

Information for Examiners of PhD and Doctoral Theses That Include Creative Works



The University of Melbourne expects theses to be of international standard and demonstrate the candidate has undertaken a substantial piece of original research which could reasonably be expected to be achievable in 3 years. Where the thesis comprises a dissertation and creative work, both must be passed for the candidate to be awarded the degree.

What we ask of you

We ask you to consider the candidate's thesis on its merits as an independent piece of supervised research. This should be irrespective of whether you consider the approach to be outside the established research paradigm for the discipline, and irrespective of whether you would have taken the same approach to the research.

Some of the work in this thesis was undertaken while **Melbourne experienced major and extended restrictions during the COVID pandemic**. Whilst our high expectations of standards and scale of research theses are not modified by the COVID constraints, some of our graduate researchers may have significantly altered or adapted their research plan in order to progress. As examiner, this may mean in some cases the thesis you examine is not typical for your discipline. Where appropriate, we have encouraged candidates to discuss any methodological adjustments made in the COVID context and explain how adaptations arose because of the disruptions, to guide your understanding of the work presented and the constraints under which it was undertaken. The candidate's commentary relating to future research directions may reflect some aspects of work which could not be pursued given the COVID circumstances. These Melbourne circumstances have included intermittent 'lockdowns' between March 2020 and November 2021, research facility closure or limited access during this entire period, along with closure of national and internal borders precluding some field or collaborative work.

You may be required to travel only if the creative work includes a performance or exhibition of visual art works. If the dissertation is not submitted at or around the same time, you will receive an abstract of 1000-3000 words one week prior to the viewing. Once you have reviewed the both the creative work and dissertation, please provide a report which addresses the criteria for examination and recommend a result chosen from the options below. Examination reports generally set out a brief account of the examiner's understanding of the research undertaken and are at least one page long. Reports often contain suggested amendments for further publication of the research, but which don't need to be addressed for the thesis to pass the examination. There is no oral examination component at the University of Melbourne.

Criteria for examination

According to the University's rules, a PhD or Doctoral thesis must:

- (a) demonstrate authority in the candidate's field and show evidence of command of knowledge in relevant fields;
- (b) demonstrate a thorough grasp of the methodological techniques appropriate to the research question, and an awareness of their limitations;
- (c) make a contribution to knowledge that rests on originality of approach and/or interpretation of the findings and, in some cases, the discovery of new facts;
- (d) demonstrate the candidate's ability to communicate research findings effectively;
- (e) demonstrate an understanding of, and commitment to, research ethics and integrity; and
- (f) be a careful, rigorous and sustained piece of work demonstrating that a research apprenticeship is complete and the holder may be admitted to the community of scholars in the discipline.

PhD or Doctoral theses containing creative works must also:

- (a) demonstrate a professional level of familiarity with, and understanding of, contemporary work in the field;
- (b) demonstrate a sufficiently comprehensive investigation of the artistic form and creative content;

- (c) apply methods and techniques in the execution of the work that are appropriate to the subject matter and are original and/or aesthetically effective;
- (d) be presented in a sufficiently professional manner;
- (e) demonstrate a sufficiently high standard of literary, visual, digital, musical or performance literacy and quality;
- (f) identify the research questions and test these through the creative work;
- (g) provide sufficiently thorough documentation of the work, (including catalogue/program material where appropriate) that is of a standard that ensures the work provides a reference for subsequent researchers;
- (h) constitute a substantive original contribution to knowledge in the subject area through the creative work and the dissertation together; and,
- (i) demonstrate an appropriate and substantiated interface between the creative work and the dissertation.

You may ask for the creative work to be re-presented or re-documented if it does not meet the above criteria.

Possible Outcomes

You will be asked to recommend a result for the thesis from the following alternatives:

1	<p>Be awarded the degree without further examination or amendment required by me, when</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are no errors or omissions that need amendment (If there are a small number of minor typographical errors, this outcome is still an option.) • The award can credibly be made on the thesis as presented.
2	<p>Be awarded the degree without further examination, subject to making minor corrections and/or additions as I have specified to the satisfaction of the Chair of Examiners, without further reference to me, when</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You detect only minor problems such as inconsistencies in terminology, ambiguities in text or figures, or referencing problems. • You are happy for the revisions to be checked by the Chair of Examiners.
3a	<p>Be awarded the degree subject to revising part or parts of the thesis as I have specified to the satisfaction of the Chair of Examiners, without further reference to me, when</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lapses in coherence or flow of argument require some sections of the thesis to be rewritten (not just corrections to small sections). • The problems do not affect the substantive conclusions of the thesis. • You are happy for the revisions to be checked by the Chair of Examiners.
3b	<p>Be awarded the degree subject to revising part or parts of the thesis as I have specified, and subject to my satisfaction, when</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are lapses as described in Recommendation 3a, but you believe the Chair of Examiners may not be able to check the revisions because the changes may impact on subject-specific interpretations.
4	<p>Not yet be awarded the degree subject to revising part or parts of the thesis as I have specified, and subject to my satisfaction, when</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The thesis contains flaws that affect its substantive conclusions and render it inadequate for the award of the degree. • The thesis could potentially fulfil the requirements of the degree with specified rewriting or work. <p><i>In this case the original examiners are requested to re-examine the revised thesis if possible. Each examiner will be provided with the reports of all original examiners when reviewing a resubmitted thesis.</i></p>
5	<p>Not be awarded the degree and not be permitted to submit for re-examination, when</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The thesis has substantive, irredeemable flaws in scholarship, research or argumentation that render it inadequate for the award of the degree.

Thesis formats, lengths and weightings

The dissertation and the creative work should be considered as complementary, mutually reinforcing parts of a single project addressing a significant research question. In some cases it may be argued that the relationship between the two parts contributes to the originality and creativity of the whole. In the PhD (Composition) the dissertation may address an approved research topic independent of the creative work. The creative work must be comprehensively documented and either the documentation or the creative work itself submitted with the dissertation.

The dissertation must do more than simply describe the creative work and how it was undertaken. While it will often include information on the materials and methodology used and place the creative work in an artistic, intellectual or cultural context; the dissertation must make an original contribution to knowledge. Published work based on research conducted during candidature may be included within the dissertation, provided the candidate is the primary author. The status of any publication will be set out in the preface.

The dissertation component of the thesis cannot be less than 25% of the work. Typical expectations for the relative weightings and dissertation lengths (including references) are as follows:

- PhD (any discipline not specified below): 50% dissertation 40,000 -50,000 words and 50% creative work
- PhD (Composition): 30% dissertation 20,000-25,000 words and 70% Folio constituting 90-120 minutes of music
- PhD (Music Performance): 30% dissertation 20,000-25,000 words and 70% Folio equivalent to three full recitals or 210 minutes

Confidentiality and research integrity

You will normally be provided with an electronic copy of the dissertation and of the creative work or documentation of the creative work. Some creative works may be sent in hard copy to you. These are confidential documents which should not be shared with any third party or submitted through similarity checking software. If you have any concerns about authorship integrity, please contact the Examinations Office (gr-exams@unimelb.edu.au).

To maintain confidentiality of the examination, please submit your report to the Examinations Office via the online form only, and not to any other person.

Your report should not reveal your identity. You should submit any material you don't want released to the candidate in a clearly marked separate document. We will release as much of your report to the candidate as possible, but your name will not be released unless you agree, and then only when the examination process is complete. Most examiners agree to their name being provided to the candidate.

All contact in relation to the examination must be through the Examinations Office. Do not contact supervisors or the candidate. If they contact you, please advise the Examinations Office.

Timing

Please complete your examination within six weeks of receiving the thesis. We will send you a reminder one week before your report is due. If you find yourself unable to complete the examination within this period, please let the Graduate Research Examinations Office know as soon as you can and provide an estimate of when you will be able to complete the examination. In the absence of prior agreement, the University may choose to appoint an alternative examiner if you are unable to complete your examination within eight weeks of receiving the thesis.

What happens next

Most examinations are completed without further involvement from the examiners. Where there is a substantial difference of opinion between the examiners, a third external examiner is appointed. The third examiner is not informed of the previous reports or discrepancy. The examination outcome is determined by the majority recommendation of the examiners.

If you have recommended a result of 3b or 4, the revised thesis will be returned to you. Candidates have only one opportunity to revise the thesis. You will be invited to make one of three recommendations: 1, 2 or 5 (as above).

Honoraria

Once each examination is complete, the University of Melbourne will pay you an honorarium. To receive it, you need to provide your payment details via the Thesis Examination System External Examiner Payment form or your completed Western Union online form.

Resources

- Thesis Examination System [Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- Graduate Research Training Policy (MPF1321) <https://policy.unimelb.edu.au/MPF1321>
- Preparation of Graduate Research Theses Rules <http://gradresearch.unimelb.edu.au/preparing-my-thesis/writing-the-thesis>
- Research Integrity and Misconduct Policy (MPF1318) <https://policy.unimelb.edu.au/MPF1318>
- Authorship Policy (MPF1181) <https://policy.unimelb.edu.au/MPF1181>
- Degree requirements can be found in the University Handbook <https://handbook.unimelb.edu.au>