

Further advice for examiners: the viva voce at UWA

The information in this document covers variations from the Doctor of Philosophy Rules 45 - 66 for cases where a candidate undertakes a viva voce (oral defense) as part of the examination of the thesis.

1. Examination of the thesis

Examiners are asked to carefully read the thesis and provide a preliminary report based on the criteria for the award of the degree as set out in A1. Your reports should recommend one of the following:

a) Proceed to viva:

- Pass; or
- Pass after revision

b) Do not proceed to viva:

- Resubmit; or
- Award a Master degree; or
- Fail

Your preliminary report should justify the recommended classification and provide sufficient detail to allow the candidate to prepare responses prior to the viva if the thesis is classified as (a) Proceed to viva, or in order to bring the thesis to the required standard if the thesis is classified as (b) Do not proceed to viva.

Your report should be received by the Examinations Office at UWA no later than six weeks after receipt of the thesis and no less than four weeks before the date of the viva.

On receipt of your preliminary reports the Board of the Graduate Research School (BGRS) will confirm whether the viva is to proceed, and will contact you to confirm the date and make arrangements for you to attend. The reports will be circulated to the candidate, supervisors and other examiners a minimum of 5 days prior to the viva.

If the thesis is classified as (b) Do not proceed to viva, then the viva will be postponed until such time as the thesis has been revised to an acceptable standard. In this case you may be asked to re-evaluate the revised thesis and provide an updated report.

With reference to the Doctor of Philosophy Rules 57(2) and 58(1), in the case where a viva is held, students and supervisors may not discuss any aspects of their examination with examiners prior to the viva.

2. At the viva

The Examination Panel consists of two external examiners and a Chair appointed from within the University. Examiners are expected to attend either in person, or via videoconference (see section 4 for further information).

On the day of the viva the Chair will meet with the examiners privately to discuss their preliminary reports and set an agenda with points for discussion and issues requiring clarification. Any potential areas of disagreement between examiners will also be discussed at this meeting and a resolution sought before the candidate is invited to join the meeting. Only the candidate and the Examination Panel will be present at the viva.

The role of the examiners is to determine whether the research work carried out meets the UWA requirements for a Doctor of Philosophy degree and has been undertaken by the candidate who, in discussion, shows an appropriate level of understanding of the thesis. Where the thesis contains co-authored papers, the examiners will consider the contribution of the candidate in determining the above. UWA's rules on theses including publications are given in A3.

The length of time of the viva should normally be between 1 – 2 hours and during this time the candidate should be offered the opportunity for a short comfort break if required. The examination should, where possible, be a positive experience for the candidate regardless of the outcome. You should not refer to the background or personal characteristics of the candidate (e.g. gender, age, disability, and race) at any point.

The examination will start with the candidate being asked to provide a short overview of the thesis and its main findings. They may also choose to address some of the questions raised in writing by the

examiners. The thesis should be discussed and questions asked and answered in a respectful and fair manner. All discussion must be in English.

The candidate should be encouraged to expand on areas of concern identified by the examiners and, where an argument in the thesis is not deemed convincing, to provide evidence in its defense.

Examiners may ask questions tangential to the work carried out in the thesis but the ability or inability of the candidate to answer such questions should not influence the outcome.

Once all questions have been answered, the candidate will be invited to make closing remarks.

3. After the viva

At the conclusion of the viva, the candidate will leave the room and the examiners will make a single determination of a classification for recommendation to the Board (see A2):

1. Pass without corrections or with minor typographical corrections
2. Pass with revisions
3. Refer back to the BGRS with a recommendation for resubmission, award of a Master or Fail.

If 3, the BGRS will make the final classification based on both the examiners' preliminary and viva voce examination reports.

The Chair is required to provide a clear and concise report that justifies the final classification and provides detail of any revisions required, and forwarded to the Thesis Examinations Office.

The candidate shall normally be informed of the examination recommendation by the Chair in the presence of the examiners. In the event that agreement on a classification cannot be reached, the reports will be forwarded to the BGRS for a decision.

4. Attendance Arrangements

For examiners attending in person, the Graduate Research School (GRS) will make flight arrangements (Economy Class airfares) and hotel bookings. An additional honorarium of \$200 will be provided to examiners attending in person to cover any sundry costs such as taxis to and from the airport. Further expense will not be reimbursed.

Hotel accommodation is provided for 1 night (domestic) or 2 nights (international) for examiners. Minibar and other miscellaneous expenses are the responsibility of the examiner.

Examiners attending by videoconference will be contacted by the GRS with instructions on how to join the viva. UWA uses the ZOOM platform and will provide a web link. A test beforehand can be arranged if required. Examiners using this mode of attendance are asked to use a quiet room and a hardwired internet connection where possible to minimise the risk of disruption.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

A1

Criteria for the award of a Doctor of Philosophy at UWA

- The thesis as a whole is a substantial and original contribution to knowledge of the subject with which it deals
- The student shows familiarity with, and understanding of, the relevant literature
- The thesis provides a sufficiently comprehensive study of the topic
- The techniques adopted are appropriate to the subject matter and are properly applied
- The results are suitably set out, and accompanied by adequate exposition
- The quality of the English and general presentation are of a standard for publication.

A2

Report outcome classification

- **Pass** means the candidate has met the requirements for the award of the degree without the need for corrections or revisions other than for minor typographical errors.
- **Pass with revisions** means that the candidate has met the requirements for the award of the degree but that changes are required to the thesis as detailed in the Examination Report. Such changes include:
 - Corrections to calculations or equations
 - Rewriting of sections to improve clarity of argument
 - Addition of references and discussion of the material therein
 - Typographical and presentation errors
 - Some re-evaluation of the data may be required, but normally additional data collection is not.

- **Refer back to the BGRS** means that the thesis in its current form does not meet the criteria for award of the degree or that the performance of the candidate during the viva does not satisfy the examiners that award of the degree is warranted. When making a decision to refer, the examiners should provide sufficient justification for the decision and recommend one of the following:
 - **Resubmission** means that the thesis does not meet the required standard but has the potential to do so with the addition of more data and/or substantial re-evaluation of the data, and potentially the conclusions. The examiners will be required to re-examine the thesis on a Pass/Fail basis after revision but will not be required to attend a second viva.
 - **Award of a Master of Philosophy** means that the thesis satisfies the conditions for a Master but not for a Doctoral degree. Specific justification must be given for this recommendation.
 - **Fail** means that the thesis does not have the potential to be revised sufficiently for the award of a Doctoral or Masters degree or that the candidate does not have required understanding and abilities to bring it to an appropriate standard within a reasonable period of time.

A3

Notes on examination of thesis including publications

Extract from the UWA Doctor of Philosophy Rules

41.(1)(a) A thesis may be presented in the form of a typescript, a published book or a paper or series of papers which have been published in refereed journals.

(b) A typescript may be structured in any of a range of ways, including, but not limited to: a monograph; a paper or series of papers suitable for publication in scholarly journals; or a combination of published and unpublished work.

(c) Work that has been published may be presented in the format in which it was published or with the formatting adjusted for consistency with the rest of the typescript.

(2) If any of the items submitted in terms of (1) have been jointly authored—

- (a) the work done by the student must be clearly indicated and certified as such by the co-authors; and
- (b) the co-authors must certify that they agree to the inclusion in the thesis of work of which they are joint authors.

(3) Work of which the student is sole or joint author may be submitted as an appendix in support of the thesis, but, in the case of joint authorship, the work done by the student must be clearly indicated.

(4) If a series of papers is presented, there must be a full explanatory introduction and a review article at the end to link the separate papers and to place them in the context of the established body of knowledge.

(5) If detailed data and descriptions of methods are not otherwise given, they must be included as appendices.

(6) If, with the approval of the Board, the thesis is presented as a typescript in two parts comprising respectively a piece of creative writing and exegesis, the two parts must be strongly connected and the connection must be demonstrated clearly in the exegesis.

Further Information

- [Viva voce guidelines](#)

This page has further advice for

- Candidates
- Chairs
- Supervisors and Schools

Contact



Questions about the viva voce process at UWA

pgexam-grso@uwa.edu.au