Backwards Calendar

Constructing a Completion Calendar for Doctorate

# Purpose: To help you develop a clear schedule.

Step 1. When do you hope to graduate? Write down that date and work backwards.

Step 2: Go to the Graduate School website and figure out deadlines you would have to hit to graduate on the date you listed in first step. (i.e., submission of final, successfully defended dissertation, IRB approval, dissertation proposal, comprehensive exams, etc.).

Step 3: For each deadline, make a list of everything that needs to happen before you can reach each goal outlined in Step 2 above (like completion of required coursework, etc.).

## *Sample Tasks*

### Graduate School

* Check the Graduate School Thesis and Dissertation Services’ Writing Resources web site ([www.etamu.edu/dissertation](http://www.etamu.edu/dissertation); see left sidebar) for the Graduate School standard template and the Thesis and Dissertation Formatting Guide.
* Specific style guidelines are dictated by the discipline in which you are receiving your degree. You should discuss these with your advisor. See the Thesis and Dissertation Services (TDS) Resources for Writing web page, second item for commonly used style guides. Some guidelines are provided online (e.g., MLA 9th edition), but others are not (e.g. APA 7th edition).
* Send an email confirmation of your defense date, time, and location to your committee. Keep a copy for yourself!
* Follow the final instructions sent to you at the time of filing the Application for Final Oral Exam

### Committee

* Identify the readers from your supervisory committee and ask them to contact committee members, including the chair/co-chairs, to schedule the final oral exam/proposal/dissertation defense.
* Complete exam/proposal/dissertation defense.
* After making corrections, get final approval on dissertation from advisor, if needed.

### Advisor

* Discuss with your advisor your anticipated schedule for dissertation completion.
* Meet with your advisor to discuss your dissertation defense.
* Submit draft of your final manuscript to advisor for review or approval.
* Get chair or co-chair(s) signature(s) prior to submission of the Application for Final Oral Exam.
* Talk with your advisor or departmental staff about the defense procedures for your department.

### Defense

* Contact the department staff member to schedule a conference room and any equipment needed for the defense presentation.
* Plan your dissertation defense (prepare handouts, PowerPoint slides, etc.)
* If possible & needed, make sure you are familiar with the equipment in the room in which you are doing your presentation.
* Defend your dissertation and gather committee feedback.

Backwards Calendar for Doctoral Graduation

***Begin filling out this form from the bottom, working backwards toward the top.***

Note: You will see references to a book called *Destination Dissertation* that offers guidance on the dissertation writing process. You can access a digital version of this text in full through the ETAMU Library. An additional resource is the book *Detox Your Writing*, also available in full online through the ETAMU Library (etamu.edu/library). The ETAMU Writing Center (etamu.edu/writing-center) can also assist with dissertation planning and writing.

| **SUGGESTED** TIMELINE | Planned Date | Earliest Date | Latest  Date |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Apply for doctoral program and receive your official acceptance |  |  |  |
| Complete required coursework (Visit course catalog description for breakdown of hours and/or consult with your advisor) |  |  |  |
| Meet with the Doctoral Program Coordinator (your default advisor until you hit exams and the dissertation phase) to monitor progress through degree plan. |  |  |  |
| Within last year of coursework, begin narrowing down potential dissertation topic and identifying your potential dissertation advisor and committee members. |  |  |  |
| Reach out to potential dissertation advisors with request to serve as advisor why you’ve selected them, a couple of sentences outlining proposed dissertation topic, and a request for a meeting with them to discuss possibility. |  |  |  |
| Meet with potential dissertation advisor and (fingers crossed!) they become the official advisor, then you can get down to business. |  |  |  |
| Discuss next steps with dissertation advisor, including selecting additional committee members based on proposed topic. |  |  |  |
| Approach potential committee members in much the same way you did your potential dissertation advisor. Once they are signed on, . . . |  |  |  |
| Develop reading list for comprehensive exams, in collaboration with dissertation advisor. |  |  |  |
| Share reading list with committee and request feedback (likely additions) |  |  |  |
| Work with dissertation advisor to prepare for and schedule comprehensive exams, in collaboration with committee |  |  |  |
| Prepare for comprehensive exams: Work through your reading list, making extensive use of the steps offered for developing the “Literature Review” in *Destination Dissertation.* |  |  |  |
| Written Portion of Comprehensive Exams (typically one week to complete, with at least two weeks for committee to evaluate) |  |  |  |
| If successful with written portion, schedule orals in collaboration with committee. Once date and time are set, contact main office to schedule room and let committee know where it will be (or set up Zoom details for virtual oral defense). |  |  |  |
| Meet with dissertation advisor for guidance prior to defense, if possible. |  |  |  |
| Go to Graduate School website and access required forms for the oral examination (see the left sidebar on the Graduate School web, “Forms & Guidelines”). |  |  |  |
| Take and pass oral exam. Complete the appropriate Qualifying Exam/Comprehensive Exam Laserfiche form. Then, begin working with dissertation advisor to develop dissertation proposal. |  |  |  |
| With the help of the dissertation advisor, form the rest of your dissertation committee, made up of at least two in-department committee members, including one serving as your “chair” or “advisor.” You will also need to select an “out-of-department” member (outside your department or at another campus) who has expertise in the area of your research. You can find the digital committee form to complete and submit under item 1 of the TDS/Dissertation web page (etamu.edu/dissertation). *At minimum*, your committee must consist of three members: two in your department and one external. |  |  |  |
| With the help of your advisor, determine if your dissertation may require IRB approval (“research involving human subjects”). If so, you may go to the TDS/Dissertation web page (etamu.edu/dissertation), under item 2 of the dissertation process to locate a link to the IRB web page for forms and further information. Work with advisor to complete the required forms and complete all required trainings. If IRB approval is required, you cannot defend your dissertation proposal until your advisor has received an approval letter from IRB approving your proposed study/research.  NOTE: If the study/research requires IRB approval, do not begin data collection until the advisor receives an IRB approval letter. |  |  |  |
| Once the advisor has approved dissertation proposal, submit to the rest of the committee for feedback. Typically, you need to give the committee three weeks to review. |  |  |  |
| If the committee determines the proposal is “defendable,” schedule proposal defense. Work with the department’s main office to secure a room for proposal defense date/time and announce to committee. |  |  |  |
| If the committee has requested revisions before proposal defense, make those revisions as soon as possible. Submit a final version of dissertation proposal to committee in plenty of time for them to review to ensure requested revisions have been address. |  |  |  |
| Your advisor will make copy of the proposal available to Department. Dissertation proposal defense is a public event. In addition, the Graduate School secures a Graduate Council representative to attend the defense. |  |  |  |
| Complete the digital form to schedule defense. All committee members and the department head must approve the scheduled defense date. You must submit the form with a copy of your proposal in time for it to be received by the Graduate School on or before the 20th of the month before your desired dissertation proposal defense date. |  |  |  |
| Dissertation proposal defense! Good luck. These typically last two hours. |  |  |  |
| If the defense is successful, after making all requested revisions, ensure that your proposal is in correct format, gather all required documents for submission (see item 3 of the TDS/Dissertation webpage), and complete the Dissertation Proposal Approval Form and submit the form and all documents for Graduate School proposal approval. The proposal should include three basic topics – introduction, literature review, and methods or data collection. |  |  |  |
| Work with dissertation advisor to begin composing dissertation. You will also need to incorporate the revisions/comments made in the Graduate School’s proposal reviewer’s checklist. |  |  |  |
| Set up timeline for completing dissertation (make extensive use of the guidance for timeline provided by *Destination Dissertation)* |  |  |  |
| Building on comprehensive exams and dissertation proposal, complete Literature Review (see *Destination Dissertation)* |  |  |  |
| Gather Data (see *Destination Dissertation)* |  |  |  |
| Code Data (see *Destination Dissertation for examples)* |  |  |  |
| Compose dissertation chapters in “chunks,” then develop one chapter at a time (see *Destination Dissertation for models)* |  |  |  |
| Remain in contact with dissertation advisor. If they want to see one chapter at a time, then be sure to follow those guidelines. Work with dissertation advisor to determine when dissertation should be distributed to the dissertation committee. (NOTE: Build at least three weeks into schedule for feedback from dissertation advisor) |  |  |  |
| Once dissertation advisor decides your dissertation is ready to share with rest of committee, do so. Again, they should have at least three weeks (ideally four) to review dissertation. |  |  |  |
| Make all revisions requested by the committee. Once the document is ready to defend, work with committee to schedule a date and time for defense. Again, you must submit a digital form with pre-approved time/date for defense for approval by the committee, department head, and Graduate School. The final defense schedule form must be received by the Graduate School by or before the 20th of the month before you plan to defend dissertation. Be aware of when the final dissertation submission deadline is for that semester so you can plan accordingly. |  |  |  |
| Work with dissertation advisor (and, perhaps, committee) to prepare for dissertation defense. |  |  |  |
| Access required forms from TDS, item 4 (etamu.edu/dissertation).  Submit finalized version to committee, with the document conforming to all formatting as required by the Graduate School. Provide a copy for the Main Office, as the dissertation defense is public and everyone will have an opportunity to review before defense. |  |  |  |
| Defend dissertation. If successful, make all requested revisions and make final formatting corrects. Work with dissertation advisor to determine timeline for final dissertation submission (and graduation) and stick to it! |  |  |  |
| After making all requested revisions, ensure that your proposal is in correct Graduate School format, gather all required documents for submission (see item 5 of the TDS/Dissertation webpage), and complete the Final Dissertation Approval Form and submit the form and all documents for Graduate School proposal approval. |  |  |  |
| Celebrate, then revise as the Graduate School/TDS requests.  Find out next steps from Graduate School and TDS and follow them carefully. |  |  |  |
| At TDS/Dissertation website (etamu.edu/dissertation), you will find all the steps you need to complete to Graduate in desired semester after successfully defending your dissertation, including what you need to do to prepare for Graduation Ceremony and the like. List those items here and set targeted date for each. |  |  |  |
| Graduate! |  |  |  |
| AFTER **GRADUATION**  · Relax and enjoy! |  |  |  |

NOTES: