Ph.D. Timeline
(approximate schedule for graduation in five years)

Enter the job market.
(You’ll have less time to work on your dissertation.)

Sometimes it takes a sixth year…
or a seventh…
and that’s OK.
You’re not alone.

Select your diss topic, ask a professor to be your director, and find at least two extra committee members. Write your diss proposal, your “prospectus,” and formally defend it.

Great time to refine a term paper and submit it for publication!

Keep submitting papers for publication.

Wrapping up your diss. (You won’t have much time in the spring.)

Defend & submit your diss. (It’s a whole thing.)

GRADUATE.

The first two (or three) years might seem like an extension of the M.A.: the only thing you’re required to do is take classes. But if you use this time to build your C.V., you’ll be glad in year 5 that you did. (You’ll never have this much time on your hands again.)

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Apply for awards, present at conferences (& meet other doc students in your field!), reach out to notable scholars, and ask professors if you can guest lecture in a course or TA for them, and be involved in departmental service.

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Study for your (2) field exams.
(There is no avoiding this. If you have extreme test anxiety, seek help.)

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**Tips**

- Give extra attention to a seminar paper so you can submit it for publication during the summer.
- Hold one service position at a time, but hold several throughout the program. This will diversify your C.V.
- Volunteer in the community. Thinking of and helping others will help you keep things in perspective. (Just don’t spend too much time volunteering.)
- Use one (or both) of your two independent studies to prepare for a field exam.
- Remember that you are in control of your dissertation process. If necessary, you can change topics (and even committees).
- Break up your dissertation into small, manageable sections (10-20 pages). Write one section at a time, and don’t get distracted by the big (intimidating) picture.
- Don’t let yourself become isolated. Study and work with friends.
- Take breaks, and do not feel guilty for doing so. You will do better work when you regularly have something to look forward to.
- Read for pleasure. Make time for it. (You are at risk of losing interest in your topic and even in reading itself.)
- Mental health problems are normal and treatable. If you feel too anxious and/or depressed to work, seek help.

**Resources**

- **CFPs, Awards, Fellowships, & Certificates:**
  - NIU.edu/grad/academics/certificates/index.shtml
  - NIU.edu/grad/funding/fellowships.shtml
  - Newberry.org/fellowships
  - call-for-papers.sas.UPenn.edu
  - MLA.org/Resources/Career/Conferences-Fellowships-and-Announcements
  - grad.UCLA.edu/funding

- **Dissertation:**
  - Thesis and Dissertation Office · thesis@niu.edu
    Adams Hall 104, Mon.-Thurs. 10:00-2:00

- **When you need help:**
  - Our graduate director
    * “We have a caring and understanding faculty. Let them help you.”*
  - NIU Counseling and Consultation Services · (815) 753-1206
    Campus Life Building 200, Mon.-Thurs. 8:00-4:30

- **When you need help NOW:**
  - National Suicide Prevention Lifeline
    CHAT: SuicidePreventionLifeline.org
  - Crisis Text Line · TEXT: “HOME” to 741-741
  - NIU Crisis Services · (815) 753-1206
  - Kishwaukee Behavioral Health Crisis Line · (866) 242-0111

For more tips and resources, take a look at the [NIU English Doctoral Success Guide](#).