Viva voce advice for doctoral candidates

The viva voce allows you to have a focussed, academic discussion with experts in your field on the research described in their thesis. It is not an interrogation. Examiners can clarify questions that have come up during their reading of the thesis and you can “defend” your work.

The viva voce aims to demonstrate that you:

- know your thesis,
- understand what you have done, how you have done it and what it all means,
- conceived and carried out the research reported in the thesis, and
- did not plagiarise the work of others.

Choosing examiners

Your chosen examiners will read the thesis and each will provide a written preliminary report. Each report will be circulated to you, your supervisors, the viva voce examination chair, and the other examiner(s). This will normally happen about 2 weeks before the viva voce itself. So you will have time to read the reports and prepare for the next stage in your examination.

Your supervisors are expected to talk to you about their choice of your examiners. As you will be aware of who your examiners are, you should look at the examiners’ research interests prior to the viva voce to consider the type of things they may want to discuss with you during your viva voce.

On the day

You will be introduced to your examiners by the viva vice examination chair who will then invite you to give a short, 10 minute overview of your thesis. Practising this beforehand will help you get over any initial nerves. The examiners will then ask you about various aspects of the thesis that they have identified in their reports. The questions may deviate from your thesis because of the examiners’ specific interests. For example, they may ask what implications the work has for a cognate but different research question. It’s ok for you to acknowledge that you don’t know the answer to questions of this nature, or have not considered things from that angle, or need to think about it.

Once the questions have finished, you will be asked to leave the room while the examiners discuss their recommendation for the thesis. This should not take too long. You will be called back after the examiners’ discussion to be given your result. If revisions are required then these will be discussed.
and written into the report. The examiners may also provide advice on things you need to do if you are planning to publish or they may ask you about your future plans. You may wish to use this opportunity to discuss possible employment or

Once it is all over, it is time to celebrate!!

**Preparation advice**

- After thesis submission, relax for a few weeks then come back and get to know your thesis again. Make a note of any mistakes or typos for correction in the final version of the thesis.
- Read the viva voce advice on the GRS website and understand the viva voce process.
- Look through the latest literature in the field to understand if there have been any new major developments in the field since thesis submission.
- As well as the detail of your thesis, understand the big picture. Practise being able to say in a few sentences what the big-ticket items in the thesis are and where the research could go forward.
- Consider how to respond to questions and issues raised by the examiners in their report.
- Practise your viva voce skills by staging a “mock” viva voce with supervisors or other academics
- Go online to see what those who have been through the experience say.

**Viva voce dos and don’ts**

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<th>Do know your thesis</th>
<th>Don’t ignore the examiners’ reports</th>
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<td>Do think about and reflect on the question before you answer</td>
<td>Don’t ramble or answer things that have not been asked</td>
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<td>Do give concise and clear answers to questions</td>
<td>Don’t respond to a question by saying “it is in the thesis”</td>
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<td>Do ask for a question to be rephrased if you don’t understand it</td>
<td>Don’t be overly defensive or blame your supervisors</td>
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<td>Do be confident, but not arrogant</td>
<td>Don’t be laid back and blasé</td>
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<td>Do be honest – if you don’t know the answer to a question, say so</td>
<td>Don’t take criticism personally or get angry. If you feel this coming on, ask for a short break.</td>
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<td>Do let the examiner finish the question before you start to answer</td>
<td>Don’t look at your watch or your phone every few minutes</td>
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<td>Do be respectful</td>
<td>Don’t be dogmatic or dismiss your examiners’ opinions</td>
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<td>Do try to have fun!</td>
<td>Don’t panic!</td>
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Common practice questions

General

➤ Why did you decide on this particular research question?
➤ What have you found the most interesting aspect of your research?
➤ How did your thinking about this topic develop as you went through this research process?
➤ Were there any surprises along the way?
➤ How did doing this research change you as a researcher?

Research

➤ You refer to X as a key influence on your research. Can you summarise the particular relevance of their work?
➤ What developments have there been in this field since you began your doctorate? How have these changed the research context in which you are working?
➤ You make only passing reference to the field of X. Why do you think that field is less relevant than the others you have given more space to?
➤ You do not say much about the theory X in your thesis. Can you explain why you have not focused more on this theory?

Methods

➤ How well did the study design work in practice?
➤ Did you have any problems with the data collection process?
➤ You used an existing research method and developed it further. Can you tell us why this further development was needed?
➤ What were the main ethical issues of conducting this research?
➤ How did you establish the limits around the scope of your data collection?

Analysis and findings

➤ Can you talk us through your methods of analysis?
➤ Did you encounter any problems with applying this method of analysis?
➤ Do you think the data you collected were the most appropriate to answer your research question or are there any other data you would have liked to have collected?
➤ Can you describe your main findings in a few sentences?

Discussion

➤ If you were starting your research again now, would plan you make any changes?
➤ You interpret these findings as X. Do you think there could be an argument for interpreting them as Y instead?
➤ You said X in your thesis. Can you expand on X?
➤ In what way do you consider your thesis to be original?

Conclusions and implications

➤ What are the empirical, practice, and theoretical implications of your findings?
➤ How would you hope your research could be followed up and taken further?
Further Information

穟 Viva voce process at UWA  www.postgraduate.uwa.edu.au/students/oral-examination

드립니다 Commonly asked viva voce questions and answers  www.postgraduate.uwa.edu.au/students/oral-examination/#viva_ffaq

درس Thesis examination at UWA  www.postgraduate.uwa.edu.au/students/thesis

_emails Questions about the viva voce process at UWA  pgexam-grso@uwa.edu.au