

## **Further advice for candidates preparing for a viva voce**

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The viva voce allows you to have a focused, academic discussion with experts in your field on the research described in your 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 supervisors are expected to talk to you about their choice of your examiners and will nominate two individuals with strong expertise in your area. 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.

The examiners will read the thesis and will each provide a written preliminary report. If the Board of the Graduate Research School recommends proceeding to the viva voce, each report will be circulated to you, your supervisors, the viva voce examination Chair, and the other examiner. 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. Supervisors are not permitted to join you in the examination, but can meet you afterwards, or accompany you to the event.

### **The viva voce arrangements**

Your examiners will be invited to attend the examination either in person or by videoconference using Zoom technology. This means that the event may only be physically attended by you, the Chair, and only one of the examiners, while the other examiner is connected via video conference. This makes no difference to the structure of the examination. The Chair of the viva voce is an experienced academic at UWA who may be in your School or a related discipline area but should have had nothing to do with your candidature. The Chair is

there to ensure that both you and the examiners understand the process, to take notes and to interpret policies and procedures if necessary. At the start of the viva voce there may be a short delay while the video conference is set up and up while the Chair has a preliminary discussion with the two examiners.

## 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 ensure you understand the process.
- » Look through the latest literature in your field to understand if there have been any new major developments 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.

## Common practise 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 practise?
- » 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 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, practical, and theoretical implications of your findings?
- » How would you hope your research could be followed up and taken further?

## **On the day: the examination**

After the preliminary examiners' discussion is complete you will be invited into the room and be introduced to your examiners by the viva voce examination Chair who will then ask you to give a short (~10 minute) overview of your thesis (not a PowerPoint presentation). 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 is ok for you to acknowledge that you don't know the answer to the question, or have not considered things from that angle, or just need to think about it.

Once the questions have finished, you will be asked if you have anything further to add and then you will be requested to leave the room while the examiners discuss their recommendation for the thesis. You will be called back after the examiners' discussion to be given their recommended classification. If revisions are required then these will be discussed and written into the viva voce 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 further directions for your research.

## What happens next?

The examiners' recommendation will be sent to the Board of the Graduate Research School and then you will be notified of their decision. At this point you can embark on necessary corrections in preparation for completion and successful graduation.

## Further Information

- [Viva voce guidelines](#)

This page has further advice for

- Examiners
- Chairs
- Supervisors and Schools

## Contact



Questions about the viva voce process at UWA can be sent to:

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