1. Right now, in your 3rd or 4th year, start writing! Or at least start thinking about your Introduction chapter. This is the most time-consuming chapter to write, and if you can start it now while you have down time in lab you will be happy you did in the long run! 😊 I would recommend starting this chapter soon after you complete your comprehensive exam while you are still in the mood to write! The first chapter I would recommend writing is your Methods chapter; it is super easy to write and will give you a sense of accomplishment when you complete it. It also helps put together seminars and/or posters or in fellowship applications. Especially when you learn a new technique, write it down while it is still fresh in your head.

When you think you are ready to defend, pick up a graduation packet from Graduate Studies. This packet has all of the pertinent information you will need to complete your thesis.

About 3-6 months (even a year?) before you are ready to defend, schedule a committee meeting. At your meeting, discuss your projects and what experiments need to be completed in order for you to defend. This way you will have everything out in the open, and everyone will be on the same page. Also bring a detailed copy of your dissertation outline (not just Introduction, Methods, Results, Conclusion, etc.) Let your committee know that you are prepared and ready to start writing. Have subtitles for each of these sections (this is also a good way to find out what experiments still need to be completed!). It is helpful to mark the sections that you have already completed (such as methods, sections of the introduction, maybe even a results chapter (if you have already published a first author paper. This is an easy chapter, just some re-formatting issues) and which sections you still need to complete. This will give your committee some frame of reference for how long it will take you to complete writing. Also discuss potential dates that will work well for your committee members; keep in mind when deadlines for grants are due and summer defenses as people are often busy or out of town during these times. When you get the okay that you can defend, make sure you file for graduation online (CARE website: care.unmc.edu) before the deadline (check the registration sheet or contact Graduate Studies if you are unsure). There is a $25 fee online. You will get a letter in the mail later on about getting fitted for your cap and gown. Also keep in mind the last date on which you can defend (also on the registration sheet). You will need to finish completing all revisions and get all paper work in by this date.

2. Stay motivated… it is hard to do! Looking at it as writing your thesis is very overwhelming; try to break it down and do a little each day. Use your detailed outline to your advantage and try to complete one to two subheadings of your outline each day.

Formatting, brief overview: (For complete list, see Graduate Studies Packet!) 😊

- Must be double-spaced, minimum text 10 (even on figure legends), 1.5 inch margins on the left hand side (all other margins are 1 inch), single-sided, page numbers are on the top right hand corner, there are a couple of different way to do figure legends (on a separate page, facing the figure) or underneath the figure on the same page—these can be single-spaced, keep in mind when you are making your figures that the margins still apply so work accordingly, Abstract can
3. When thinking about a defense date, make sure to give yourself plenty of time to have other people/students read your thesis. One tip: not very many people will be willing to read your ENTIRE dissertation careful. I would recommend picking 2-3 people to read each chapter, so pick people with expertise in that certain chapter area (or people that don’t have expertise, so that you know you are writing it clearly!). Also make sure you have someone who is great at catching grammar and punctuation mistakes read your thesis. This is VERY important! Once you get done writing one chapter, give it to someone to revise; keeping in mind that it may take them around 1-2 weeks to read your chapter, so while you are writing your next chapter, they may be done with the previous one, etc. Now that you have thought about all this, set your date. Either have another committee meeting or send your committee an email and suggest that they “Reply All” to each email so everyone is on the same page with a date/time. Once you get this information, schedule a room/auditorium for your defense (1 hour) and also select a room for your “question/answer part” with your committee afterwards (around 2 hours. This varies with each person).

For international students, you need to turn in your Optional Practical training paperwork to Grad studies at least 110 days before you are ready to send your application to the USCIS. So talk to your advisor about this and make sure they know that your I-20 is expiring and what this means in terms of getting your OPT card etc. Once you apply for OPT if it comes before you defend, it doesn’t matter. If it comes early, it is better than having to wait for it and not getting paid. Once I applied for it, it really did take the full 90 days to get approved and come in the mail. So again talk to Dan Teet at Grad Studies and PLAN AHEAD.

4. The hardest part to write (at least for me!) is the Conclusions chapter. Some people just re-hash their other chapter, which isn’t very beneficial. I tried to go through every aspect of my dissertation results chapters and ask additional questions, “what’s next?” to each of my results subheadings, and what would I expect. This was a lot of work, but it actually helped me out tremendously during my “question/answer portion” of my defense with my committee afterwards because every question they had for me, I pretty much had thought of and had outlined in my Conclusions chapter. There are many ways to write this chapter; I actually wrote it in a manner where I asked a question and then I tried to address that question. Look at past members in your laboratory/and other labs to see what they have done and see what works best for you.

5. Yay! You are done writing! Make sure to give your dissertation to your committee at least 4 weeks before you are planning to defend.

6. At this time you can also fill out the Application for Final Oral Examination for Ph. D. Degree and give it to Graduate Studies (this needs to be submitted 2 weeks prior to your defense!). This form
needs to be typed, so either ask Graduate Studies to give you a pdf that you can type on or find a typewriter; this is a common theme for the rest of the forms too…

7. You will be given two Title sheets; one you need to have completely typed with your committee members’ names and the other is partially typed where you will have your committee members sign the form after you successfully defend. Again, you will need to find a typewriter for this because it needs to be printed on “special paper”. The secretary in your department may be able to help you with these forms. You will also have to type a Outcomes Assessment Form, detailing your future plans/publications/etc. so you may want to do this all at the same time. You also need to type the information on the Report on Doctoral Degree form. I had Graduate Studies make me a “type-able” pdf of this. You need to bring this form with you on the day of your defense to have your committee members sign.

8. Other forms you need to complete:
   - Survey of Earned Doctorates, Microfilming Agreement form (page 3 of ProQuest packet, usually people check TR-1), Dissertation Submission Form (page 4 of ProQuest packet), and Copyright Registration form (there is a $65 fee)(page 5 of ProQuest packet) if applicable. I would disregard page 6 of the ProQuest packet where it asks you if you would like to order copies of your dissertation; you can print them using Printing Services at UNMC (fairly reasonable prices) and have them bound at the library ($10 fee for each book).

9. Now in the time between when you have submitted your dissertation to your committee and your defense date… READ, READ, READ!! Know everything that you have put in your dissertation. I would recommend reading your dissertation numerous times as well.

10. Now is defense day, get a good night’s sleep before hand. Try to relax, remember you and you alone are the expert on your projects! Give an outstanding presentation focusing on a good, complete story. Do NOT try to encompass all of your work; this would take way longer than the 45 minutes you are allotted. Try to teach your audience instead of just getting through your presentation. This is your time to shine and show everyone that you are an amazing scientist! Convey your ideas to them. Provide background and EXPLAIN your data and give conclusions and potential significance.

11. Now is the scariest time, meeting with your committee afterwards for questions. Just take a deep breath; it will all be over in 1-2 hours! Answer the questions thoughtfully. If you don’t know an answer, try to speculate (walk them through your thought process instead of just saying I don’t know). Most committees keep their questions focused on your thesis… but others will ask about anything you may have leaned in your classes, etc. Try to find this out before you defend so you can prepare. Also keep in mind the focus of each professor, if you have someone on your committee that is interested in Immunology, I would try to look over how that might impact my project somehow in the future, etc.

   **Day of Defense: bring one copy of the Title sheet and the Report on Doctoral Degree form for your committee to sign when you have successfully defended.

12. Once you are done, you will usually have some minor (hopefully not major!) revisions to make. After you get these changes made and accepted (usually your advisor will give you the okay), it is time to print your dissertation. You can do this through Printing Services at UNMC (also other places if you
599-4282 (Some professors will allow you to put it on their cost-center numbers so be sure to ask). Bring your dissertation as a single pdf on a flash drive. They will look at each page with you to make sure nothing has been converted (symbols, etc.). You will also write down the pages that are colored as they will be printed and inserted separately. Regardless of where you get your dissertation printed, you need to get it printed on **20 lb, white acid-free, 25% rag content bond paper**. You need to print 2 copies for the library (not bound or hole punched!), some departments have you also make them a copy… mine did not so be sure to check with your department head, your advisor, yourself, and ask your committee if they would like a copy (mine just wanted the version that they had and others wanted an electronic pdf version; be sure to check, each person is different). Print **2 copies of the title page** and **4 copies of the abstract**.

13. You are almost done! Now is what I like to call Graduate School Scavenger Hunt…

1. Bring everything with you to Graduate Studies. They will stamp your dissertation and send you to the library.

2. Go to the Library (WHM 6004); you will give the library the two unbound copies of your dissertation, Title sheets with committee signatures, thesis title sheets, abstracts, etc. At this time you can also have your copies of your thesis bound (**$10 fee for each copy**), there are many different colors to pick from; if you want an example check out past students dissertations in the library. Library Staff will sign your Report on Doctoral Degree form.

3. Go to the Cashier’s Office at the Student Life Center (closes at 4 pm) and pay the abstract fee (**$55**). Have them sign your Report on Doctoral Degree form and bring the receipt and form back to Graduate Studies.

4. Turn in Report on Doctoral Degree form, receipt and other forms including:

   -- Outcomes Assessment Form, with your CV attached, and a copy of your first author paper

   -- Survey of Earned Doctorates

   -- Microfilming agreement

14. You are NOW done! Congratulations on your Ph.D.! 😊