

Preparing for your PhD Viva Voce 'Viva'/Oral Examination

Your oral examination will usually take place in the Faculty's Board Room. You might find it useful to see the room if you have not been in it before so you know what to expect. The examination is undertaken with the two examiners and may include an independent chair if the Degree Committee has deemed it appropriate. There are no rules for its duration, but as an approximate guide, the examination will normally occupy at least 90 minutes and is likely to conclude within three hours at a maximum.

The oral examination should allow:

- The defence of your dissertation and the clarification of any matters raised by the examiners
- the examiners to probe your knowledge in the field
- the examiners to assure themselves that the work presented is your own and to clarify matters of any collaboration
- the examiners to come to a definite conclusion about the outcome of the examination

The examiners will forward their reports to the Degree Committee for consideration at its following meeting. The Degree Committee will in turn make a recommendation to the Board of Graduate Studies which will be considered at its following meeting. The dates of these meetings and the University's congregations are listed on: <http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/offices/gradstud/meetings/>

What you can do beforehand

You will need to know your thesis well and be able to take questions on it. You will not need to produce anymore work for the oral examination. You might find it useful to re-read your thesis and mark it up with coloured post-its so that you can navigate to the relevant sections with ease in the oral examination.

You will find it useful to look at your examiners' work beforehand and get an understanding of how they undertake their research. What sort of research methods do they use? Which theorists do they engage with? What is their writing style? – Thinking about your examiners' work may give you an idea of where they will be coming from in terms of questions about your thesis.

Have a think about what you would do if you had your time again. What worked well? What would you do differently? What would you do next? How does your work sit in the wider context of your field? Why did you tackle this research? Why are you interested in it? Have you noticed any errors in your thesis since submitting it? – make a list of them.

Do have some questions for your examiners. Your oral examination is a unique opportunity – two experts in your field will have studied your work and will have very useful comments for you in terms of future publications.

You might find it useful to have a mock oral with your supervisor, advisor or a friend, or, to just act out an oral examination for yourself. Rehearse some answers to the above questions so you are already familiar with what to say. Talk to friends and family about your work. Often a non-specialist will ask the most profound questions.

Don't be shy to ask your examiners to repeat a question. Don't worry about taking your time to think and then answer. And, most important - just be yourself - if you feel nervous, it might make you feel better to let your examiners know.

What to take with you

You can take a (marked up) copy of the thesis in with you. You may want to take an ipad or notepad and pen to make notes.

Water will be available in the room where you will be examined but you may like to take your own with you.

What to Wear

We do not wear gowns for oral examinations at Cambridge. Whilst the Faculty would advocate being comfortable, most participants tend to wear smart, professional and respectful attire.

Special Requirements

If you have any special requirements, you will be given the opportunity to let the administration know so that we can make arrangements for you in advance. It is useful to be given notice for special requirements as we may need time to realise arrangements for you.

If you have any questions about undertaking your viva, talk to your supervisor or email: Grad.enquiries@aha.cam.ac.uk.