



**MS IN APPLIED BEHAVIOR ANALYSIS PROGRAM
CAPSTONE PROJECT MANUAL AND GUIDELINES**

Contents

INTRODUCTION TO THE MASTER’S CAPSTONE PROJECT	3
DESCRIPTION OF CAPSTONE PROJECT SECTIONS	4
Abstract	4
Chapter 1: Literature Review	4
Chapter 2: Methods	5
Chapter 3: Results	6
Chapter 4: Discussion.....	6
References.....	7
DEVELOPING AND PROPOSING A CAPSTONE PROJECT	7
Choose a Topic and Receive Advisor Approval; Form a Capstone Project Committee	7
Develop and Propose Capstone Project to Advisor	7
Deliver Capstone Project Proposal and Receive Committee Approval	7
CONDUCTING THE RESEARCH	8
Obtain Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval	8
Recruit Participants	8
Implement Study Protocols and Collect Data	8
Analyze Data.....	8
WRITING THE CAPSTONE PROJECT	9
Introduction and Methods.....	9
Results and Discussion	9
Formatting.....	9
Effective Writing Practices.....	9
CAPSTONE PROJECT DEFENSE AND EVALUATION	10
Written Report:	10
Oral Defense:.....	10
Capstone Defense and Evaluation.....	11
Written Capstone Evaluation Policy	11
Oral Defense Evaluation Policy.....	14
GENERAL TIPS -- WRITING AND ORAL DEFENSE	16
Tips on Writing a Scientific Paper.....	16
Tips on Creating an Effective Oral Defense	17
FLOWCHART OUTLINING STEPS/TIMELINE	18

INTRODUCTION TO THE MASTER'S CAPSTONE PROJECT

1. Objective

- a. All Master's level students are required to complete a Capstone Project as part of their degree program. This activity requires students to
 - i. Identify a topic for an analysis,
 - ii. Develop a research project in consultation with your advisor,
 - iii. Implement the analysis,
 - iv. Conduct a systematic evaluation, using single-subject methodology if experimental,
 - v. Write-up the results of your analysis, and
 - vi. Present the findings.

2. Scope

- a. The Capstone Project can be in the areas of experimental analysis of behavior, applied analysis of behavior, conceptual, theoretical, or philosophical behavior analytic scholarship.
 - i. Typically, a Capstone Project is experimental, correlational, or a systematic literature review.
- b. The Capstone Project encompasses a structured investigation into a behavioral analysis problem, employing methodologies that can range from experimental designs to systematic literature reviews.
- c. The Capstone Project will likely include:
 - i. Literature Review: To establish the context and rationale, based on scholarly literature.
 - ii. Methodological Framework: Detailed explanation of the research design, data collection, and analysis.
 - iii. Research Findings: Presentation and interpretation of data.
 - iv. Conclusion: Discussion of the implications of findings, limitations, and areas for future research.
 - v. Oral Defense: A presentation discussing your topic, methods, and findings.

3. Examples and Non-examples of Capstone Project projects

- a. Examples
 - i. Conducting replications of research using the Portable Operant Research and Teaching Lab (PORTL)
 - ii. Experimental work with participants
 - iii. Replications of previous research
 - iv. New areas of study
 - v. Case studies with less control over variables but that produce meaningful results
 - vi. Substantial and systematic reviews that yield new insights

- b. Non-examples
 - i. Standalone surveys
 - ii. Routine clinical work.
 - iii. Certification or licensure test prep modules.
 - iv. Comprehensive examinations.
 - v. Reports or projects with hypothetical data
- 4. Incorporation into the Overall Program
 - a. Components of the Capstone Project will be drafted across the course of the overall program. This will assist students in gradually developing and refining their project. For example
 - i. In SPED 7518 (1st Spring) students develop a literature summary that can help identify a topic and establish background literature
 - ii. In EDPR 7581 (1st Summer) students develop a research proposal that can be built from the literature summary and directly propose the Capstone Project
 - b. Students are encouraged to use these class assignments to build their overall Capstone Project. These in-class assignments should be considered drafts of the Capstone Project.

DESCRIPTION OF CAPSTONE PROJECT SECTIONS

Abstract

(Length: 150-250 words)

1. The abstract provides a general overview of the research project. This would include a brief description of the topic, research question, methods, and results. You may also include a final statement summarizing the findings.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

(Length: approximately 5 pages)

1. General Overview: Begin with an introduction to your topic, focusing on its relevance and applications to the specific population or areas you are investigating in your Capstone Project. Highlight the significance of this approach in the broader field of study.
2. Topic Exploration: Provide a detailed description of the specific topic your Capstone Project addresses, explaining why it is important and its potential impact on the field. This should set the stage for the detailed review that follows.
3. Review of Studies: Conduct a thorough review of 10-30 relevant studies. This should involve:

- Locating relevant literature through database (e.g., PsycINFO) searches and manually scanning journals.
 - Identifying key authors, seminal works, and leading journals in the field.
 - Critically analyzing the literature to identify themes, strengths, and weaknesses.
 - Using primary sources and avoiding unreliable sources like the popular press.
4. **Purpose and Research Questions:** Conclude with a clear statement of the purpose of your research and the specific research questions you aim to address. This section should link the reviewed literature to the aims of your study, demonstrating the gap your research intends to fill.

Chapter 2: Methods

(Length: various, but likely less than 3 pages)

1. **EXPERIMENTAL STUDY:** If conducting an experimental study, the methods section likely includes
 - a) **Participants and Setting:** Describe the participant criteria, including inclusion and exclusion criteria, demographic characteristics, and the setting where the research will be conducted.
 - b) **Materials and Apparatus:** Detail the materials used in the study, including any specific equipment or software. Mention any unique apparatus and its construction details if relevant.
 - c) **Design and Procedures:** Explain the research design, describing the independent and dependent variables. Outline the sequence and timing of the experimental procedures.
 - d) **Data Collection:** Describe the measures used.
 - e) **Interobserver Agreement and Treatment Integrity:** Discuss how interobserver agreement will be maintained and how the integrity of the treatment will be assessed.
2. **SYSTEMATIC REVIEW:** If conducting a systematic literature review, the methods section likely includes
 - a) **Literature Search Strategy:** Detail the search strategy used to gather studies, including databases searched, keywords used, and inclusion and exclusion criteria. This should be exhaustive enough to ensure reproducibility.
 - b) **Selection Criteria:** Describe the criteria for selecting studies for inclusion in the review. Include the process of screening titles and abstracts, assessing full-text articles for eligibility, and reasons for exclusion of irrelevant or unsuitable studies.
 - c) **Data Extraction and SynCapstone Project:** Explain how data was extracted from the selected studies and the methods used to synthesize this information. Discuss any

qualitative or quantitative synCapstone Project approaches, such as meta-analysis or thematic analysis.

Chapter 3: Results

(Length: approx. 3 paragraphs for proposal; various but likely 4-8 paragraphs for final Capstone Project)

1. **EXPERIMENTAL STUDY:** If conducting an experimental study, the results section likely includes
 - a) For Proposal: Present hypothetical data illustrating how the chosen design will demonstrate experimental control. Provide a paragraph describing hypothetical results for each participant, emphasizing the expected trends and variability.
 - b) For Final Capstone Project: Offer a detailed analysis of actual data collected. Include graphs for each phase of the study for each participant, adhering to APA conventions for data presentation.
2. **SYSTEMATIC REVIEW:** If conducting a systematic literature review, the results section likely includes
 - a) For Proposal: Present the hypothetical results of the search and selection process in a structured way, possibly using a PRISMA flow diagram. Provide several paragraphs summarizing how you would structure the hypothetical results. Demonstrate how the results section might be organized along the areas examined, such as the characteristics of the included studies, such as study design, participant demographics, interventions, and outcomes.
 - b) SynCapstone Project of Findings: Detail the main findings from the included studies, organized thematically or by key questions.

Chapter 4: Discussion

(Length: approx. 1-2 paragraphs for proposal; various but likely 2-4 paragraphs for final Capstone Project)

1. For Proposal: Discuss what the expected results would signify. Cover the potential implications and the theoretical relevance of the anticipated findings.
2. For Final Capstone Project: Review the actual results briefly, then discuss their implications in depth, including:
 - a) Theoretical and methodological implications.
 - b) Applied implications and possible behavioral mechanisms.
 - c) Limitations of the current study and suggestions for future research.
3. Concluding Remarks: Close with a conclusion that encapsulates the impact of the findings and their relevance to the field of applied behavior analysis.

References

1. A listing of all references cited in the paper. These references should be arranged in APA format. There are many resources available regarding APA; make sure all references adhere to this format.

DEVELOPING AND PROPOSING A CAPSTONE PROJECT

Choose a Topic and Receive Advisor Approval; Form a Capstone Project Committee

1. Research can be in any branch of behavior analysis, whether philosophical/conceptual, basic, or applied.
 - a. Considerations:
 - i. Relevance: The topic should contribute to your field.
 - ii. Originality: It should provide a new perspective or challenge existing knowledge.
 - iii. Feasibility: Consider resource availability and time constraints.
 - b. Prepare a topic proposal outlining the significance, objectives, and preliminary literature review.
 - c. Discuss the proposal with your advisor for initial feedback.
 - d. Revise based on feedback and receive final advisor approval.
2. Form a Capstone Project Committee that includes
 - a. Your Advisor: Your main point of contact, guiding you through the Capstone Project process.
 - b. Committee Members: At least one additional faculty members who provide specialized knowledge or methodological expertise. Likely ABA faculty
 - i. Responsibilities of Capstone Project Committee
 1. Provide detailed feedback on your proposals, drafts, and final submission.
 2. Assess your progress and readiness for defense.

Develop and Propose Capstone Project to Advisor

1. Create a draft proposal. This proposal should include
 - a. Chapter 1: Literature review
 - b. Chapter 2: Methods
 - c. Chapter 3: Results (Proposal format)
 - d. Chapter 4: Discussion (Proposal format)
 - e. References

Deliver Capstone Project Proposal and Receive Committee Approval

1. Revise your proposal based on advisor feedback
2. The proposal should include
 - a. Abstract
 - b. Chapter 1: Literature review

- c. Chapter 2: Methods
 - d. Chapter 3: Results (Proposal format)
 - e. Chapter 4: Discussion (Proposal format)
 - f. References
3. Before presenting to your committee, make sure your paper has been thoroughly proofread. You should consider
 - a. Utilizing campus writing services if writing is not your strength
 - b. Having your paper read aloud to you; ideally form a partner in the program and do joint reads of papers. Alternatively, have Microsoft Word read the paper aloud to you
 - c. A POORLY WRITTEN PROPOSAL WILL BE REJECT BY THE COMMITTEE AND THE STUDENT WILL NEED TO RE-PROPOSE.
 4. Adhere to all APA conventions.

CONDUCTING THE RESEARCH

Obtain Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval

1. Depending on the nature of your study, IRB approval may be required. You should discuss with your advisor whether this is necessary.
2. This is unnecessary for systematic reviews or activities involving the Portable Operant Research and Teaching Lab (PORTL)

Recruit Participants

1. If you obtained IRB approval, follow the recruitment process described in your protocols
2. If you are using PORTL for study activities this step is unnecessary

Implement Study Protocols and Collect Data

1. Begin implementation of the overall Capstone Project project, adhering to the methodology approved by your Capstone Project committee
 - a. You should meet with your advisor at least 1 time every other week during data collection
 - b. **DO NOT MAKE ANY CHANGES TO PHASES OR MODIFICATIONS TO YOUR PROCEDURES WITHOUT CONSULTING YOUR ADVISOR**
2. Maintain ethical standards and ensure data integrity.
3. Routinely collect interobserver agreement data and calculate procedural fidelity.

Analyze Data

1. Analyze the data using the appropriate methodology approved by the Capstone Project committee.
 - a. If an experimental study, should incorporate single subject research methodology.
2. Document the process and results for reproducibility.

WRITING THE CAPSTONE PROJECT

Introduction and Methods

1. These sections have already been written for the initial proposal.
2. Revise as necessary, updating with new information and incorporating any changes or recommendations provided by your advisor or Capstone Project committee.

Results and Discussion

1. Results: Present your findings clearly using APA formatting for tables, figures, and statistics. Each table and figure should be labeled and referenced in the text. Describe the results in narrative form as well, ensuring that your presentation is both data-driven and accessible.
2. Discussion: This chapter should interpret the results, discussing their implications and limitations. The discussion should be balanced, highlighting both strengths and weaknesses of the study. It's important to relate your findings back to your initial research question and the existing literature, proposing areas for future research.

Formatting

1. General Layout: Adhere to specific guidelines provided by your department, which typically align with APA style standards. This includes using a consistent font size and typeface (e.g., 12 pt Times New Roman; 11 pt Calibri or Arial) and double spacing throughout the document.
2. Margins and Alignment: Ensure margins are at least 1 inch on all sides, aligning the text to the left margin, which is standard in APA format.
3. Citation Style: Follow APA guidelines for in-text citations and the reference list. This includes the author-date citation method in the text and a detailed list of references at the end of the document, formatted according to APA standards.
4. Headings and Subheadings: Use APA levels of heading to organize the content logically and hierarchically. This helps in guiding the reader through the document and understanding the structure of your research.

Effective Writing Practices

1. Plan and Prepare: Understand the assignment requirements, choose an engaging topic, and conduct thorough research. Create an outline to organize your thoughts and structure the paper effectively.
2. Develop a Writing Routine: Set aside dedicated time for writing each day. Tackle the paper section by section and write regularly to maintain momentum.
3. Use Resources Wisely: Utilize reliable sources for your research, and ensure you properly cite all references. Use University services to assist you in the process. The librarians at the University of Memphis, in particular, will be thrilled to provide you with assistance.

4. Revise and Refine: Seek feedback from peers or advisor and use their insights to improve your draft. Edit and revise your paper multiple times focusing on different aspects such as clarity, grammar, and argument strength.
5. Stay Motivated and Manage Your Time: Set realistic goals and deadlines for each phase of the writing process. Take regular breaks to avoid burnout and keep your motivation high.

CAPSTONE PROJECT DEFENSE AND EVALUATION

1. There are two major components of the Capstone Project – A written report and an oral defense of the written report

Written Report:

1. This is the overall Capstone Project paper. It is the product that you will be creating through the process. The final report includes the following components
 - a. Abstract
 - i. Written by time of committee proposal
 - b. Chapter 1: Literature review
 - i. Written by time of committee proposal
 - c. Chapter 2: Methods
 - i. Written by time of committee proposal
 - d. Chapter 3: Results (Final Capstone Project format)
 - i. Written at conclusion of research project
 - e. Chapter 4: Discussion (Final Capstone Project format)
 - i. Written at conclusion of research project
 - f. References
 - i. Written at conclusion of research project
2. This written report will be provided to your Capstone Project committee at least 2 weeks before the oral defense

Oral Defense:

1. This is a presentation of the overall analysis and project. This presentation will cover all components of the written report (i.e., Introduction, Method, Results, Discussion) and will be delivered via a poster presentation.
2. During or after the poster presentation, the Capstone Project committee will ask questions of the student regarding the project and provide recommendations for any final revisions to the written report.

Capstone Defense and Evaluation

The capstone committee is responsible for evaluating both the written capstone document and the oral defense presentation. Evaluation decisions are based on the criteria outlined in this manual, including organization, quality of analysis, understanding of the literature, methodology, conclusions, oral presentation skills, and ability to respond to questions.

For both the written capstone and oral defense, the committee may determine one of the following outcomes:

1. Pass
2. Pass with Required Revisions
3. Fail

Written Capstone Evaluation Policy

Written Report: The written product is evaluated using a competency-based rubric that assesses scholarly understanding, proficiency in development and understanding of research methods, and overall ability to convey material succinctly.

Each Evaluation area will be rated by committee members using the following scale:

- 4 = Competent
- 3 = Adequate
- 2 = Developing
- 1 = Insufficient

Students must demonstrate competency across evaluation domains to successfully pass the oral defense.

Capstone Components	Competent 4	Adequate 3	Developing 2	Insufficient 1
Introduction	Clearly describes the general topic and its relevance, identifies a gap in the literature, includes sufficient evidence (10-30 relevant citations), arguments are logically and conceptually accurate	Describes the general topic and its relevance, includes between 6 and 9 references, a gap in the literature is identified but the literature discussed does not clearly lead to the research question	Describes the general topic without justifying its relevance, includes between 4 and 5 references, a gap in the research is not clearly identified, the introduction lacks cohesion and focus	Vaguely describes the general topic, includes less than 4 relevant references, the evidence cited is not connected to a central topic or to the research question, descriptions lack conceptual accuracy

Research question	The research question is clearly formulated and logically follows from the arguments presented in the introduction.	The research question is formulated adequately, but it does not clearly derive from the issues raised in the literature review.	The research question is incomplete, lacks specificity, and/or is not clearly connected to the literature review.	The research question, is too vague or broad: does not mention the IV and DVs, is not connected to the literature review, or is missing.
Method	All sub sections are included (participants, materials, settings, measures -including DV, IOA and TI- design, and procedures), the measures are correctly chosen and accurately described, the procedures are technologically described, and the design answers the research question demonstrating experimental control	All subsections are included but some components may lack sufficient detail, the measures and/ or research design may need minor adjustments	A few subsections are missing or need corrections, the main measures are not correctly chosen, the procedures are unclear and/or need major clarifications/corrections	Several subsections are missing or need major corrections; the procedures do not answer the research question; the experimental design is inadequate
Results	Research findings are accurately described, graphs are clear, self-explanatory and well formatted	Research findings are well described but may need more detail, graphs may require a few adjustments	Research findings are described with some errors, data or graphs are incomplete or ambiguous	Research findings are inaccurately described, graphs are missing, hard to read, or do not correspond to the chosen research design
Discussion	Relevant aspects mentioned in the introduction are sufficiently discussed in light of findings, includes thorough analysis and interpretation of data, relevant implications for theory and practice, accurate description of limitations, and suggestions for future research	Findings are adequately analyzed and interpreted but lack depth of analysis, implications for theory and practice, limitations, and future directions are relevant but require elaboration	Findings are interpreted superficially, are incomplete, or have a few errors, implications for theory and practice, limitations, and/or areas for future research are insufficiently discussed or have some conceptual errors	Findings are not interpreted or analyzed accurately, implications for theory and practice, limitations, and/or areas for future research are not mentioned, or are irrelevant given the data and the research question

Format and Organization	The document is well written, the format is consistent with APA7 guidelines, all sections are complete and organized, references are complete	Adequately written, APA 7 format used but with a few errors, all sections are included, organization and clarity could be improved, some references have a few errors	Some grammatical errors and typos, frequent APA7 omissions, some sections lack organization and clarity, references are incomplete.	Frequent grammatical errors, no adherence to APA7 format, disorganized presentation of arguments, several missing components, references are absent or most of them have errors
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Total Possible Score: 24 points

Written Defense Outcome Determination

- Pass: A student will receive a passing evaluation when:
 - The student earns a minimum total score of 18 of 24, and
 - No individual domain receives a score of “1 = Does Not Meet Expectations.”
- Pass with Required Revisions: A student may receive a “Pass with Required Revisions” outcome when:
 - The student demonstrates overall competence but requires minor clarification, revision, or further development in one or more areas.
 - The total score falls between 15 and 17 points, and/or
 - One evaluation area is rated as “2 = Developing / Minor Concerns.”
- Fail: A student may receive a “Fail” outcome when
 - The total score falls below 15, and/or
 - One evaluation area is rated as “1=insufficient.”

Procedures Following Failure of the Written Capstone

1. The committee will provide feedback identifying major deficiencies requiring remediation.
2. The student may revise and resubmit the written capstone one additional time.
3. The timeline for resubmission will be determined by the advisor and committee.
4. Students required to revise the capstone may be required to delay graduation until revisions are completed and approved.
5. Failure of the resubmitted written capstone may result in dismissal from the program consistent with Graduate School policy

Oral Defense Evaluation Policy

The oral defense is evaluated using a competency-based rubric that assesses professional presentation skills, scholarly understanding, and the student's ability to defend the capstone project.

Each evaluation area will be rated by committee members using the following scale:

- 3 = Meets Expectations
- 2 = Developing / Minor Concerns
- 1 = Does Not Meet Expectations

Students must demonstrate competency across evaluation domains to successfully pass the oral defense.

Evaluation Area	Criteria	Score (1-3)
Professional Presentation Skills	Maintains professional demeanor, organization, eye contact, pacing, and effective use of visual materials.	—
Knowledge of Topic and Literature	Demonstrates accurate and comprehensive understanding of the topic, relevant literature, and rationale for the project.	—
Methodology and Analysis	Clearly explains research design, procedures, analysis methods, and rationale for methodological decisions.	—
Interpretation of Findings	Accurately interprets findings, limitations, implications, and relevance to behavior analytic practice or scholarship.	—
Response to Questions	Responds to committee questions professionally, accurately, and with sufficient depth and clarity.	—
Scholarly Communication	Demonstrates graduate-level communication skills, organization of ideas, and professional terminology throughout the defense.	—

Total Possible Score: 18 points

Oral Defense Outcome Determination

- **Pass:** A student will receive a passing evaluation when:
 - The student earns a minimum total score of 15 out of 18, and
 - No individual domain receives a score of "1 = Does Not Meet Expectations."
- **Pass with Required Revisions:** A student may receive a "Pass with Required Revisions" outcome when:

- The student demonstrates overall competence but requires minor clarification, revision, or further development in one or more areas.
- The total score falls between 12 and 14 points, and/or
- One evaluation area is rated as “2 = Developing / Minor Concerns.”
- Fail: A student may receive a “Fail” outcome when
 - The total score falls below 12, and/or
 - One evaluation area is at “1=insufficient.”
 - The committee determines the student cannot adequately explain, defend, or interpret the capstone project and related methodology, findings, or implications.

The committee may require revisions to the written capstone, additional clarification, or remediation prior to final approval.

A failed oral defense may require additional remediation and a second oral defense attempt consistent with program policy. Failure of the second oral defense may result in dismissal from the program consistent with Graduate School policy.

Procedures Following Failure of the Oral Defense

1. The committee will provide feedback outlining deficiencies requiring remediation prior to re-defense.
2. The student may be permitted one additional oral defense attempt.
3. The second defense may not occur until the advisor determines whether the student is adequately prepared to re-defend.
4. Additional revisions to the written capstone may be required prior to the second defense.
5. Failure of the second oral defense may result in dismissal from the program consistent with Graduate School policy.

Additional Policies

Committee Authority

The capstone committee retains the authority to determine whether:

- a capstone is ready to proceed to oral defense,
- revisions are sufficient for approval,
- a re-defense is necessary, and
- the student has demonstrated adequate competency for successful capstone completion.

Timeline Expectations

Students are expected to complete required revisions within the timelines established by the advisor and committee. Failure to make satisfactory progress may result in additional review by program faculty.

Professional Expectations

Students are expected to maintain professional communication, preparation, and conduct throughout the capstone process, including all meetings, proposal activities, and oral defense procedures.

GENERAL TIPS -- WRITING AND ORAL DEFENSE

Tips on Writing a Scientific Paper

1. Start with a clear research question.
2. Do thorough literature research to frame your study.
3. Structure your paper according to the latest American Psychological Guidelines.
4. Outline your paper before you begin writing.
5. Write a compelling abstract that succinctly summarizes the study.
6. Use the IMRaD structure: Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion.
7. Present your methods in a detailed and reproducible manner.
8. Use figures and tables effectively to summarize data.
9. Ensure all figures and tables are referenced in the text.
10. Discuss how your findings relate to previous research.
11. Acknowledge the limitations of your study.
12. Cite all sources accurately and comprehensively. Do not include lots of quotes.
13. Use active voice where appropriate to strengthen the narrative.
14. Keep sentences and paragraphs concise.
15. Proofread for spelling and grammatical errors. Have someone read your paper aloud to you to catch errors. Microsoft Word can read the paper aloud to you.
16. Use consistent terminology throughout the paper.
17. Ensure your conclusions are supported by your data.
18. Include a comprehensive list of references.

19. Consider the broader impact of your research.
20. Be objective in your interpretation of the results.
21. Avoid overstating the significance of your findings.
22. Maintain a formal and professional tone.
23. Use precise and specific language.
24. Regularly save and back up your work.
25. Plan your writing schedule and stick to deadlines.
26. Keep your introduction and background engaging.
27. Avoid plagiarism by paraphrasing and citing correctly.
28. Present data and results in a logical order.
29. Avoid unnecessary jargon.
30. Manage your time effectively during the writing process.

Tips on Creating an Effective Oral Defense

1. **Clear Objective:** Clearly state the purpose of your research at the top of your poster.
2. **Logical Flow:** Organize content logically, typically left to right and top to bottom.
3. **Limit Text:** Use bullet points and avoid overcrowding with text. Aim for 800 words or less.
4. **Use Visuals:** Include charts, graphs, and images to explain concepts and show data.
5. **Consistent Style:** Maintain a consistent use of colors, fonts, and layout throughout the poster.
6. **Readable Text:** Use large, readable fonts and high contrast for legibility from a distance.
7. **Stay Concise:** Keep your language clear and concise to make your points quickly understood.
8. **Professional Appearance:** Ensure the poster is neat and visually appealing.
9. **Use of Space:** Avoid clutter by leaving ample space around your text and images.
10. **Rehearse:** Practice explaining your poster to different audiences.
11. **Feedback:** Get feedback on your poster design and pitch from peers before the presentation.
12. **Technical Accuracy:** Double-check your data and descriptions for accuracy.
13. **Cite Sources:** Properly cite all references and data sources on your poster.

14. **Prepare for Questions:** Be ready to answer questions about your research and findings.

15. **Engage with Viewers:** Show enthusiasm about your research and engage with your audience.

FLOWCHART OUTLINING STEPS/TIMELINE



