

Viva Survivor

Dr Nathan Ryder

Email: nathan@nathanryder.co.uk

Help: www.viva-survivors.com

Twitter: @DrRyder and @VivaSurvivors

Supervisors

Conversation about
choice of examiners

Viva experiences
as examiners

Feedback differences
Mock viva strengths

University Staff

Regulations
↳ contact details

Resources

Training

Colleagues & Peers

Viva experiences
as candidates

Culture of examination

"Want a coffee?"

Seminars

Friends & Family

Proofreading

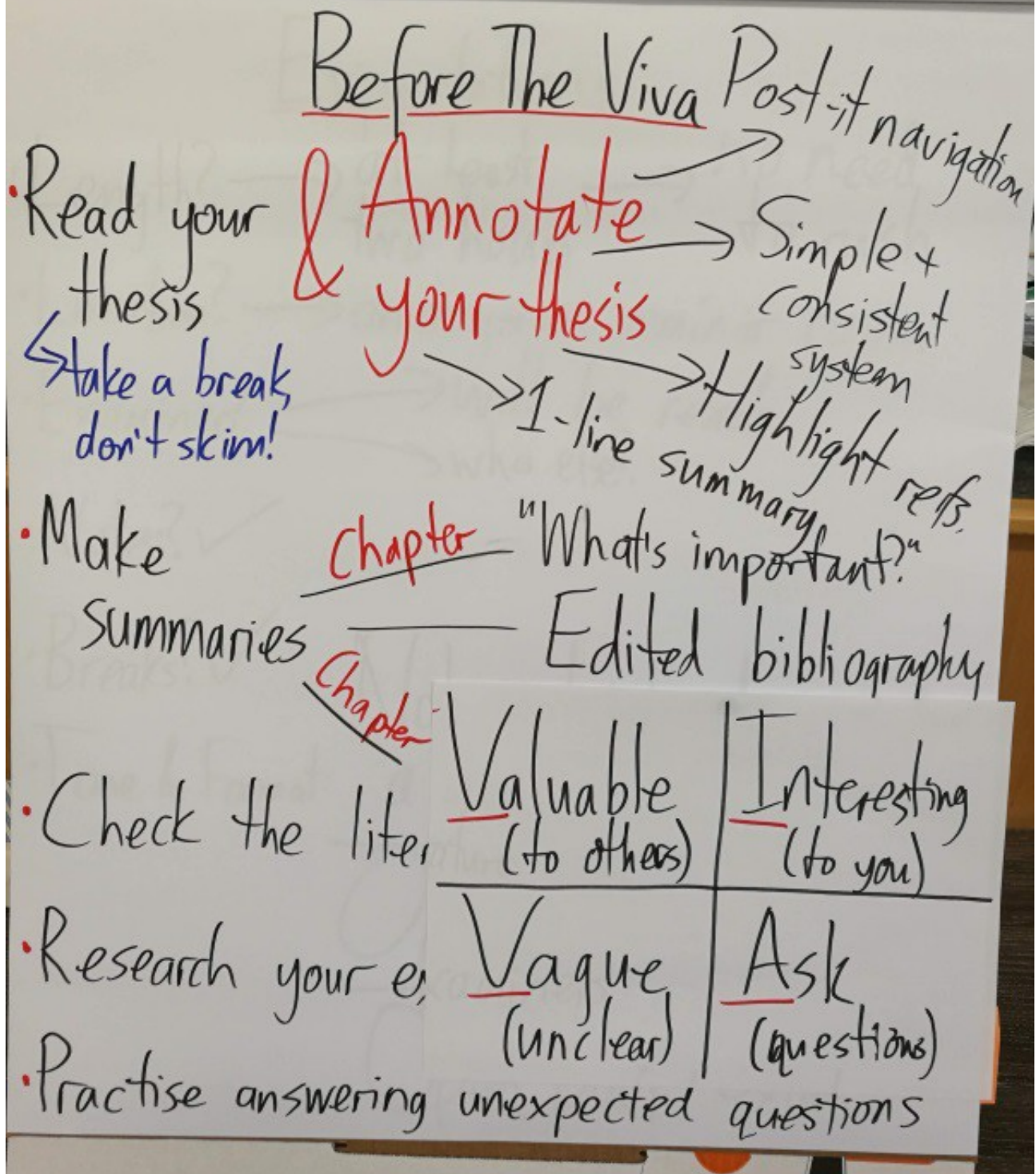
Understanding

Examiners

Publications

Interests

Reputation



Expectations

- Length? → at least two hours → no need to rush
- Location? → an onymous seminar room
- Examiners? → will be ready
→ who else?
- Notes? ✓
- Breaks? ✓
- Tone & Format: Not: a trial, adversarial,
a quiz, a Q&A

Open Qs ⇒ Discussion

Open Book exam

On The Day

- Take time to think
Note → Breathe → Think → Answer
- "I don't know" is an answer
but try to engage anyway
- Take what you need
 - annotated thesis
 - pen + paper
 - water
& take what you think you need
- Remember your examiners are { human
PhDs
interested
- Confidence is not about hope

Sample Viva Questions

In the viva you will be asked many specific questions about your research. Here are some of the broader questions that might come up.

What is your thesis about?

What is original about your work?

How did your research question arise?

What inspired you to tackle your research problem?

What is the key contribution of your research to your field?

What have you done that merits the award of PhD?

How would you describe your methodology and why did you decide to use this?

Given the rate of development in your research area, how long will your contribution be seen as relevant?

Who are the leading figures in your field of research?

What are the most recent developments in your field?

How could your work be improved?

What are the strongest and the weakest points of your thesis?

With hindsight, is there anything that you would change about your research?

Why are the problems that you have tackled worth researching?

What sections of your thesis do you think are publishable?

How can you be certain that your findings are correct?

What would you do differently if you were to start again?

What conferences have you been to? Have you given talks/papers?

What have you struggled with in your research?

What have you learned about research?

Viva Preparation Resources

Tara Brabazon: Take the heat out of trial by fire

<http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storycode=411311>

A really helpful article on vivas from April 2010. Tara lists ten top tips for the viva:

- 1). Know that the first question will be easy. Be aware that the last question will be difficult.
 - 2). Listen to the question and wipe your intellectual slate clean after each use.
 - 3). Write down the questions.
 - 4). Pause before answering the question.
 - 5). Ask a question of the examiner if you require clarification of a term.
 - 6). Take the tone out of the examiner's question. Listen to the content of the question.
 - 7). Make sure that you are answering what the examiners have asked you, rather than what you would like to have been asked.
 - 8). Be prepared to admit weakness and state what you could have done differently.
 - 9). Examinations are stressful. Do not deny the stress. Manage it.
 - 10). There may be a final question asking if the examiners have covered the key issues in the candidate's research. Use the opportunity.
- The article expands on each of these points in great detail. It is a valuable resource, and good to consult as part of viva preparation.

Vitae: <http://vitae.ac.uk/researchers/1241/Your-viva.html>

Vitae offer many resources, and link to many more as well. A good starting point is their Viva Checklist: this lists actions which they suggest will help you to prepare for your viva.

Viva Survivors: www.viva-survivors.com/ / @VivaSurvivors on Twitter

Viva Survivors is a daily blog and irregular podcast project that I produce to help PhD candidates prepare for their viva. The blog updates every morning with a new post to inspire and help. The podcast archive features 60+ interviews with PhD graduates. I talk to them about their research, their viva and life after the PhD. We have a special focus on what they did to prepare and what happened in the viva.

Viva Survivors/Resources: www.viva-survivors.com/resources/

On Viva Survivors I am also creating a collection of resources that will help people prepare for the viva. The most valued to date is *The tiny book of viva prep*, a print-and-fold guide to getting ready for the viva. More will follow, and you can find links to articles by others on the site too.

Fail Your Viva – Twelve Steps To Failing Your PhD (And Fifty-Eight Tips For Passing)

"Fail Your Viva" is my first ebook and despite the title, it provides clear advice for PhD candidates on what they can do to prepare for their viva. Reviewing it, Ben Libberton of Literature Review HQ said, "*This witty guide is filled to bursting point with nugget after golden nugget of important viva survival material.*"

The Viva: Who? What? How? - Frequently Asked Questions About The PhD Viva

My second ebook on viva preparation, published May 2015. In it I answer the most commonly asked questions about the viva.

You can find my books in the Amazon Kindle Store and at www.payhip.com/DrRyder