

CRiLLS Student Workshop Series

Preparing for your Viva
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Grad School and your supervisor can give you formal procedures

Today – some informal tips on avoiding possible pitfalls, setting expectations

- 1. don't panic!
- 2. do accept there is no set format
- 3. do enough but not too much preparation

No "right way"

- Rationale for Viva
 - Brainstorm – what do you think it's for?
- Joining the Academic Community
- Showing how much you know
- Giving you the chance to justify your research

- Examiners must look for:
 - Originality
 - Rigour (theoretical justification and methodological validity)
 - Significance
- Test of these – publishability

- Viva to check any queries to reach this standard

What's the viva really for?

- Can you sum up your PhD in 5 minutes?
- Theory – can you see the big picture?
 - Why do you think this topic matters?
 - Why did YOU do it?
 - Why did you do it this way?
 - Why did you not do it THAT way?
- What contribution does your research make to your chosen area?

- Methodology – can you be critical?
 - Did it go as expected – if not, why not?
 - What would you do different if you were about to start now? Why?

Common questions – mainly WHY?

- Who is responsible for preparations?
 - Supervisor? You? Grad School?
- Procedures:
 - Submission of title, abstract and examiners
 - External examiner's request needs some details
 - Usually 3 months beforehand
 - **beware** any assumptions – double check expected viva dates and everyone's availability
 - Soft copies into Grad School with abstract
 - Keep one copy for yourself
- Once soft copy is off to examiners – take time away from work – you need it!

How to prepare?

- Return about 1 month before.
- Reread whole thing skimming through to get story back in your head.
- Write a 1-page rationale and summary of findings
- Re-read again for key difficulties you need to be on top of.
- Thinking time – with supervisor?
- Even run a mock viva?

Run up to viva

- Don't proof-read beforehand – you end up with different pagination (as I did!)
 - Just keep a note of simple changes you find to add to any you are asked to change
- Check if there are recent literature updates – but not too much (3?)
- Coloured tabs to make finding sections easier

Trouble-shooting beforehand

- Examiners each prepare a preliminary report to Dean, then collate any remaining queries for written revisions in a joint final post-viva report. Prelim report discussed beforehand to shape viva
- Comment on the following areas: Subject Matters summary (organisation; structure; presentation; authenticity; content; publishable quality and critical awareness of subject) and issues to raise in viva.
 - Descriptiveness, lack of theoretical rigour
 - Missing literature (AVOID failing to cite other PhDs)
 - Inconsistencies in methodology design
 - Woolly analysis of data, failing to match RQs, poor tie in with literature

Examiners' preparation

- Will be stressful but need to show confidence – it's your "baby"
- Take into the room what you need
- Supervisor can be in as silent witness, but not usual
- Examiners' rules – they shouldn't get on their hobbyhorse

- Expect at least 2 hours
- It's ok to say you don't know
 - "A PhD is the worst piece of research a future academic will ever do"

In there

- Are you satisfied that the thesis is the candidate's own work or, if it was done in collaboration, that his or her share in the research is adequate?
- Is the mode of presentation of the thesis satisfactory?
- Is the thesis an addition to knowledge and worthy of publication either in full or in abridged form (such as a paper or papers in an appropriate journal)?
- Does the candidate's work show that the subject of the thesis has been studied with adequate industry and application?
- Do you consider the candidate to be adequately acquainted with the field of knowledge within which the subject matter of the thesis falls?

- Please use the space below if you wish to make any comments on the candidate's research training.

- Please use the space below if you wish to make any general comments regarding the research work that the candidate has produced or the programme that the candidate has followed including evidence of support or resources (corrections list here).

Final report

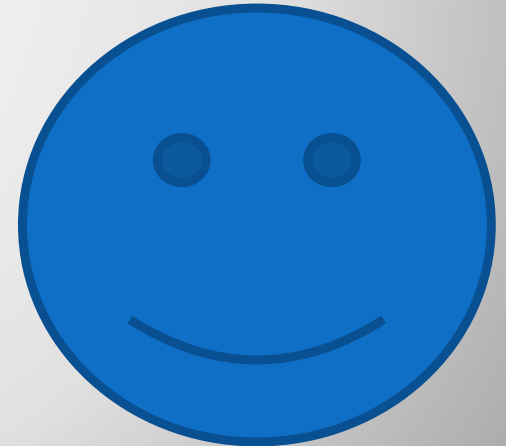
- Conferring, then final decision
 - A - no corrections, minor corrections (1 month), minor revisions (6 months) - checked by internal
 - B - resubmit with revisions (12 months, to same external) with or without viva (viva without revisions, 6 months)
 - C - MLitt/MPhil instead (don't worry about D or E!)
- Examiners' reports to be collated by internal, sent to Grad School and direct to you and supervisor.
- Different schools have different practices straight after a viva – check you know what's usual.

Afterwards

- Work with supervisor on revisions – prepare corrections in line with report, as well as full final version.
 - Check what internal wants - I would prefer to check off short list from report, with page numbers, rather than look at whole thing
- Submitting after revisions
 - check official letter from Grad School giving you the timeline, abstract preparation, printing layout guidelines and other requirements
 - Allow enough time for printing hard copies, check title layout
- Pass list, allowing you to attend Congregation

Submitting final version

- How do you think you will feel?
 - Party/no party?
- When do you think you feel you are a “Doctor”?
- What next?
- ??



Questions?