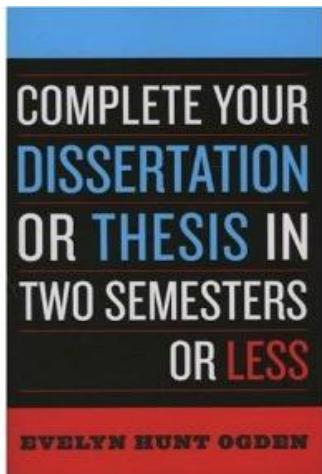


Book Review



Complete Your Dissertation or Thesis in Two Semesters or Less

by Evelyn Hunt Ogden

Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers (2007).

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Review by **Michael Lester Hixon**

As I attended my first Doctorate of Education residency dinner at the beginning of my studies, the keynote speaker shared the fact that only fifty percent of all doctoral students who finish their coursework successfully complete their dissertations. The first thought that went through my mind was "Is this going to be me?". Following the residency, I discovered Evelyn Hunt Ogden's *Complete Your Dissertation or Thesis in Two Semesters or Less*. Ogden's guide provides a framework for developing a plan of action for finishing a dissertation. Although the guide does not systematically detail how to complete a dissertation, it offers first-hand experiences from doctoral students who did and did not complete their dissertations. The practical experiences are applicable to a variety of doctoral study situations. I found the guide to be an asset from the beginning of my coursework, through the writing of my dissertation, and to the concluding moments of my doctoral studies. The guide helped to refocus my positive energies when the dissertation road seemed gloomy and impossible to complete.

In chapter 1, Ogden identifies compelling facts about doctoral degrees, such as the astonishing odds for success in a doctoral programme and an overview of the dissertation study. Although most of the chapter focuses on the grim number of students who do not finish their dissertations and the countless number of years it takes many to complete their dissertations, Ogden describes surprising truths and myths about dissertations. The simple truths include the option of merely conducting a limited research study that contributes a small piece of knowledge within a field of study. Writing a great American novel or searching for a cure for cancer are myths of required dissertation topics. These two examples are considered myths because the objective of a doctoral study is to learn how to conduct research not solve major issues within society or write a literary masterpiece. The author also emphasises the need to generate a deadline calendar to complete the study within a reasonable timeline. Without a calendar for completing the study, one may not fulfil the commitments, which would result in an unfinished dissertation.

In chapter 2, Ogden emphasises the importance of selecting a dissertation chair and committee and thoroughly researching candidates prior to selection. Careful selection of the dissertation chair and committee improves the probability of success. As part of the research process, the author describes various professor personality types that ensure success, such as the professor's dedication to research in the field, interest in the candidate's study, and motivation for success. The author also depicts professor personality types that jeopardise success, such as the professor who cannot meet deadlines, who is never in the office, or who is only interested with one's own research interest.

In the ensuing few chapters, Ogden reviews the process of writing the dissertation and offers many helpful hints for successfully completing the dissertation, such as selecting a dissertation topic, seeking a professional editor, writing the prospectus and proposal, drafting the dissertation, and the oral defence process. In chapter 3, Ogden stresses the importance of finding a research topic in which the doctoral student has a passionate interest. The topic should be one that is manageable within a short time frame and has accessible data. Ogden's suggestions for selecting a topic of interest provide the doctoral student with the foundation for beginning an academic study. The author also recommends ensuring that the dissertation chairperson and committee members are committed to one's study. In my doctoral journey, I found a chairperson and committee committed to my study. I had the opportunity to work with a team of professionals with valuable insights. In addition, the committee provided direction in finding resources to successfully prepare and finalise my study.

In chapter 4, Ogden suggests seeking a professional editor to clean up one's manuscript. With a simple search on the internet, one discovers that there are many editors available to review your dissertation drafts for content and form. The cost of editing is minimal in comparison to the delays one may experience from repeated editorial submissions. If a doctoral student is not able to afford the cost of an editor, they may pursue an option used at my university. Doctoral students worked in cohorts and edited each other's papers.

In chapter 5, Ogden provides many useful checklists for organising the design of the dissertation and preparing the prospectus and proposal for review by the committee. I found the checklists helpful for double-checking my work for accuracy and completeness prior to approval to begin data collection for the dissertation.

Ogden provides, in chapter 6, a useful outline and checklist of the organised sections for each dissertation chapter. In addition, the calendar presented by the author includes helpful guides to scheduling time to complete the dissertation while balancing family and personal commitments. The calendar assisted in my own doctoral journey because of issues of simultaneously writing a dissertation, balancing work, marriage, birth of a child, and a second job.

The oral defence is the topic of chapter 7. Ogden emphasises the importance of creating a dissertation presentation outline, being prepared for critical questions regarding one's study, and thanking all attendees for their participation in the oral defence. I used the author's advice to prepare a PowerPoint Presentation on my dissertation and considered possible critical questions from the committee based on the university's mission statement on social change research.

In the final chapter, Ogden describes life after the completion of the doctoral degree. Ogden refers to postdoctoral life as postpartum depression, which occurs because the rigorous and focused routine of working on the dissertation for the past few years no longer exists. Following the completion of the dissertation, Ogden recommends catching up on activities neglected during the time-consuming dissertation process, such as taking a vacation, remodelling the living room, or reading five mystery books in a row. However, it is inadvisable to take a permanent vacation from postdoctoral activities. The author strongly recommends pursuing publication opportunities by submitting parts of the doctoral study, writing an article independently, or co-authoring an article for submission to a journal publication. Assistance from previous advisors or colleagues may prove beneficial in publishing endeavours.

Overall, *Complete Your Dissertation or Thesis in Two Semesters or Less* is a quality guide that employs a critical approach for being successful as a doctoral student and completing the dissertation. Ogden's critical approach is to develop a plan to complete the dissertation and to follow through with that plan. Doctoral students without a plan for successfully

completing the dissertation often end up with an unfinished dissertation and no degree. In addition, Ogden has chosen a title for the book that describes the purpose of the guide. The title reflects Ogden's many strategies for successfully carrying out a dissertation within a two semester time frame, such as developing a plan for finishing the dissertation and executing that plan. I recommend this book to any student working on a dissertation. Moreover, Ogden's review of the basic facts about doctoral studies, the description of the process for completing the dissertation, and the explanation of the various types of professor personalities is relevant to any discipline in the academic world.