

GUIDELINES FOR ORAL EXAMINATION OF THESIS¹

Role of the Chair

The chair of the examination committee is the official representative of the Assistant Vice-President (Graduate Studies). The chair serves to administer the examination according to the approved format of the program. The chair does not serve as an additional examiner.

It is the responsibility of the Chair to ensure that the oral examination is conducted in a professional manner. The Chair must ensure that proper forms from the Office of Graduate Studies are available and duly completed and signed by the Examination Committee. The Chair should ensure that adequate time is allotted to the candidate for presentation of research findings, and to the examiners for questions. The details on the time allocation to the candidate and examiners are given in the following paragraphs. It is also the responsibility of the Chair to ensure that examiners should adhere to the allocated time.

In unforeseen circumstances where a Committee member is unable to attend the examination (*e.g.*, due to sickness) either in person or by video/teleconference, the Chair will attempt to receive questions to ask on behalf of the absent member, to be answered by the student to the satisfaction of the examiners present. If this absent member is the External Examiner of a PhD thesis examination, and the written thesis Appraisal and/or questions to ask have not been received, the examination should be postponed.

If during the examination the behaviour of either the candidate or the examiner(s) is unprofessional, the Chair should provide a warning. If the unprofessional behaviour continues, the Chair should stop the examination and report to the Graduate Coordinator.

The Chair should ensure recommendations for revision of the thesis are completed, and should withhold their endorsement of the examination (through signing the Recommendation Form) until such time.

Role of the Examiners

The examiners have the responsibility to review the thesis as outlined in the University Guidelines for thesis evaluation. If an examiner feels that there is a major problem with the thesis, the examiner should inform the candidate in writing with a confidential copy only to the **advisor** and **Graduate Coordinator**. If the candidate and the examiner cannot resolve the problem before the oral examination, the Graduate Coordinator will act as facilitator. If there is no agreement, the examination can go forward at the student's request, or postponed on the advice of the Graduate Coordinator.

Maximum Duration of Oral Examinations

Ph.D. Examination: 3.5 hours
Master's Examination: 2.5 hours

¹ Oral Examination Procedure October 22, 1996 (re-typed November 7, 2007 & updated June 1, 2016)

Examination Procedure

Ph.D. Oral Examination

Introduction by Chair- 5 minutes

Presentation of research findings/scholarly work by candidate - 30 minutes (maximum)

Public Question Period -10 minutes

Break - 5 minutes (members of the public are free to leave)

Examination Period (questions only from examiners) - 2 hours and 40 minutes

Ordering of Questions by the Examination Committee:

There will be two rounds of questions by the Committee. The questioning by the Committee will be in the following order:

- 1) External Examiner
- 2) Member of the Graduate Faculty (not on the Advisory Committee)
- 3) Member of the Advisory Committee
- 4) Advisor or second member of the Advisory Committee

Suggested time allotted to examination committee members:

<u>Examiner</u>	<u>Round 1</u>	<u>Round 2</u>
External	25 minutes	10 minutes
Graduate Faculty	20 minutes	10 minutes
Advisory Committee Member	20 minutes	10 minutes
Advisor/Advisory Committee Member	20 minutes	10 minutes

Deliberation (in camera) - 35 minutes

Master's Oral Examination

Introduction by the Chair - 5 minutes

Presentation of research findings/scholarly work by candidate - 30 minutes (maximum)

Public Question Period - Audience -10 minutes

Break - 5 minutes (members of the public are free to leave)

Examination Period (questions only from examiners) - 1 hour and 40 minutes

Ordering of Questions by the Examination Committee:

There will be two rounds of questions by the Committee. The questioning by the Committee will be in the following order:

- 1) Member of the Graduate Faculty (not on the Advisory Committee)
- 2) Member of the Advisory Committee
- 3) Advisor or second member of the Advisory Committee

Suggested time allotted to examination committee members:

<u>Examiner</u>	<u>Round 1</u>	<u>Round 2</u>
Graduate Faculty	15 minutes	10 minutes
Advisory Committee Member	15 minutes	10 minutes
Advisor/Advisory Committee Member	15 minutes	10 minutes

Deliberation (in camera) - 25 minutes

Additional Information for Chairing a Graduate Examination in Pathobiology

General

- The following are guidelines, and the chair of the examination can modify this approach if needed to ensure that the exam is conducted fairly. Unusual situations should be discussed with the Graduate Coordinator and/or Department Chair.
- Make sure you bring the forms that require signatures; the graduate secretary will give you these in advance. This package should also have a copy of the relevant pages from the Graduate Calendar.
- Check the room >10 minutes before the exam, to ensure set-up is ok.
- Review the Graduate Calendar, with respect to the criteria for success in a PhD, DVSc and MSc exam.
- Start time is usually as advertised, **without** the 10 minute academic grace period.

Qualifying examinations

- The role of chair is not limited to the day of the examination: the chair is responsible for ensuring that the student is given adequate guidance with respect to the topic area and scope of the exam, well in advance of the examination. The usual timeline is for the advisor to submit the examination request three months prior to the exam. Each examiner should provide verbal and written advice that clarifies the topic area and scope of their area of the examination. This advice must be provided to the student in writing, such as by email, and copied to the Graduate Coordinator and to the Chair of the examination, no later than 2 months before the examination. This advice may, for example, take the form of a list of topic areas, one or more specific aspects of the discipline area, or a reading list that is developed by the examiner and/or the student.
- Chair the short pre-exam meeting, in which the examiners discuss possible questions from each examiner, to ensure that the questions accurately reflect the general and specific topic areas, are appropriate for the time available for the written exam (about 1.5 hours per examiner), and do not overlap excessively. Students normally answer one of two questions from each examiner, but this approach is not mandated.
- Oral examination
 - Typically, there is one round of questions with 15 or 20 minutes per examiner, followed by a shorter second round. Questions are not limited to those in the written part of the examination, but may cover any topic in the agreed upon areas.
 - Be cognisant of the fact that the candidate becomes fatigued toward the end of the second round, so attempts should be made to limit the defence to two hours, if this is in the best interests of the candidate.
- Deliberation:
 - Examiners only. In situations when the advisor is not a member of the examination committee, the advisor may be permitted to observe.
 - Consider the candidate's performance in the oral exam and written exam, as well as the letter from the advisory committee that evaluates the quality of the student's research performance to date and of the student's potential as a researcher. The weighting of these elements is determined by the examination committee.
 - The candidate is deemed to have passed if no more than one of the examiners (including the chair) votes negatively. An abstention is regarded as a negative vote.

Final examinations

- Candidate's presentation:
 - At the start of the exam, introduce and thank the examining committee and give an overview of the exam structure.
 - For External Examiner, state where he or she is from, thank on behalf of the university.
 - Introduce the candidate with a brief background, or have the advisor introduce the candidate.
 - Generally MSc candidates give a 25-30 minute overview, PhD/DVSc 30-40 minutes.
 - After presentation, encourage 5-10 minutes for audience questions.
- Final examination, defence:
 - Two rounds of questions. There is flexibility in the time allotted to each examiner depending on the nature of the questions and responses. Normally, each examiner is given 15-20 minutes, with additional time given to the External Examiner if needed. After the first round, suggest a short break, then a second round of up to 10 minutes, or more if needed. Be cognisant of the fact that the candidate becomes fatigued toward the end of the second round, so attempts should be made to limit the defence to two hours, if this is in the best interests of the candidate. **Stick to matters of substance**; issues of writing style, grammar, and spelling are usually provided to the candidate after the defence.
 - The defence is open to all members of the University community.
 - Deliberation:
 - Examiners only. In situations when the advisor is not a member of the examination committee, the advisor may be permitted to observe.
 - The candidate is deemed to have passed if no more than one of the five examiners (including the chair) votes negatively. An abstention is regarded as a negative vote.
 - If there are minor changes in the written thesis, it is usual to give everything to the candidate and advisor, who make the changes. If there are significant changes, you as Chair of the exam may withhold a signature until you are convinced that the changes have been made. Again, these changes are usually made by the advisor and candidate together.