

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



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 output, 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.

You may be required to travel only if the creative output 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 output 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 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.

Criteria for examination

According to the University's rules, 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.

Creative outputs included with a PhD or Doctoral thesis must:

- (a) demonstrate a professional level of familiarity with and understanding of contemporary work in the field
- (b) demonstrate a sufficiently comprehensive investigation of the creative form and content
- (c) have applied 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 artistic and creative work
- (f) identify and test or explore the research objectives
- (g) demonstrate sufficiently thorough documentation of the work (including catalogue/program material where appropriate) to ensure the work provides a reference for subsequent researchers
- (h) together with the dissertation, constitute a substantive original contribution to knowledge in the subject area, and
- (i) have an appropriate and substantiated interface between the creative output and the dissertation.

You may ask for the creative output 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	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	Major revision (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 reassesses the thesis accordingly. A thesis submitted for reassessment 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, lengths and weightings

The dissertation and the creative output should be considered as complementary, mutually reinforcing parts of a single project addressing a significant research objective. 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 output. The creative output must be comprehensively documented and either the documentation or the creative output itself submitted with the dissertation.

The dissertation must do more than simply describe the creative output and how it was undertaken. While it will often include information on the materials and methodology used and place the creative output 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 has clearly articulated their substantial contribution to and the status of any publication 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 output
- 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 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 two weeks 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. Where consensus is not achieved, an external adjudicator will be appointed. 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.

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>
- Responsible Conduct of Research 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>