

Losing My Ph.D. Thesis

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The first step in preparing a doctoral thesis begins with preparing a proposal. A proposal is a summary of what a doctoral thesis is about, i.e., the topic to be investigated and the research methodology. A proposal is usually presented to the student's committee that reads and approves or disapproves the student's proposal. If the committee approves the proposal, then the student can go ahead and finish the thesis. If not, the student has to consider another topic for her/his thesis.

Unlike other proposals, my proposal consisted of 130 pages and took a whole year to prepare. I visited several schools and observed ESL classes. I prepared my observation form, applied it, told what statistical techniques I was going to use, and what results I expected to obtain. In brief, my proposal contained a detailed account of what I was going to do in my thesis.

Every day, I went to the Computer Center, and worked on my proposal for long hours. After finishing a particular section, I would type it on the computer, print it, and hand in to my advisor. My advisor would read it and write comments on it. Then I would make the necessary corrections and retype that section. I did that several times as my advisor was always meticulous and always made sure that everything was perfect.

One day before I was supposed to turn in my proposal to my committee members, I was making my final corrections in the evening. After working for few hours, I wanted to take a short break. So I saved my work, crossed the street, and went to the Quicktrip store, for coffee. After I had my coffee, I went back to the Computer Center to print the final version of my proposal. To my surprise, every time I tried to open my thesis file, the computer responded by saying that there was no file.

After several trials, I discovered that I had lost my whole thesis, i.e., my 130 pages as a result of a mistake that I made in saving my thesis file.

I cannot find the words to describe how I felt that moment. I felt like a multimillionaire who had lost all his money in a second. In just a second, all kinds of ideas were going on in my mind. I was thinking of what I might do to have my thesis ready by the next morning. It was not possible to take the draft that I had at home and make 6 copies of it, as all the photocopying centers were closing. It was not also possible to retype 130 pages myself and have them ready by the next day. It was too late to contact a secretary at 8:45 p.m., have her retype my proposal and have it ready by the next day. In brief, I was in a predicament. I could only visualize failure. I felt that that was the end of my graduate study and was certain I would never see the day I graduate. So I broke down and cried my heart out.

I was somewhat lucky, because this happened 15 minutes before the Technical Support Office at the Computer Center closed. So I dashed through the door, dropped on the chair, and cried heartily. I can never forget how kind the T.A's at the Technical Support Office were. They calmed me down and asked whether I was working on my proposal the previous day. I answered in the positive. They said they could restore that version not the one that I lost. They also told me that they always saved a backup copy of every student's work, as they knew students very often lost their work as a result of fatigue. I could not believe what I heard. He wrote the "restore commands" for me and said that my thesis would be restored 8:00 a.m. the next day. He added that if I did not get it at 8:00 a.m., they would make another request and I would regain my thesis at 11:00 a.m. I typed the "restore commands" right away, ran back to the Technical Support Office and begged the T.A. to check and see whether I followed the steps correctly.

Soon, I went home. I was still in a state of shock, thinking of what happened and could not sleep that night at all. I was looking at the clock

all night long and could not wait for the sun to come out. I ran to the computer center early in the morning and waited for the clock to strike 8:00 a.m. I turned the computer on, checked it and the thesis was there. I saved my thesis three times. I spent the whole day making the corrections that I made the night before. Later, every time I wanted to save my work, I stared at the keyboard with terror, hesitated and then made sure that I press the right key. I finished the corrections and had the 6 copies printed just in time. I carried all 6 copies and ran from building to building to hand the proposal to each committee member. By the time I finished, it was 5 p.m., the end of the day and finally gave a sigh of relief.