

HOW TO PREPARE FOR A DRC

PhD students normally schedule a Dissertation Research Consultation with Marvin Hunn as part of the phase two dissertation subject approval process. The normal process consists of two meetings. The first meeting lasts 5 to 10 minutes. Bring a completed dissertation subject approval form with you. Be prepared to very briefly describe your basic subject matter and to recommend one short work on the subject (e.g., a journal article). English language works are strongly preferred. The second meeting lasts 60 to 90 minutes and will be scheduled for a date about one week after the first meeting. The second meeting will include the following elements.

1. Similar dissertations. The library will supply you with a bibliography of some dissertations on your topic.¹ We will also forward this to the dept. Your faculty advisor may ask you to explain how your proposal differs from any similar dissertations identified in this way. Duplication of subject matter is not a problem provided you can make some original contribution, e.g., by offering a novel conclusion, by advancing a new argument for an old conclusion, by adducing fresh/different primary source data/evidence, by using different methods, etc. Be warned that merely being more thorough than prior works may not count as sufficient originality.

2. Research design/strategy. We will discuss the following issues.

- What are your tentative conclusions? What is your thesis?
- What are some promising lines of evidence to support that thesis? Are there any special problems identifying or gathering critical evidence and counter evidence?
- Explain the overall logic of your case. How does that evidence support that thesis? What is potentially the biggest weakness in your case?

Your answers should be specific, clear and concise. Tentative and incomplete answers are expected; the goal is to show that you have thought about the issues, not that you have already solved all the problems. If you have already written a paper on the topic, then you should be able to provide clear answers with ease. By stage two you should have written on the topic.

3. Research process.

- Does Turpin have the library resources you will need, particularly primary sources? Do we need to buy something special to support your work? Let us order materials while you are at stage two so they will be cataloged and on the shelf by the time you reach stage three.
- Are you familiar with the relevant databases and reference works?
- Do you know how to use interlibrary loan?
- Do you need a doctoral study carrel?

Once you have completed course work and exams, you will need to devise a study plan for your dissertation research. Come back to the library at that time if you want some practical help. We also have a list of books on “how to write a dissertation.”

¹ Of course you are interested in all scholarly material on your topic, and you will cover key works of all kinds in your literature review when you write your dissertation, but the DRC literature scan focuses only on dissertations because they tend to be difficult to identify and because they help you gauge the level of prior doctoral work on the topic. Students are often very interested in the latter.