

Mission Creep and Headings in a Dissertation

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Mission Creep is a common mistake for novice researchers. This is when you start off focused on a specific purpose for the research, and then you start to promise more than your study can deliver. You must constantly review the document for consistency and alignment of the various proposal elements. Any time you mention the goals, intent, purpose, aim, or objectives of the study, there must be alignment and consistency with the methodology, problem, and true purpose of the research. When you edit your work, do a search for these terms and make sure that everything is in accord. For example, in a phenomenological study, you cannot determine a relationship of any sort – that is not what phenomenology is about. Make certain that your mission is clear and consistent, and all elements of your proposal are aligned and make sense.

Another common problem for new researchers is in understanding heading structure. In a dissertation, we use different levels of headings. The number of headings depends upon the length and organization of your manuscript. Regardless of the number of headings, however, always begin with level 0 heading (for Chapters) and proceed to level one, level two, etc. Most universities want you to use specific headings in formatting your dissertation. Headings are signposts that focus the reader on the most important content in your writing. Provided that they are well structured, headings

make scholarly documents easier to write and easier to read. Each heading should accurately describe or signal the focus of the information beneath it.

There are 5 heading levels in APA. The 6th edition of the APA manual revised and simplified previous heading guidelines. Regardless of the number of levels, always use the headings in order, beginning with level 0. Please consult the APA 6th Publication Manual (Chapter 3, Section 3.03) for examples and further explanation.

APA Headings	
Level	Format
0	Centered, not bold, Upper and Lowercase Heading. Use for Chapter 1, 2, etc.
1	Centered, Boldface, Uppercase and Lowercase Headings
2	Left-aligned, Boldface, Uppercase and Lowercase Heading
3	Indented, boldface, lowercase heading with a period. Begin body text after the period.
4	<i>Indented, boldface, italicized, lowercase heading with a period.</i> Begin body text after the period.
5	<i>Indented, italicized, not bold lowercase heading with a period.</i> Begin body text after the period.

At the final proofreading stage, make sure not to strand a heading at the bottom of a page. The information in the heading must be in accord with the content. In reviewing early proposal drafts, we often find there is information in one heading (problem statement) that really belongs in other sections (such as the background of the problem). Always remember that a dissertation reflects a high level of scholarship and research conducted. Make certain that the manuscript is concise and precise, and contains no redundancies or conflicting information.