



Advice for candidates on the oral defence

If you have presented your work at seminars, workshops and conferences during your doctorate, you should be well prepared for the oral defence of your thesis. The oral is an opportunity for you to talk with academics who are interested in your research and have read your thesis closely. You have been working on your doctorate for three to four years and will have developed unique expertise in your field.

Examiners' reports

You will receive the examiners' reports on your thesis at least five working days before the oral. Reports will be released earlier if they are available. Take time to consider and reflect on the examiners' feedback. You should arrange to discuss the reports with your supervisors and decide how best to respond to the examiners' comments and criticisms (see addressing the examiners below).

Avoid using the time between receiving the examiners' reports and the oral to revise your thesis. Wait until you have heard what the examiners have to say in person. They may be able to assist with the resolution of some of the issues identified in their reports. Other issues they have commented on in their reports may disappear altogether following your defence.

Bringing material into the exam

You may bring notes (for reference only), data sheets (if you have had to reanalyse scientific data), your laboratory book or equivalent, and, of course, a copy of the thesis. Please **do not** bring pre-written responses to read out or submit to the examiners, this is not permitted.

Addressing the examiners

At the start of the oral, you will be invited to address the examiners for 10-15 minutes without interruption, but please be aware that the Chair may stop you if you go over this time. There is no University requirement that you handle the presentation in any particular way. If you want to use powerpoint (or similar), you should bring your presentation on a USB stick to the oral and it will be loaded for you by one of the examinations team. If you require specific software in order to demonstrate your presentation, please contact the examination team well before your oral. It is acceptable to not use any visual aids and simply talk about your research or, if you prefer, you can start straight into the examiners' questions.

Remember that the examiners have already read the thesis, so use your 10-15 minutes to "add value". You may:

- provide an overview of your research
- explain the major contribution you make in the thesis
- highlight certain claims
- respond to the key points made by the examiners in their written reports
- give a reflective account of your research journey
- indicate where your thesis takes you intellectually.

Questions from the examiners

Following your presentation, the examiners will ask questions and engage you in discussion. They may wish to clarify issues arising from your thesis, check your understanding of particular points, or query your methodological approach. You may be asked to locate your research in a wider context or to discuss matters tangential to your thesis. The examiners may also wish to discuss the scope and detail of any required revisions.

If your thesis is clearly acceptable, the oral examination may become a reasonably informal discussion of ways in which your research might be developed or how your thesis could be prepared for publication.

Defending your thesis

Throughout the oral, the examiners will expect you to defend your thesis. Be clear about what you are defending. Your thesis should demonstrate your ability to carry out independent research and should make “a significant and original contribution to knowledge or understanding”. Explain how it does this.

Be confident: no-one knows your topic better than you.

A note about School presentations

Some schools have a tradition of doctoral candidates making a public presentation prior to their oral defence. Please be aware that this is not part of the examination process, the examiners are not required to attend and you are still expected to fully engage with the examiners in the oral defence.