



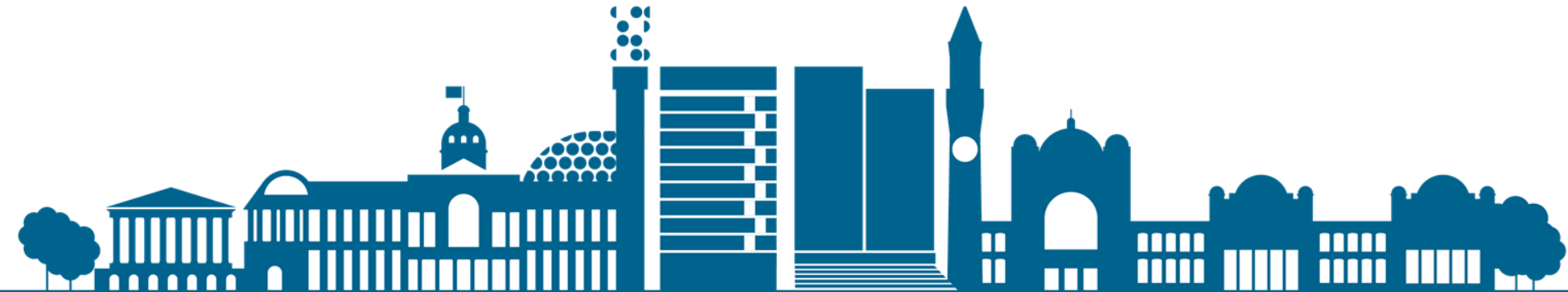
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Preparing for your Viva

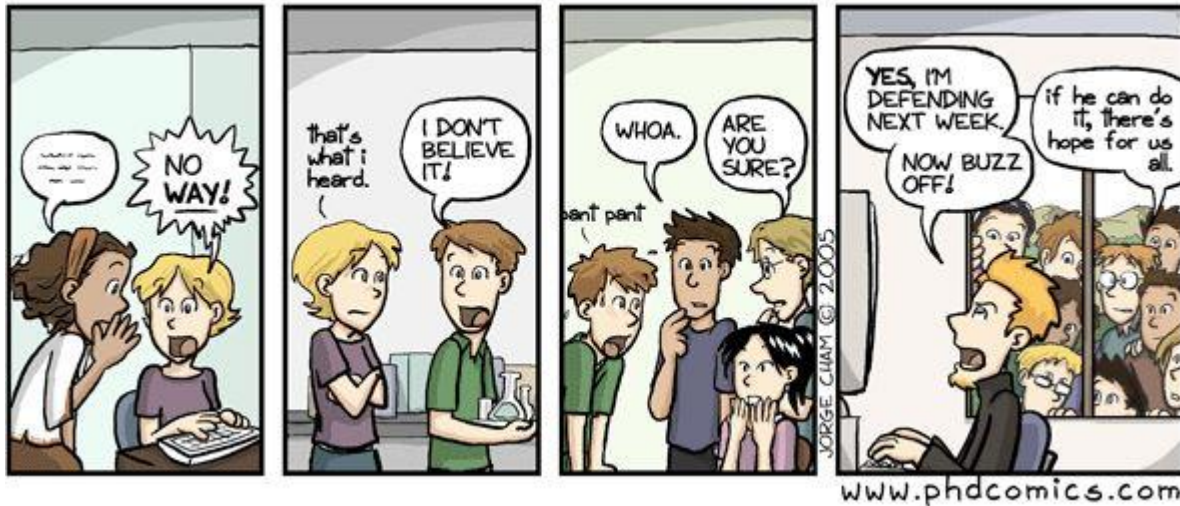
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Getting to know each other



In this session we will cover:

- What structure the viva usually has
- What examiners will be looking for
- What you need to do to prepare for your viva
- How to demonstrate your knowledge in a viva



What is a viva for?

- The purpose of the viva is an oral defence of your research and your knowledge of the academic area in which your research has been carried out
- It usually lasts between 1.5 and 4 hours
- You need to be able to explain and defend:
 - what you have done
 - what you know about the subject area
 - the other research that has been carried out on this general topic
 - the foundations of knowledge on that topic





The road to your Viva

Ready to submit?

Viva standards

- Your supervisor(s) are consulted before the viva begins and are present
- You can communicate with the chair of examiners

Process Starts

- Research Student Administration (RSA) starts the nomination process for the examiners
- RSA sends a 'Nomination of Examiners' form to the Head of School for approval

3 months before

Submit a '*Notice of Intention to Submit a Thesis*' form 3 months before you intend to submit



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Process Starts

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Your examiners

- Your supervisor(s) are consulted before the examiners are nominated
- You can comment on the choice of examiners



Your examiners

- Nominees are approached, informed about the timescale of the viva (6-8 weeks after submission)
- Senate formally appoints external examiners
- You are informed, in writing, about your *internal, external examiners, the chairperson, the date, time & place of the viva* (at least 2 weeks before the viva)



Who is involved?

- Chairperson
- Internal examiner
- External examiner



❖ *There may be cases where two external examiners are appointed*



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What do examiners do before the viva?

- ☐ Read the thesis
- ☐ Identify typos
- ☐ Look for material that is unclear, poorly presented or possibly wrong
- ☐ Mark every point with a post it note
- ☐ Extract key issues and select questions to explore the candidate's (your) knowledge



What do examiners address in their report?

- (a) Was the nature and purpose of the research made clear and was this substantially achieved?
- (b) To what extent does the thesis demonstrate that the postgraduate researcher has an adequate understanding of the subject and knowledge of the literature?
- (c) Has the appropriate methodology for the study been chosen? Is the methodology then used effectively? Are the findings interpreted in a valid way?
- (d) Is there coverage of recent and relevant literature in the field of study which shows critical appraisal and an original synthesis?
- (e) What evidence is there of independent critical and analytical skills, and the ability to evaluate evidence?
- (f) Is there an understanding of the theoretical field associated with the study? Is the linkage and balance between practical investigation and theory satisfactory?
- (g) Is the thesis clearly written and presented? Is the style and structure of the thesis satisfactory?



What do you need to do before the viva?

- ☐ Re-read your thesis and write a one-page summary for each chapter
- ☐ Prepare example answers and take in notes with you – but do not read these out!
- ☐ Get your peers to ask you all the questions you are dreading
- ☐ Study the background of your examiners



Viva Tips

- Know your examiners' work & cite them if appropriate
- Prepare some questions that you might expect them to ask
- Organise a mock viva



In the viva

The viva should allow

- ☐ **You** to defend your thesis and clarify anything raised by examiners
- ☐ **Examiners** to probe your knowledge in the field
- ☐ **Examiners** to be assured that it is your own work
- ☐ **Examiners** to come to a definite conclusion about the outcome of the examination

They should/may not give you an indication of this before or during the viva.



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The Viva Video

Surviving your viva canvas module



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During your viva...

- ❑ **Don't rush your answers.** Take your time. Have a drink of water or use phrases such as 'That's a good question' to give yourself time to think.
- ❑ **Discuss.** Don't answer questions with 'yes' or 'no', but justify your comments with examples or evidence.
- ❑ **Answer assertively but don't be defensive.** The examiners are not there with the intention of failing you; they're on your side.
- ❑ **Stay calm.** Don't forget, this is the one exam where you are likely to know more about the subject than those giving the marks! The examiners want to get the best out of you. As long as you do the preparation, you'll be fine.



Handling tricky questions

- Be prepared for: 'Are you sure about that?'
- Expect to be challenged
- Even negative feedback requires an answer
- Don't get defensive
- Think and respond constructively:
 - ❖ Rephrase your point
 - ❖ Make explicit links to the questions you were asked



Possible Questions

In your groups/pairs:

Preparing for your viva

Overview

Summarise your thesis in a sentence.
Does the title represent the content?
Describe your thesis in brief.
How did you decide to order your thesis?
What is your overall argument?
Summarise the context.
Why did you choose this topic?
How did you develop an interest in this subject? (Theoretical, Personal, Professional, Conceptual?)
Why is this topic important, and to whom is it relevant?
What are the key findings?
What is original here; what are your contributions to knowledge?
What justifies this thesis as a doctorate?

Literature

Where did you draw the line on what you included in your literature review?
Where did you draw the line on what you included in the theoretical literature?
How did the literature inform your choice of topic and the thesis overall?
What three publications would you say have been most influential in your work?
Where does your work fit into the literature?
Who are the key names in this area?
Who are the project's key influences?
How does your work differ from theirs?
Do the findings confirm, extend, or challenge any of the literature?
How does your work connect to that of your reviewers?

Research Design and Methodology

Summarise your research design.
Did you think about applying a different design?
What are the limitations of this kind of study?
Is there anything novel in your method?
What problems did you have?
How did you develop your research questions?
Did the research questions change over the course of the project?
How did you translate the research questions into a data collection method?
What are the philosophical assumptions in your work?
Where are YOU in this study?
Describe your sample.
How did you recruit your sample?
What boundaries did you set on your sample?
What are the weaknesses of your sample?
What precautions were taken against sources of bias?
What boundaries did you set on your data collection?
What are the strengths and weaknesses of your data?
What other data would you like (or have liked) to collect?
What is the theoretical framework in this study?
Why did you choose this conceptual framework?

Analysis

Describe your frame of analysis.
How did you construct this framework?
What didn't you include in the framework?
Did your study turn out as you expected?
What problems did you have in the analysis?
Did you combine induction and deduction in your analysis? Can you share some examples?
Describe the findings in more detail.
Briefly summarise the findings as they relate to each of the research questions.
How do you think the theoretical framing was helpful? Can you share some examples?
What other data could you have included, and what might it have contributed?
Could the findings have been interpreted differently?

Review

What are the strengths and weakness of your study?
What sense do you have of research being a somewhat untidy, or iterative and constantly shifting process?
How confident are you in your findings and conclusions?
What are the implications of your findings?
How has the context changed since you conducted your research?
Where do your findings sit in the field in general?
How do you see this area developing over the next 5-10 years?
Where does your work fit within this?
What is your contribution to the field?
To whom is your work relevant?
What haven't you looked at, and why not?
What, if any, of your findings are generalisable?
How would you like to follow this project up with further research?
What would you publish from this research, and in which journals?

Reflection

How did the project change as you went through?
How has your view of the area changed as you have progressed through your research?
How did your thinking change over the course of the project?
How have you changed as a result of undertaking this project?
What did you enjoy about your project?
What are you proudest of in the thesis?
What were the most difficult areas?
What surprised you the most?
What, for you, were the most interesting things to come out of your thesis?
If you started this study again, what would you do differently?



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Summary of tips

- Know your thesis (your contribution & limitations of your research)
- Know your examiners' work
- Organise a mock viva
- Enjoy the discussion



References

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