Tips

Viva-voce Examination

All candidates for MPhil and PhD awards are assessed via a viva-voce (oral) examination on completion of their thesis. UK universities and higher education institutions use the viva voce to assess research degrees and are governed by the relevant institutional regulations.

Purposes

The viva-voce is an oral defence of your thesis and its purpose can be summarised as follows:

- It is the means by which the awarding body determines whether you have fulfilled the requirements for the award and that the thesis is of an appropriate standard.
- It provides a mechanism to ensure that the work is your own.
- It helps the examiners determine how far you are able to talk about your research project and enables them to seek clarification on your research methods and findings.
- It gives you the opportunity to explain any issues about your work that examiners might have identified.
- It provides a means of identifying any changes required to the thesis or further investigation required prior to completion.

Preparing for questions

Here are some typical viva-questions. You should instantiate each question for your particular thesis, and have a framework for answering it worked out before the viva.
General questions

1. How did you come to study this topic?

Open questions

2. Tell me about your methodology.

3. Could you summarise your work for us?

4. Are there implications of your thesis for your discipline broadly?

5. What have you been reading lately in this area?

6. Who do you think is leading the way in research in this area?

Specific questions

7. Who would you say are the key researchers in your field today?

8. Why did you use method A for measuring B? What was wrong with the C method?

9. Why didn’t you use X method in experiment Y?
10. Did your supervisor(s) suggest you should do more analysis?

11. Would you say that your thesis has any weaknesses?

12. In what way is this thesis ‘original’?

13. What contribution have you made?

14. Which parts of the thesis do you think are publishable?

(Rowena Murray, 1999)

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