be sure to include specifics about the research design including the number of participants, the statistical tests that were used, limitations and delimitations and so on. Noting these kinds of details will make your annotated bibliography a more valuable tool as your work continues.

Common Errors to Avoid

1. Paper margins: 1.5 inches on left – remaining at 1 inch (see formatting resources available in the Dissertation Center)
2. The research questions should not be stated so as to be answerable with a “yes/no” response.
3. There must be a direct alignment from the topic to the purpose to the research question(s)/hypotheses to the proposed method and design.
4. Avoid anthropomorphism – page 69 of APA – giving human qualities to inanimate objects.

An unacceptable example: the organization stated –
A better solution: the leaders of the organization stated

5. Avoid long sentences, fragmentation, and grammatical errors. Configure your MS Word software to perform Grammar and Spell checking (i.e., Tools/Options/Spelling & Grammar/, set the Writing Style option to Grammar and Style), or use the F7 key in MS Word to identify areas for improvement.
6. Whenever presenting information as factual, or that is not considered common knowledge, or represents concepts obtained from an outside resource, ensure that an appropriate citation and corresponding reference have been added. Citations add support and validity for your paper and avoid potential plagiarism (refer to the [Northcentral University Writing Center](#) for further information). Numbers in the paper usually require a citation to give validity to the information. An example, 3 out of 4 teachers will retire in the next decade (Smith, 2007).
7. Per pp. 65-66 of the APA Publication Manual, use past tense for discussing literature, an action or condition that occurred at a specific time in the past. Jones (year) published or Smith (year) stated, because this was said or completed in the past.
8. Avoid emphasis on the authors (e.g. the author stated... authors indicated...) and instead shift the focus of the sentence to the main ideas and key findings. Use straightforward, declarative statements and cite authors parenthetically.

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1. If you are not intimately familiar with the Northcentral University library you will save significant time and effort by participating in one of the regularly scheduled [Library Workshops](#).

2. [Search like an Expert](#) is a very helpful library module that only takes a few minutes to view but will increase your search power tenfold.

3. Do not hesitate to use the [Ask a Librarian](#) function.

4. Review the reference sections of the sources you find in order to identify other related sources. Following citations from important sources can be one of the most effective techniques used by scholars to trace ideas back to their origins and expand their list of relevant sources. [Recent dissertations](#) on topics similar to your own can be particularly helpful.

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1. Review the article [Distinguishing Scholarly Journals from Other Periodicals](#).

2. Look for sources that have been published within the last five years, but also understand that older, “seminal” sources that were pioneering work in their fields are important no matter how old they are in that a knowledge of them provides a foundation for scholars working in a field. For example, Glaser and Strauss introduced scholars to Grounded Theory Methodology in 1967, and it continues to be discussed and elaborated on to this day. When referencing a seminal source for the first time you may wish to identify it as such in your writing.

Another exception to the five year rule occurs when it is important to develop a historical perspective on a particular topic. As long as the context makes it clear that is what you are doing, older sources are appropriate. However, as a general rule, the requirement is that you show mastery of research in your field over the last five years, citing older sources only when they continue to be referenced in those sources or when terms defined in those studies continue to be used.

3. Look for primary sources. The following websites elaborate on the distinction between primary, secondary and tertiary sources.

[Primary and Secondary Sources](#)

[Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary Sources](#)

[Primary vs. Secondary Sources](#)

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[RefWorks](#) - an online research management, writing and collaboration tool which is available through the Northcentral University library is designed to help researchers easily gather, manage, store and share all types of information, as well as generate citations and bibliographies. This tool, can, among other things, help you to properly format citations and bibliographical entries in accordance with the APA Manual, saving you a lot of time and aggravation. If using Write N Cite, please view the [Library KnowledgeBase entry](#) to learn how to configure your computer settings correctly. For assistance with *RefWorks*, either contact the library at library@ncu.edu or view the online tutorial at <http://www.refworks.com/tutorial/>.

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1. The following article answers questions about the use of first person in academic writing: [Use of First Person in APA Style](#). It is worth keeping this article handy because learners often have questions about this aspect of academic writing.

2. A common writing problem when developing dissertations is the use of anthropomorphisms, i.e. assigning human qualities to non human entities such as a study. A typical example is: "This study will explore..." A study is not the kind of entity that

can explore. You will find it helpful to read the brief article entitled [Avoiding Anthropomorphism](#).

3. The Concept Paper is the first in a series of scholarly documents leading to the final dissertation manuscript. As such, headers and footers typically included in classroom assignments should not be included. Use the Concept Paper Template available in the Dissertation Center.

4. Avoid the use of casual language, jargon and colloquialisms. See page 68 of the 6th edition of the *Publication Manual of the APA*.

5. Ensure citations are presented for each new [assertion](#) so as not to give the erroneous impression that you are presenting your own views and opinions.

6. Use very few direct quotations (about one for every ten pages), instead demonstrate you can [synthesize](#) the information obtained from the literature.

7. Reduce emphasis on the authors and focus on the ideas instead, citing authors parenthetically, when possible. The first example below places emphasis on the authors. The second example places emphasis on the ideas. The second example is preferred

Rubin and Rubin (2005) point out that the credibility of findings is enhanced by interviewing a variety of participants who express divergent views.

The credibility of findings is enhanced by interviewing a variety of participants who express divergent views (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

8. Use [past tense](#) when discussing literature since it describes actions or conditions that occurred at a specific time in the past.

9. Review APA heading formatting as described on page 62 of the 6th edition of the *Publication Manual of the APA*.

10. Review the guidelines for numbers presented as numerals found on page 111 of the 6th edition of the *Publication Manual of the APA* as well as the guidelines for numbers expressed as words on page 112.

11. Use an ampersand inside a parenthetical citation such as (Gaul, Gaul & Borg, 2003). Use the word “and” when the citation is part of the sentence. For example: according to Gaul, Gaul and Borg (2003)... Note: see comment about reducing emphasis on authors above.

12. Review the proper use of italics as discussed on pages 104-106 of the 6th edition of the *Publication Manual of the APA*. Note in particular the use of italics when presenting titles and describing anchors of scale.

13. A concept paper and the dissertation that eventually emerges from it should be about *inquiry*, not *advocacy*. If you are an advocate for a particular school of thought or for some hoped for findings in your research, it means that you believe in them strongly as you begin the work and that you are convinced they form a correct interpretation or outcome even before data is gathered and interpreted. All writing during concept paper and dissertation development should steadfastly avoid the appearance of an agenda, bias or a presumption of what will be discovered. By being careful about how you write about your topic in this regard you will be forced to be careful about how you think about your topic. Being careful how you think about your research topic will help you maintain an open mind as you begin your research journey.

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What an Approved CP Means (and does not mean)

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1. Having your Concept Paper approved by the Office of Academic Research (OAR) is a major milestone on your journey to earning a doctorate. However, an

approved Concept Paper does not constitute a contractual agreement assuring you that the Dissertation Proposal you develop on the basis of your Concept Paper will be approved. A Dissertation Proposal is a more advanced academic document and is evaluated according to more demanding criteria. On the other hand, an approved Concept Paper is the first step in the dissertation process.

2. An approved Concept Paper does not mean that you have completed all of the work that needs to be done on your research design and other aspects of your Proposal. It is important to remember that the dissertation process is iterative, and components of a well-written dissertation often require revision before clarity is achieved. As challenging as developing an acceptable Concept Paper is, a great deal of work remains to develop an acceptable Dissertation Proposal.

3. Section 3 of the 2010 *Northcentral University PhD Dissertation Handbook* includes the following comment.

It is helpful to remember that scholarly research is iterative and non-linear (however painful this may be while you are going through the process). Making a change in a later version to correct an issue in a previous version may reveal new issues that need to be addressed in the subsequent version.

As the details of your research design are worked out in greater detail, issues and dilemmas there were not visible at the Concept Paper stage may come to light resulting in a *Resubmit* disposition from the Office of Academic Research for your Proposal. However, the OAR will provide recommendations on how to resolve the problems in the Proposal. A robust and creative response to these recommendations will advance the quality of your work and move you closer to achieving an approved Proposal.