

Information for Examiners of PhD and Doctoral Theses



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE

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.

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 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.

Possible Outcomes

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

1	Be awarded the degree without further examination or amendment required by me, when <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	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 <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	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 <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	Be awarded the degree subject to revising part or parts of the thesis as I have specified, and subject to my satisfaction, when <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	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 <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	Not be awarded the degree and not be permitted to submit for re-examination, when <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 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 is the primary author. The status of any publication will be set out 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
- Named 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 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 disagreement. The Chair of Examiners provides advice to the Chair of the Higher Degrees Research Committee based on 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>