



**EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND POLICY**

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION | THE UNIVERSITY OF UTAH

University of Utah College of Education  
Department of Educational Leadership and Policy

Ed.D. Program  
Capstone Guide

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# ELP K-12 Ed.D. Capstone Guide

This guide is intended to help Ed.D. students successfully complete the capstone and Ed.D. degree in a timely manner with peer and faculty support.

## Stage 1: First Year and Following Summer

The beginning of your Ed.D. journey should be one of exploration and discovery. You will be exposed to ideas that challenge you, put words to hunches you've had in the past, and simply broaden your exposure to what it means to be a scholar-practitioner in the field of education. You will also learn skills to describe, explain, and defend your developing positions on these discoveries. The beginning of your program will comprise coursework that will inform the seeds of your capstone projects, such as:

- Theories and Paradigms
- Research Topic
- Research Methods
- Research Questions

These are areas which you should engage with for yourself in the **first semester**. Engage yourselves in the course content and track how your ideas are changing or growing.

*Pro Tip: Keeping a journal, using a notes app on your phone, or sending text messages to yourself to record "a-ha" moments might be helpful.*

In the **second semester**, you should start talking with classmates who might be interested in similar research sites (e.g., elementary schools vs. high schools), topic areas, research methods, and theories. You will probably begin to see these alignments emerging from your first semester together.

*Pro Tip: Consider staying connected with these colleagues by forming a reading and writing group, becoming Facebook friends, following each other on Twitter, or just trading emails about interesting articles and conversations you've found or had.*

During your **summer semester**, prior to starting your second year, you should build a reading group to search for literatures (content, theory, and methods) together, read and discuss them together, and start narrowing your ideas about research questions. We recommend meeting for reading group every 3-4 weeks. This will help you stay accountable to each other and to yourselves for progress.

## Stage 2: Second Year and Following Summer

While the first year of your program is one of developing and discovering interests and colleagues, the second year is one of increasing focus and expertise.

At the end of the summer, at the **beginning of the second year**, meet with your advisor to identify a supervisory committee chair. Your committee chair will then help you determine: 1) your developing capstone problem, theoretical orientation, and methodological interests; 2) additional committee members; and 3) a proposed timeline for the next two years for your continued

development toward project idea, proposal, capstone, and completion. You should update this timeline with your chair each semester.

*Pro Tip: Consider writing yourself a “contract” that includes these ideas. It is an evolving document, but it can be an accountability tool as well as an opportunity to articulate and clarify the current state of your thinking and goals. Share it with your advisor / committee chair and your writing group. If you’re into social media, post it on Facebook!*

Once you identify a committee chair, you will shift from meeting with your initial advisor to working with your chair (if your chair is not the same person as your advisor).

Your supervisory committee should be in place by the end of the first semester of your second year. Your supervisory committee chairperson must be a tenured or tenure-track faculty member in the ELP department. The majority of your supervisory committee members must be tenured or tenure-track faculty members in the ELP department. You must have three members on your supervisory committee. Make sure that you and your chair work out the specific role or expectation for each committee member.

The second year is about focusing in to complete the following aspects of preparation for the capstone:

- Problem statement
- Project outline
- Literature review
- Instrument development
- Research site selection criteria
- IRB approval, if applicable

During the **second semester of this second year**, you and your chair should take stock of your literature base, research topics, and study design ideas. Examine where you have gaps that you will need to fill in order to conduct a successful capstone, and sign up for classes and conduct literature reviews accordingly.

*Pro Tip: Start using a citation software early. Use organization tools to sort the entries by topic. Attach notes so that you can easily create an annotated bibliography for yourself. This will be useful at literature review time.*

At the **middle of the second semester of the second year**, you should begin writing out iterations of your problem statement and research questions intended for the capstone. With your chair’s feedback, continue revising until it truly captures what you want to know and provide the field. You should also come up with an outline for a capstone project that will help you respond to your problem of practice/policy. During the semester, you will turn this outline into a proposal.

In the **summer before the third year**, students will take a Capstone Seminar, intended to give them skills and time to prepare the following pieces:

- Problem Statement
- Literature Review
- Theoretical Framework

- Research Methods and Study Site
- IRB Completion, if applicable
- Timeline for Data Collection, Data Analysis, Writing, and Rewriting

These pieces will turn into the capstone proposal, which will be defended to your committee in the fall.

*Pro Tip: Set a monthly standing appointment (and keep it sacred!) to keep meeting with your writing group—you can read each other’s problem statements and proposal drafts, keep each other company, and help each other set “baby steps” goals for each week. Consider doing Skype or FaceTime check-ins in between meetings, or if one of you can’t be at the meeting in person.*

While the first three sections (problem statement, literature, and framework) are likely to constitute a large part of your capstone proposal, the Research Methods, Study Site, and Timeline will be *essential* to complete. In addition, for empirical studies conducted with participants (as opposed to public documents or large secondary data sets), Institutional Review Board permissions and Study Site permissions must be approved by **September or October of fall semester**. Thus, your capstone timeline should account for these steps and the time required for data collection and analysis.

### Stage 3: Capstone Year

You will **begin your third year** by defending your capstone proposal to your committee. After the capstone proposal defense, conducting and completing the capstone study is in sight! Take some time to celebrate the proposal defense and recharge your batteries.

During this year, you will be in **regular touch with your committee chair and writing group**. Contact your committee chair **at least once per month by email** to report your progress and ask any questions you may encounter. Contact your **writing group at least once a week** outside of your monthly meetings. The frequency of communication is an accountability check, as well as assurance that you are not isolated or stuck during this busy and intellectually taxing time.

The following is a suggested timeline for students to complete the capstone in a timely fashion.

- Students should complete data collection **by January 15** of the third year in order to afford time to analyze data and write up a capstone.
- Analysis should be mostly completed **by February 28** of the third year, though analysis is iterative throughout writing.
- Capstone research studies must be written and submitted to committees **by April 1**.
- For a spring graduation date, defenses should occur **by April 25**.
- In addition, field-based products related to the capstone must be completed **by the last day of finals period of spring semester**.

Degrees will not be granted until both parts of the capstone—research study and field-based product—are submitted, defended, and approved by the capstone committee.

In order to complete the capstone within this brief timeline, you will have to be extremely diligent about time management, working a little every day, and finding strategies for balancing personal life, work, and capstone. Talk to your colleagues and chair to brainstorm a plan that will work for you. Remember, it will be an intense season, but it will pass quickly. You can do it! The important thing is to gather your supports to do so.

## Process and Tools:

We have provided the following tools in order to support your process. These are intended to provide guidance on expectations for successful and effective group work that leads to high-quality capstones. The first tool provides a *snapshot of capstone milestones*, an overview of the progress guide above. The second tool is a chart that provides some clarity on the *differences between a capstone and a dissertation*. Finally, the third tool is a process guide to help *run your reading and writing groups*.

### Snapshot of Capstone Milestones

Year	Capstone/Ed.D. Milestones
Year 1	<p><b>Fall:</b> Immerse in courses</p> <p><b>Spring:</b> Get to know peers with related interests (regardless of program)</p> <p><b>Summer:</b> Form a reading group</p>
Year 2	<p><b>Fall:</b> Find committee chair and committee members</p> <p><b>Spring:</b> Transition reading to writing group; Take stock of reading lists and depth of literature base; Start writing iterations of problem statement and outline of capstone</p> <p><b>Summer:</b> Capstone seminar to prepare proposal</p>
Year 3	<p><b>Fall:</b> Proposal defense, IRB (if applicable), data collection, and analysis</p> <p><i>Stay in regular touch with your chair and writing group!</i></p> <p><b>Spring:</b> Data collection, analysis, writing, DEFENSE, field-based product, and GRADUATION!</p>

### What is the Difference between an ELP Capstone and a Dissertation?

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	Capstone	Dissertation
Degree	Required for Ed.D.	Required for Ph.D.
Definition	An independent project that uses research to provide understanding, implications, and recommendations related to a specific problem of practice or policy.	An independent research project that extends the existing literature base on a topic that addresses problems of theory as well as practice or policy.

	Capstone	Dissertation
Methods/Formats	<p>A research or research-based, original product in the form of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Action research</li> <li>• Evaluation research</li> <li>• Traditional research (empirical project)</li> <li>• Policy manual for state or district educational agencies</li> </ul> <p>The capstone must be one of these four types, or the student should pursue departmental approval for an alternative format.</p>	Original research in the form of a dissertation
Components	<p>Depends on the method and format (above), but all include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Problem statement that clearly articulates urgency and significance of specific problem, leading to questions</li> <li>• Literature review that shows student’s expertise of the landscape of relevant areas of research</li> <li>• Theoretically based framework</li> </ul>	<p>Whatever the format or organization of chapters, the dissertation must include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Problem statement</li> <li>• Literature review</li> <li>• Theoretical framework</li> <li>• Methodology</li> <li>• Results</li> <li>• Discussion</li> </ul>
Field-based products	<p>All capstones must result in practitioner products or dissemination of capstones. Field-based products may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consulting or providing professional development to local education agencies</li> <li>• Short publications in practitioner journals</li> <li>• Presentations to school district leaders or school board</li> <li>• Policy briefs</li> <li>• Other ideas generated with practitioners</li> </ul>	Not required, but could be pursued post-defense

# Reading and Writing Groups

These guidelines are provided as suggestions to meet the required goals of reading and writing groups. How you run the group is up to you, but these are processes that should work, with minor adaptations agreed upon by group members.

In many cases, your reading group will turn into your writing group, but depending on life schedules and progress, you may have group members move in or out. This is ok.

Overall, groups help you share strategies, tools, knowledge, and resources to meet your goals and keep moving forward. Groups are also invaluable support networks and intellectual resources, as well as accountability partners. Below are some things reading and writing groups do.

## What does a Reading Group do?

- Identify personal deadlines
- Search for and select the appropriate literature for your project
- Strategies for: Taking notes on readings, Managing citation libraries
- Create and review annotated bibliographies
- Discuss texts, theories, ideas from other authors
- Share interesting pieces that could be relevant for other group members
- Process ideas and theories relevant to your scholarship

## What does a Writing Group do?

- Identify personal deadlines
- Read and give feedback on each other's drafts
- Things to examine during peer review include:
  - Paragraphs that are making an author stuck
  - Outline of argument
  - Clarity of writing
  - How to integrate ideas from different authors or theories
  - Talking through what you are trying to say but are having a hard time writing
  - Frameworks and concept maps or figures that are difficult to lay out
  - Preliminary findings or data analysis
- Share strategies to address writer's block
- Revise
- Revise again ... after more analysis and discussion
- And revise again
- Monitor goals, support, and strategies
- Create and manage writing timeline
- Share ideas for time management

## Running a Reading or Writing Group:

The following steps should help you get started and keep going.

1. **Identify group members.** Identify like-minded peers from courses who could be in your group. You don't have to be interested in exactly the same topic, but even people who have

related but different interests can help you process ideas from a slightly different perspective while still understanding what you're talking about and citing.

2. **Pick a productive setting.** For some of you, this might be a room in the Marriott Library, one of the working areas in the SAEC building, or a coffee shop. Some of you may meet best over Skype or Google hangout. Whatever the setting, make sure your time together is consistently scheduled, protected, undisturbed, and likely to be accessible to all group members.
3. **Pick a time – and keep it.** Whatever you do, don't miss your group meeting. Send emails ahead of time to share articles, drafts of things you want feedback on, and make sure you show up.
4. **Set norms and expectations.** What will your group accomplish? What do you need from other group members? What can other group members realistically expect from you? What will you do if you feel you aren't supported, or how will someone talk to you if they feel you aren't participating regularly? Discuss these questions openly so that you can have a productive group.
5. **Have fun!** Group meetings will be a chance to have social time while getting your work done. Bring snacks and wear comfortable clothes. Share funny cat videos. Vent (for a few minutes only). Do what you need to do to get in the right state of mind to give your peers your best thinking, and to receive their support.
6. **Goal-setting.** Set reasonable goals with timelines, and identify specific support and strategies you need to achieve those goals. Do you need a week off work and sequestering in a hotel room to write? Do you need child care pick up/drop off? Do you need meals prepared or picked up for you? Identify which dates and times in the next month you will need these.
7. **Share.** Public accountability is a big part of making progress. Make your timelines public. Share when you meet a goal and celebrate. Email your chair to celebrate. Text your group members when you have a breakthrough or find the perfect article.

Reading and writing for a capstone is hard work. It takes a lot of time and dedication, and can feel like a huge independent project. It is independent, but you aren't alone. A reading and writing group provides an essential blend of social and intellectual support. The growth and challenge of a capstone is even more memorable and enjoyable when it is shared.