

Information for Examiners of PhD and Doctoral Theses with Viva



The University of Melbourne offers degrees by research across a wide range of disciplines. It expects theses to be of international standard and to demonstrate that the candidate has undertaken a substantial piece of original research that could reasonably be expected to be achievable in 3 years.

What we ask of you

The examination consists of two parts: thesis evaluation and oral examination.

Thesis evaluation

In reading the candidate's thesis, please consider 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.

Note that some candidates commenced before or during the COVID pandemic. Melbourne experienced intermittent lockdowns between March 2020 and November 2021 with research facility and site-visit restrictions during this entire period. Closure of national and internal borders precluded some field or collaborative work. These constraints affected the nature of the work that could be undertaken, but not our expectations of scale or standards of research.

Once you have read the thesis, please provide a preliminary report that addresses the criteria for examination below. Please submit your preliminary report within six weeks of receiving the thesis and at least two weeks before the viva examination date. 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 two to eight pages long (minimum one page) and often contain suggested amendments for further publication of the research, but that don't need to be addressed for the thesis to pass the examination.

Oral Examination

There will be a single viva attended by you and your co-examiner, the candidate and a viva chair. The viva will typically be via videoconference. The graduate research examinations team will schedule the time and date for the viva once you and your co-examiner have received the thesis. The viva is expected to be held approximately nine weeks after you receive the thesis.

Two weeks before the viva, you and your co-examiner will receive copies of each other's preliminary report. These are not shared with the candidate or their supervisors. Prior to the viva, the viva chair will invite you and your co-examiner to a pre-examination meeting to discuss the conduct of the viva and order of questions.

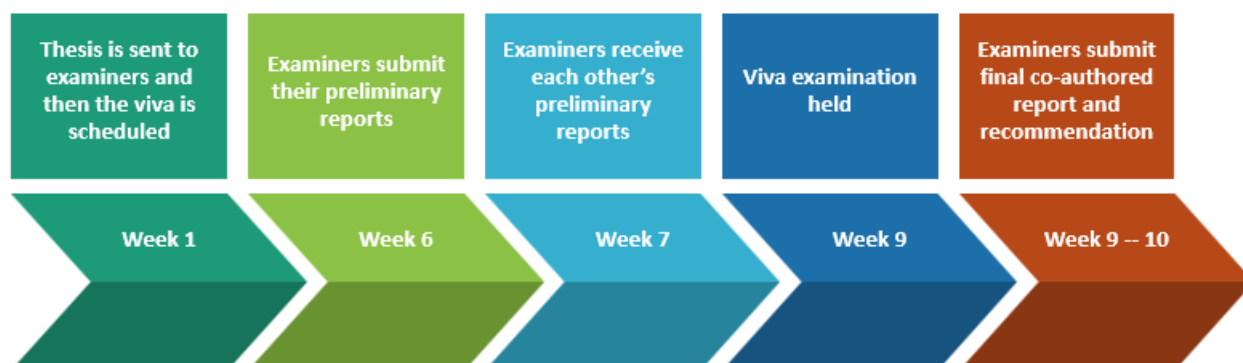
The purpose of the viva is to:

- a) provide an opportunity for the candidate to present their research while enabling examiners to clarify concerns with the thesis
- b) provide an opportunity for the candidate to discuss their research in detail with examiners who are leaders in their field
- c) assure examiners that the work presented is the candidate's own and to clarify the candidate's contribution to any collaborative research, and
- d) facilitate the examiners reaching agreement on an examination outcome.

At the start of the viva you and your co-examiner will engage in a discussion with the candidate. This discussion will be for a minimum of one hour and a maximum of two hours and will be moderated by the viva chair. At the conclusion of the viva, the candidate is excused while the examiners confer about the outcome of the viva, with the viva chair present. Once this deliberation is complete the candidate will be invited back and advised of the outcome of the examination and given a verbal indication of any revision required.

Within five days following the viva, you and your co-examiner will submit a co-authored brief final report which includes the examination outcome and a clear outline of any required revisions. Upon approval of the Chair of Examiners, the preliminary and final reports will be shared with the candidate and their supervisors.

Examination timeline overview



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

At the conclusion of the viva, you will be asked to jointly recommend one of the following outcomes:

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 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 that 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 [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 preliminary stages of the examination. If they contact you, please advise the Examinations Office.

What happens next

Most examinations are completed without further involvement from the examiners. If you and your co-examiner agree an outcome of Major revision, you will nominate one examiner to check the revisions. Candidates have only one opportunity to make major revisions to the thesis. In such cases you will be invited to recommend one of three possible outcomes: 1, 2 or 4 (as above). There will not be a second viva.

If examiners cannot reach consensus and one examiner recommends a fail, the Pro Vice-Chancellor for graduate research may appoint an adjudicator. If, after adjudication, the candidate is permitted to make changes to their thesis, the revised thesis will be sent to both examiners to recommend a final outcome.

Honoraria

When the viva final report is submitted, 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. You will receive a second payment if required to assess a revised thesis.

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>