What to expect from the thesis

The University of Melbourne requires all theses to be of international standard.

What to should the thesis demonstrate?

The MPhil or Masters by Research degree signifies that the holder has undertaken independent and sustained research conducted and reported by the holder under proper academic supervision and in a research environment for the prescribed period. The University of Melbourne requires research topics that can realistically be completed in 18 months to 2 years full-time. This may affect the nature and length of a thesis.

Your examination should consider the candidate’s thesis solely on its merits as an independent piece of supervised research appropriate for a masters level. This should be irrespective of whether you consider the approach to be outside of the established research paradigm for the discipline, and irrespective of whether you would have taken the same approach to the research.

Format

All theses must be presented as a unified whole and address a significant research question. The University of Melbourne allows graduate researchers to include publications written during their candidature as part of their thesis, provided they are the primary author. The publication status (if any) will be clearly acknowledged in the preface.

Length of the thesis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Course Length</th>
<th>Thesis word length*</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MPhil and Masters by Research (Thesis only)</td>
<td>18 months – 2 years full-time or 3-4 years part-time equivalent</td>
<td>30,000 – 40,000 words and may not exceed 50,000 words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters by Research (Advanced Seminar &amp; Shorter Thesis)</td>
<td>18 months – 2 years full-time or 3-4 years part-time equivalent</td>
<td>20,000 – 22,000. This represents 75% of the assessment of the degree.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master of Fine Arts</td>
<td>2 years full-time or 4 years part-time</td>
<td>30,000 to 40,000 words or a thesis comprising a combination of creative work and written component to the equivalent of 40,000 words. The written component must be of at least 25% (10,000 words) of the final submission.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
**Master of Music**

| 2 years full-time or 4 years part-time | Depending on the discipline and approval of the course coordinator 30,000 to 40,000 words; or a combination of creative work and written component to the equivalent to 40,000 words; or a folio of creative works equivalent to a written thesis of 40,000 words; or a minor thesis of 20,000 to 25,000 words and 3 elective subjects. |

*Word length includes footnotes but excludes words in tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices. Special permission, and agreement from examiners, must be sought to exceed 50,000 words.*

**Partial or total fulfilment of the degree**

The title page of the thesis will indicate whether the thesis is submitted in full or partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree. Separate information for examining theses including creative components is available.

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree may be shorter than one submitted for examination by thesis alone.

You can view the specific requirements of a particular degree in [The University of Melbourne Handbook](https://www.unimelb.edu.au/handbook).

**Examination process**

**Relevant Policies of the Academic Board**

- Graduate Research Training Policy (MPF1321) [https://policy.unimelb.edu.au/MPF1321](https://policy.unimelb.edu.au/MPF1321)
- Research Integrity and Misconduct Policy (MPF1318) [https://policy.unimelb.edu.au/MPF1318](https://policy.unimelb.edu.au/MPF1318)

**Parties involved in the examination process**

**Examiners**

- At least two independent external experts. Examiners from the University of Melbourne are not permitted.
- At least one examiner resident outside the state of Victoria.
- Should have no conflict of interest of a personal, professional or commercial nature with the candidate, the supervisors and/or The University of Melbourne in the last five years, or in the near future.
- Candidates are not permitted to know the identities of their examiners until the examination is complete. Your identity will then only be released to the candidate if you agree or if required under Australian Freedom of Information legislation.

**Chair of Examiners**

- The Head of Department or their nominee; cannot be the candidate’s supervisor.
- Does not submit a report or have a vote in deciding the outcome of the examination.
- Makes recommendations to the Chair of the Higher Degrees Research Committee.
- May act as a conduit between examiner, supervisors and candidate if the examiner requires additional information (for example, advice on the thesis under consideration and its content, or requests for additional written clarification).
| Chair of Higher Degrees Research Committee | • Final statutory approver for examinations.  
• Approver for any exceptional requests. |
| Graduate Research Examination Office | • Main administrative contact point.  
• Has delegated authority from the Academic Registrar and Chair of Higher Degrees Research Committee in all but exceptional cases. |
| Supervisor/s | • May initially contact the examiners to ascertain interest/availability but then no further contact is permitted until after the examination has been finalised. |

**What do examiners need to do?**

You will normally be provided with an electronic copy of the thesis. Until the final thesis is released by the University of Melbourne, it is confidential. Please do not share or distribute these to any third party or release them publicly under any circumstance. It is also not permitted for you to submit the thesis through similarity checking software. Instead you should refer any concerns about authorship integrity to gr-exams@unimelb.edu.au.

Once you have reviewed the thesis, submit a detailed independent report online, award a numeric mark out of 100 and make a recommendation on the thesis. The examination process does not normally include visiting examiners or a viva voce.

Depending on the combined examiners’ recommendations (see below), 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 that there are extant 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.

You will be notified in writing once the examination is concluded and are then welcome to contact the candidate, except for matters relating directly to the examination process.

**Qualities to look for in the thesis**

To pass a research master thesis must:

(a) demonstrate advanced learning in research skills and mastery of appropriate techniques, such as the use of archival or primary evidence, analysis of data, judgement of conflicting evidence;
(b) demonstrate specialist knowledge in the area of research;
(c) demonstrate an understanding of, and commitment to, research ethics and integrity; and
(d) be given an average numerical mark of 65% or greater as defined in the table below.

Where appropriate, please provide your opinion with respect to the following questions:

- Does the candidate show sufficient familiarity with, understanding and critical appraisal of the relevant literature?
- Does the thesis provide a sufficiently comprehensive investigation of the topic?
- Are the methods and techniques adopted appropriate to the subject matter and are they properly justified and applied?
- Are the results suitably set out with adequate exposition and interpretation?
- Are conclusions and implications appropriately developed and clearly linked to the nature and content of the research framework and findings?
- Has/have the research question/questions been tested or explored according to disciplinary norms?
- Is the literary quality and general presentation of the thesis of a suitably high standard?
- Does the thesis as a whole constitute an original contribution to knowledge in the subject area?
The numeric mark
You will be asked to provide a numeric mark in the range 0-100 on the online form (not in your written report).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mark</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>90-100</td>
<td>Outstanding (H1)</td>
<td>The candidate has demonstrated a very high level of competence with respect to the questions listed above AND there is clear evidence of considerable original work of high quality, including analysis or other evaluation, and the research, implementation or experimentation phases of the discovery have also been substantially completed, with an expectation that the thesis would be worthy of publication with only a small amount of revision and/or editing required.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85-89</td>
<td>Excellent (H1)</td>
<td>The candidate has demonstrated a high level of competence with respect to the questions listed above AND there is clear evidence of considerable original work, including analysis or other evaluation, and the implementation and experimentation phases of the discovery have also been substantially completed, with an expectation that with a small amount of further research and/or analysis the thesis would be worthy of publication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80-84</td>
<td>Very good (H1)</td>
<td>The candidate has demonstrated more than adequate level of competence with respect to the questions listed above AND the thesis provides evidence of the candidate’s ability to synthesise and organise existing information in a useful and critical manner and is well-written and largely free of error OR there is evidence of original work, including analysis or other evaluation, and the implementation and experimentation phases of the discovery have also been substantially completed, with an expectation that with a small amount of further research and/or analysis the thesis would be worthy of publication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75-79</td>
<td>Good (H2A)</td>
<td>The candidate has demonstrated a minimum level of competence with respect to the questions listed above AND the thesis provides evidence of the candidate’s ability to synthesise and organise existing information in a useful and critical manner and is well-written and largely free of error OR there is evidence of original work, including analysis or other evaluation, and some amount of research, with an expectation that with research and/or analysis the thesis might be worthy of publication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70-74</td>
<td>Satisfactory (H2B)</td>
<td>The candidate has demonstrated a minimum level of competence with respect to the questions listed above AND the thesis is judged to be more than adequate in at least one of the questions listed above OR there is evidence of original work, including some analysis or other evaluation of the proposal, even if not fully implemented or tested.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65-69</td>
<td>Adequate (H3)</td>
<td>The candidate has demonstrated a minimum level of competence with respect to the criteria for examination.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-64</td>
<td>Inadequate</td>
<td>The thesis is deficient with respect to one or more of the criteria for examination and resubmission of the thesis in a revised form is required for re-examination.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-49</td>
<td>Failed</td>
<td>The thesis is so deficient with respect to one or more of the criteria for examination that revision and resubmission cannot be considered as an option.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Your report

In addition to the numeric mark, please submit a report reflecting your assessment of the appropriate outcome for the examination and giving feedback to the candidate to guide them, if applicable, in making changes to the thesis to ensure it is of the highest possible standard. As a guide we would ask for your report to be at least one full page including comments on both the strengths and weaknesses of the thesis.

You may wish to structure your report around the questions above, or on a chapter-by-chapter account of the thesis. You may also wish to provide suggestions for potential publishable content and/or a list of errata where appropriate. We would welcome any other comments of a general nature that may be of assistance to the Higher Degrees Research Committee, the candidate and/or the supervisors.

We will release as much of your report to the candidate as possible, but your name will not be released until the examination is completed (if you agree to this). Please use a blank document which does not reveal your identity to create your report. You should submit any material you don’t want to be released to the candidate in a clearly marked separate document.

To maintain confidentiality of the examination, submit your report to the Examinations Office via the online form only, and not to any other person. If you have any questions about the online Thesis Examination System, please review the Frequently Asked Questions, or contact the Graduate Research Examinations Office.

Result

You will be asked to select one of the following recommendations for the thesis:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>You recommend the candidate should</th>
<th>When to use</th>
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</table>
| 1. be awarded the degree without further examination or amendment required by me. | • There are no errors or omissions that need amendment  
• The award can be made credibly on the thesis as presented  
• Your report may include a list of suggested amendments for publishing the material. |
| 2. be awarded the degree without further examination, subject to inserting in the thesis the minor corrections and/or additions as I have specified to the satisfaction of the Chair of Examiners, without further reference to me. | • You detect only minor problems such as inconsistencies in terminology, ambiguities in text or figures, or referencing problems  
• The issues are not specific to the field under consideration so the Chair of Examiners can determine whether the candidate’s corrections adequately comply with your notes.  
• Examiners often make this recommendation where they take issue with the candidate’s subject-specific interpretations but accept the validity of a divergent view.  
• Your report may include criticisms for the candidate to consider before submitting the material for (further) publication. |
| 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. | • Lapses in coherence or logic require 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 believe compliance can be determined 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 | • As per Recommendation 3a, but you believe the Chair of Examiners may not be able determine compliance 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.

- The thesis contains flaws that affect its substantive conclusions and render it inadequate for the award of the degree.
- With additional specified rewriting or work the thesis could potentially fulfil the requirements of the degree.
- The original examiners must re-examine the revised thesis if possible.
- Examiners of a revised and resubmitted thesis will be provided with the reports of all original examiners for their reference.

5* not be awarded the degree and not be permitted to submit for re-examination.

- The thesis has substantive, irredeemable flaws in scholarship or logic that render it inadequate for the award of the degree.

**Time for examination**

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 immediately and provide an estimate of when you expect you will be able to do so. The Higher Degrees Research Committee may choose to appoint an alternative examiner if you are unable to complete your examination within eight weeks of receiving the thesis.

**Payment**

The University of Melbourne will pay you an honorarium for each examination when we have received:

- your recommendation, numeric mark and detailed written report
  and one of
- your completed *External Examiner Payment Request* online form
  or
- your completed Western Union online form.