VIVA – WHAT HAPPENS?

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In pairs take 5 minutes to brainstorm what you would like to get out of this seminar? Brainstorm means include everything, no matter how seemingly unimportant.
By the end of this session you will:

1. Be able to explain the academic regulation and the process for thesis submission.
2. Be able to describe the examiners expectation from the viva.
3. Be able to list the preparation required prior to your viva.
Milestone Study - University’s Expectation
Master Science by Research (M.Sc)

Start

Semester 1: Registration, Proposal Defend, Upload Progress Report

Semester 2: Registration, Upload Progress Report

Semester 3: Registration, Notice of Thesis Submission (3 months), Viva

Semester 4: Registration, Thesis Correction & Submission

Convocation

Note: Graduate on Time (GoT) – 2 Years
Milestone Study - University’s Expectation

Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D)

Start

Notice of Thesis Submission (3 months)

Proposal Defend

Thesis Submission

Notice of Thesis Submission

Viva

Semester 1

Semester 2

Semester 3

Semester 4

Semester 5

Semester 6

Semester 7

Semester 8

Registration

Upload Progress Report

Upload Progress Report

Upload Progress Report

Upload Progress Report

Upload Progress Report

Upload Progress Report

Upload Progress Report

Upload Progress Report

Registration

Registration

Registration

Registration

Registration

Registration

Registration

Registration

Thesis Correction & Submission

Note: Graduate on Time (GoT) – 4 Years
2014 PhD & MSc Outcomes

PhD Outcomes:
1. PhD awarded with no corrections - NON
2. PhD awarded minor corrections - 10 students
3. PhD awarded major revisions - 12 students
4. Fails - NON

MSc Outcomes:
1. MSc awarded with no corrections - NON
2. MSc awarded after minor corrections - 34 students
3. MSc awarded after major revisions - 22 students
4. Fails - NON
Top five ways to fail your MSc or PhD

Annoy and irritate your supervisor!!!

• Just don’t see him/her
• Turn up late for meetings or not at all
• Completely ignore their advice
• Blame them for going on holidays & not giving feedback same day
• Submit final & only draft one day before final submission date
• Relying on your supervisor to think for you
• Use your supervisor as a spell and grammar checker
Top five ways to fail your MSc or PhD

How to fail on progress!

• Don’t do any reading
• Ignore your supervisor advice
• Don’t submit any written work as you go along
• Make no effort to improve your English
• Miss your own deadline and do nothing about it
• Leave all work to the end and then do 22-23 hrs days
• Do a part time job at Tesco instead of doing your research.
Top five ways to fail your MSc or PhD

How to fail the thesis or dissertation!!!

• Submit project / research not suitable for the degree stream
• Do literature “summary” rather than a literature review
• Write dissertation in unreadable English
• Cut and paste from websites, other peoples papers or thesis
• Include little or no references
• Collect lots of data without discussion with your supervisor then panic when you can’t work out what to do with it.
• Late submission….
Why have a Viva?

- Brainstorm

  - Prove you wrote it
  - Prove you understand it
  - Test fundamental and advanced knowledge of the wider field
  - Rite of passage
  - Proof your research is PhD standard
What is the purpose of a viva?

- Oral defence of your research and your knowledge of the academic area in which your research has been carried out
- You need to be able to explain and defend:
  - What you have done
  - What you know about the subject area
  - Other related research that was carried out on your topic
  - The foundations of knowledge on your research
  - Clarify points of uncertainty to examiners
  - That it’s all your own work
  - That you fully understand the work and its implications
How to fail the oral exam?

• Turn up completely unprepared to answer questions & instead read extracts from the thesis / dissertation

• Annoy the examiners by using badly prepared slides
1. The thesis must have prior approval for submission from the supervisor(s) and the respective faculties.

2. For PhD, DEng and MSc candidates, you should notify PPS at least THREE (3) months before you intend to submit your thesis.

3. Notification forms for thesis submission are available from PPS website.

4. Submit ONE (1) draft copy of the thesis to your supervisor to ensure that the format as stipulated in the “Guidelines for Preparation of Thesis, Report of Master Project and Dissertation” has been followed before submitting 5 copies for examination.

5. The draft copy should be accompanied with a TURNITIN report (Similarity Indeks ≤ 20%)
PhD, DEng and MSc candidate is required to produce and submit a research work that constitutes an original contribution to the field of research.

2. A Doctoral Thesis shall be between 35,000 and 60,000 words (excluding footnotes, exhibits, figures, tables, graphs, appendices, bibliographies, etc).

3. A Master thesis shall be between 20,000 and 35,000 words (excluding footnotes, exhibits, figures, tables, graphs, appendices, bibliographies, etc).

4. Thesis can be written in English or Bahasa Melayu.

5. Thesis must have an abstract in both English and Bahasa Melayu.

6. All thesis submitted shall be accompanied by a signed declaration of copyright and affirmation of fair use of unpublished research.
1. Examiners each prepare a preliminary report before the viva

2. In the room: 2 examiners, you, chairperson, your main supervisor (unless you decide otherwise)

3. Take with you: a copy of your thesis, any preparation notes, something to take notes and water
Oral Examination Process

1. Student submit notice of thesis submission 3 months prior to thesis submission.
2. JKTSPS will appoint the examiners within 1 month after receiving the notice of thesis submission.
3. When thesis is ready, SV certify the thesis is acceptable in content, quality, and presentation.
4. Student submit 5 copies of thesis in comb binding for VIVA.
5. A copy of thesis to each examiner will be send.
6. External examiner propose a date for the VIVA.
7. VIVA

Examiner should return thesis examination form/report to PPS (within 2 months for PhD & 1 month for MSc).

Student submit thesis before or during the final sem. of the max period of candidature. Failure can result in termination of candidature!!!
1. **ONE (1) external examiner** from another university and **ONE (1) internal examiner** who is a faculty member of UTeM.

2. If the candidate is a staff of the University, the Examiners consist of **TWO (2) internal examiners & ONE (1) external examiner**.

3. Both examiners appointed are from the relevant field of studies.

4. Examiners appointed should have adequate qualifications and experience in the field of interest.

5. The appointment of all examiners for PhD thesis shall be recommended by JKPSF and approved by JKTSPS.
1. THREE (3) examiners, TWO (2) external examiner from another university and ONE (1) internal examiner who is a faculty member of UTeM.

2. Only ONE (1) external examiner, the internal examiner and the chairperson will present during viva.

3. Examiners appointed are from the relevant field of studies.

4. Examiners appointed should have adequate qualifications and experience in the field of interest.

5. The appointment of all examiners for PhD thesis shall be recommended by JKPSF and approved by JKTSPS.
1. You/your supervisor can make suggestions. Dean of faculty has the final say.

2. How to find out about your examiners.
   - Ask colleagues, Google them, read their work and cite them if relevant!
   - Think about how the thesis relates to their work.
   - Don’t forget the importance of the internal examiner.
### Table 10.1: Criteria for Appointment of External Examiners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria of Examiners</th>
<th>Candidate Examined</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Minimum academic qualification</td>
<td>PhD</td>
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<td>PhD/Industrial PhD</td>
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<td></td>
<td>PhD</td>
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<td>Minimum number of post-graduate students graduated</td>
<td>1 PhD or 3 MSc</td>
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<td>1 PhD or 3 MSc</td>
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<td>1 MSc</td>
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<td>Journal Publications</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Experience as Internal Examiner</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
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</table>
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 (examiners may reinterpret data if appropriate)
- They may check on prior work
How long does a viva session for PhD?

- Typically 2 - 3 hours with no break
- Could be more than 3 hours
Possible Outcomes

The examiners report should recommend the thesis under one of the six following categories:

i. Pass

ii. Pass with minor revision (Max of 6 months for corrections submission after it has been verified by the Principal Supervisor).

iii. Pass with major revision (Max of 12 months for corrections submission after it has been verified by the Principal Supervisor).

iv. Resubmission (Max of 12 months for corrections submission after it has been verified by the Principal Supervisor - Candidate required to defend the thesis).

v. Fail
PPS retain one (1) hardcover final copy of the thesis, forward one (1) copy to the faculty and the principal supervisor and send one (1) copy and the electronic copy to the library. The student shall keep one (1) copy.
How do you make sure your thesis is any good ahead of the viva?

- Get lots of peer and other professional feedback.
  - Present at conferences
  - Attend conferences to informally discuss your work with others
  - Become active in colloquiums
  - Send material for publication.
    - And send it off again after you’ve addressed the comments from the first draft/rejection letters!
  - Ask at least one other qualified person (who’s not your supervisor) to read the draft before you submit (preferably someone who has experience in examining theses).
  - Get clear feedback from your supervisor on the FULL and FINAL draft.
How do you make sure your thesis is any good ahead of the viva?

- Proof-read your thesis carefully.
- If you are not a native speaker then have your thesis professionally proof-read.
- You will not fail because typos/language errors, but poorly proofread work annoys examiners and may cause them to doubt your professionalism and the quality of your work.
Exercise 2

In pairs take 5 minutes to brainstorm your fears about the viva voce.
3 things you can do to prepare for the viva:

- Re-familiarise yourself with your thesis
- Predict and practice possible questions
- Think about how to express yourself in the viva
Re-familiarise yourself with the thesis

- Keep your thesis alive: Re-read your thesis (make a 1-page summary of the main points in each chapter).
- Be familiar with the references you cited
  - Keep up to date with the field – esp. what’s happened since you submitted.
- Read it with the thesis criteria in mind.
- Be honest with yourself:
  - Identify weak points so you can be in a good position to:
    - Show you know the faults
    - Defend those that you feel are minor
    - Show you know how you would remedy them if you had this knowledge in hindsight.
    - Prepare to engage the examiners in debate over how they would have tackled that area.
- Get a supervisor or colleague to question-spot with you.
How is your thesis judged?

Checklist:
1. Original work?
2. Worthy of publication?
3. Adequate knowledge of the field?
4. Critical judgement?
5. Three years’ work?
6. Unified body of research?
7. Adherence to academic conventions (i.e. references, coherent structure, literature review, clear conclusions)?
1. What is your thesis about?
2. Summarise your key findings
3. What is original about your work?
4. What are the contributions to knowledge of your thesis (why is it important?)
5. Why did you approach the area in this way?
6. The ‘big picture’ is an important part of this.
What is your thesis about?, and what have you done that merits a MSc or a PhD?”

- Exercise 3: Prepare a 5 minute answer about this.
- Have a mental map of how you could expand on this 5 minute question if pressed.
Is it worthy of publication?

- Summarise your key findings
- Have you published any aspects of the work?
  - You might have presented things at conferences, in proceedings which are worth mentioning.
- What could you publish?
- And where?
- [NB: if you have published anything, include it as an appendix which shows without a doubt that it is worthy of publication]
Does it Show critical judgement?

- Summarise your key findings
  *(Can you identify and prioritise what is important in your own work?)*
- What is original about your work?
- What are the contributions to knowledge of your thesis
  *(why is it important?)*
- What is the strongest/weakest part of your work?
- Why did you approach the area in this way?
- If you could start again now, what would you do differently?
  *(This can be a way of showing self-criticism)*
- How could you improve your work?
- What could you publish?
  *(Indicates your views of what is good about your work)*
- What have you learned from the process of the PhD?
Does it show good knowledge of field and literature.

- What are the contributions to knowledge of your thesis (why is it important?)
- What were the motivations for your research? Why is was it worth addressing?
  - Who else is working on this problem?
  - How has it been tackled before?
- Why did you approach the area in this way?
  - How else have others done it?
  - Why do you think your way is better?
- If you could start again now, what would you do differently?
  (Show you know of any studies in which the problem has been tackled since you planned and executed your work).
- What do your results mean?
  (Show in the context of other studies.)
- What are the big questions in your field at the moment?
- What do you think the next big developments will be?
Why are you being asked these questions?

The examiners are:

- Not trying to catch you out
- Looking for positive evidence to tick criteria boxes
- Genuinely want to engage in debate
- Test what your view, as an academic equal, think about a topic
- Clarify muddled or ambiguous expression in thesis
What if you get a tricky question that you need to think about?

- Ask for clarification
  - Recast in your own words ‘Do you mean…’
- Buy some time to think of the answer:
  - ‘Now the answer to that is not obvious/straightforward…’
  - (buying time…)
  - ‘that’s a good question’
  - (plus a little flattery…)
- If you really can't answer a question:
  - Be honest.
  - But if you have any ideas on the subject, say so.
  - Or Say, "I can't answer this without some more detailed thought, but I should be able to work it out with a bit of time."
  - If it relies on literature or ideas you are not familiar with, thank the examiner for the useful pointers and references.
Tips for 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.
What if you get a question which uncovers a flaw in your work?

- Don’t panic
- Remember you are engaging in a debate with equals.
  - Don’t be aggressive (or defensive)
  - Rather, seek to find out your examiners views on how the problem might be remedied.
- Can it be addressed in future work which develops on what you’ve done in your thesis?
  - …or in a resubmission
    - Better than not showing awareness and not being given the chance to resubmit.
- If it’s something you are already aware of, prepare your discussion of why it doesn’t undermine your whole thesis.
  - Showing you are aware of this will show you have good critical skills.
  - But don’t volunteer flaws unnecessarily!
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 but how it went will give you an idea
Preparation

- 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
Exercise 4

In pairs think examples of questions you might be asked in your viva.
Some possible questions

- What in your view is the main contribution of this thesis?

- How does this relate to xxxx’s work?

- What was your thought process that lead you to try that approach?

- Summarise the basic theory behind this approach.
Tricky ones

- Be prepared for: ‘Are you sure about that?’
- It is legitimate to check your thinking and to challenge you
- Even negative feedback requires an answer
- Think & try to respond constructively:
  - Rephrase your point
  - Do not be defensive or dogmatic
  - Make explicit links to the question you were asked
What is being examined?

The examiners want to see:

1. An original contribution to knowledge
2. Appreciation of context of work
3. Knowledge or related areas
4. Evidence of research training and achievement
5. Publishable quality work
6. Equivalent to 3 years full-time research effort
Common viva questions

Originality

1. What are the most original parts of the thesis?
2. Which propositions would you say are distinctively your own?
3. How do you think you work takes forward or develops the literature in this field?
4. What are the “bottom line” conclusions of your research? How innovative or distinctive are they?
Common viva questions

Origins/Topics

1. Can you tell us how you came to choose this topic for your doctorate?
2. Why have you defined the topic in the way you did?
3. What were some of the difficulties you encountered and did they influence how the topic was framed?
Common viva questions

Methods
1. What are the core methods used in this thesis?
2. Why did you choose this approach?
3. In an ideal world, are there different techniques you’d have liked to use?

Data
1. What are the main sources or kinds of evidence?
2. Are they strong enough to sustain the conclusions you draw?
3. How do your findings fit with or contradict the rest of the literature in this field?
Dealing with questions

- Listen to the question
- Pause and take your time
- Talk precisely and move from the general to the specific
- Use appropriate rhetorical strategies:
  - First person and the active voice
  - Speaking in the past tense
Dealing with criticisms

- Keep the faith, but respect and accommodate examiners’ criticisms/suggestions
- Remind the examiners of the (limited) scope of a PhD thesis
- Talk about making amendments in the context of publication
List of Possible General Questions

1. Can you start by summarising your thesis?
2. Now, can you summarise it in one sentence?
3. What is the idea that binds your thesis together?
4. What motivated and inspired you to carry out this research?
5. What are the main issues and debates in this subject area?
6. Which of these does your research address?
7. Why is the problem you have tackled worth tackling?
8. Who has had the strongest influence in the development of your subject area in theory and practice?
9. Which are the three most important papers that relate to your thesis?
10. What published work is closest to yours? How is your work different?
11. What do you know about the history of [insert something relevant]?
12. How does your work relate to [insert something relevant]?
13. What are the most recent major developments in your area?
14. How did your research questions emerge?
15. What were the crucial research decisions you made?
16. Why did you use this research methodology? What did you gain from it?
17. What were the alternatives to this methodology?
18. What would you have gained by using another approach?
19. How did you deal with the ethical implications of your work?
20. How has your view of your research topic changed?
21. How have you evaluated your work?
22. How do you know that your findings are correct?
23. What are the strongest/weakest parts of your work?
24. What would have improved your work?
25. To what extent do your contributions generalise?
26. Who will be most interested in your work?
27. What is the relevance of your work to other researchers?
28. What is the relevance of your work to practitioners?
29. Which aspects of your work do you intend to publish – and where?
30. Summarise your key findings.
31. Which of these findings are the most interesting to you? Why?
32. How do your findings relate to literature in your field?
33. What are the contributions to knowledge of your thesis?
34. How long-term are these contributions?
35. What are the main achievements of your research?
36. What have you learned from the process of doing your PhD?
37. What advice would you give to a research student entering this area?
38. You propose future research. How would you start this?
39. What would be the difficulties?
40. And, finally… What have you done that merits a PhD?
1. What do you notice about the types of questions asked?
2. How does the student answer?
3. Are there any examples of ‘defending’ the thesis?
4. Is the similar to what you expected?
It’s your passage into independent academia
Be aware of the regulations and procedures
Defend your thesis
Minor corrections are quite usual
Allow time in your plans to make corrections
Feel proud of your achievement
Know your examiners’ work & quote it!
Know your examiners’ likes & dislikes
Organise a mock viva
Enjoy the compliment of the examiners spending so much time thinking about your work.
If you don’t know, don’t bluff

‘Enjoy the academic banter and debating – have fun relishing the intellectual exercise. Be delighted that someone has read you work in detail.’
Finally

- Thank-you for listening
- Questions… ?