

Information for Examiners of PhD and Doctoral Theses



The University of Melbourne expects theses to be of international standard and to demonstrate that the candidate has undertaken a substantial piece of original research which could reasonably be expected to be achievable in 3 years.

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.

Once you have reviewed the thesis, please provide a report which addresses the criteria for examination and recommend a result chosen from the options below. Examination reports generally set out an account of the examiner's understanding of the research undertaken as well as give feedback on specific details. Reports are typically 2-8 pages long (minimum one page). 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 currently no oral examination component at the University of Melbourne.

Criteria for examination

To be awarded a pass, a PhD or Doctoral thesis must:

- a) demonstrate the candidate's command and critical assessment of a substantial and complex body of knowledge at the forefront of their field
- b) demonstrate that the methods and techniques used are appropriate; and demonstrate an understanding of their principles, strengths and limitations
- c) demonstrate that the candidate has generated original knowledge that makes a significant contribution to their field, in which the research objectives are tested or explored according to disciplinary norms
- d) demonstrate the candidate's independence of thought and approach
- e) demonstrate the candidate's ability to effectively communicate original research findings to appropriate professional, academic and industry audiences, and in national and international contexts
- f) demonstrate the candidate's understanding of, and commitment to, research ethics and integrity
- g) form a careful, rigorous and cohesive piece of original research.

Possible Outcomes

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

1*	Pass No changes required; or only minor edits required, such as typographical errors, formatting issues or other corrections that have no bearing on the quality of the overall argument. The chair of examiners verifies the required changes have been addressed.
2*	Pass with minor revision (Chair of Examiners) Minor revisions to content are required. In this case, examiners must provide an enumerated list and explanation of each required revision. These revisions will be reviewed and verified by the chair of examiners who may consult the examiner to verify the changes.
3	Revise, resubmit and regrade (Examiner) Serious shortcomings in the content of the thesis are present but can be resolved with major revision. Examiners must provide an enumerated list and explanation of the required changes. The revised thesis is returned to the examiner to consider, and the examiner regrades the thesis accordingly. A thesis submitted for regrading may only be awarded a result of 1, 2 or 4.
4*	Fail The thesis has serious irredeemable flaws and is not of a standard to be awarded the degree.

Thesis formats and lengths

The thesis must be presented as a unified whole and address a significant research question. Published work based on research conducted during candidature may be included within the thesis, provided the candidate has clearly articulated their significant individual contribution to and the status of any publication in the preface.

The maximum allowed thesis length is 100,000 words. Typical expectations for the length of theses (including references) are as follows:

- PhD: 80,000 words
- PhD including publications: 50,000-80,000 words
- Professional research doctorates: 50,000-80,000 words

Confidentiality and research integrity

You will be provided with an electronic copy of the thesis. These are confidential documents which must not be shared with any third party or submitted through similarity checking or generative AI software. If you have any concerns about authorship integrity, please contact the Examinations Office (gr-exams@unimelb.edu.au). Note that all Melbourne theses are checked for plagiarism using similarity-detection tools prior to submission.

All contact in relation to the examination must be through the Examinations Office. Please submit your report to the Examinations Office via the [Thesis Examination System \(TES\)](#) online form only, and not to any other person. You should submit any material that you don't want released to the candidate in a clearly marked separate document.

Do not contact supervisors or the candidate during the examination. 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 time, please let the Graduate Research Examinations Office know as soon as you can and provide an estimate of when you will be able to submit your report. In the absence of prior agreement, the University may choose to appoint an alternative examiner if you are unable to submit your report within eight weeks of receiving the thesis.

What happens next

Most examinations are completed without further involvement from the examiners. If one examiner recommends Fail, the chair of examiners will invite the examiners to confer with each other to achieve a joint recommendation. If examiners cannot reach consensus, the Pro Vice-Chancellor for graduate research may appoint an adjudicator.

If you have recommended a result of 3 or the outcome of a conferral or adjudication is 3, 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 4 (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 Convera form.

Resources

- Thesis Examination System [Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- Graduate Research Training Policy (MPF1321) <https://policy.unimelb.edu.au/MPF1321>
- Preparation of Graduate Research Theses Process <https://gradresearch.unimelb.edu.au/processes/preparation-of-graduate-research-theses>
- Research Integrity and Misconduct Policy (MPF1318) <https://policy.unimelb.edu.au/MPF1318>
- Authorship Policy (MPF1181) <https://policy.unimelb.edu.au/MPF1181>
- Statement on text recycling and self-plagiarism in research: <https://research.unimelb.edu.au/strengths/ethics/text-recycling-and-self-plagiarism-in-research>
- Degree requirements can be found in the University Handbook <https://handbook.unimelb.edu.au>