

VIVA VOCE

25 MAC 2017

Light at the end of the tunnel.....



- OR:

..... an ONcoMinG Train !!!



Outline

- What is a viva?
- Why have a viva?
- The thesis examination process
- The examiners
- How is your thesis judged?
- Possible outcomes
- How to prepare for the viva
- What to do in the viva
- After the viva



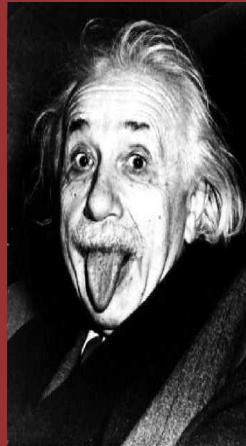
What is a viva?

- The oral part of the examination of your thesis



Preparing for the PhD Viva

- What most examiners expect from a PhD?



“Show me the Knowledge”



Why have a viva?

- To examine the academic content and **scholastic level** of a thesis
- To provide candidates with the opportunity to **defend the thesis**
- To **explore and explain** the design, methodology and outcome of the research
- To **discuss** the research
- To **provide evidence** to help the examiners arrive at a judgment of the thesis
- To **enable the examiners** to make a recommendation to the university about the thesis

The thesis examination PROCESS

- Intention to submit (including selection of the examiners)
- Approved Exact title submitted
- Thesis is submitted together with submission form to post graduate centre's office.
- Examiners independently assess your thesis
- Pre-viva comparison of notes by examiners
- Viva (a defence not an exam)
- Decision

● G.O.T.

The examiners

- Who selects the external and internal examiners?
- You/your supervisor can make suggestions
- **BUT the Senate has final say**
- How to find out about your examiners?
- Ask colleagues, Google them, read their work and **cite them if relevant!**
- Think about how your thesis relates to their work.
- **Don't forget the importance of the internal.**

viva-voce: Preparation

- Before you submit: examiner selection, produce a good thesis.
- **What is a good thesis?**
- After you submit:
 - Re-read and SUMMARISE (chapters and thesis as a whole)
 - Mark thesis highlights
 - Make a list of typos and errors – for sure there will be some!
 - Revise – some of the key works/ideas you made use of
 - Practise – anticipate likely questions and practise answering them

The PhD viva: Preparation

- Practise your presentation
- Know where the venue is (if possible, visit the viva room)
- Decide where to wait
- Make sure that you are well-rested and eat appropriately
- Wear comfortable clothes that make you look smart
- Do not let stress drive you
- Sit quietly and reflect

The PhD viva: Preparation

- Sit quietly and reflect
- Make sure you know your work- conceptual framework, how each part fits together and what you have achieved
- Bring a copy of your thesis (tag key chapters), pen, writing paper and a summary sheet of main points
- **Be relaxed but alert (COME EARLY)**
- Remember you would not have come this far if your work is not passable or interesting
- **Avoid negative people on the day(s) before the viva**

Guidelines for making power point slides

Slide layout:

- Title at the top of the slide
- Important information near the top of the slide.
- Contrasting colors for text and background
- (**LIGHT** text on a dark background is best. Avoid white backgrounds)
- **KEEP** the color scheme of PPTs consistent throughout presentation.

- One concept per slide.
- **SINGLE** slide should display few key points on it; **AVOID** text in the form of long sentences.
- **USE** bullets to highlight main points
- **AVOID** using frequent animations and transitions in the presentation. Try to apply the same transition, if any, throughout the presentation.
- **USE** clearly visible and understandable diagrams, tables, charts and graphs to enhance the meaning of the text to be presented.

Font:

- **CHOOSE** a font that is simple and easy to read such as Arial, Times New Roman or Verdana.
- **USE**, at most, two different fonts – perhaps one for headings and another for content
- **KEEP** all fonts large enough. Font size for main heading should be 40 pt, sub headings 32 pt & text 24 pt.
- **AVOID** using all capital letters – even for headings. **All Caps** make the words difficult to read.
- **USE colors on your slides.** Make sure that the color has a purpose: for example, to highlight a part of a figure or to group similar things.

THE MORNING OF THE DEFENSE:

THIS IS IT.

THIS IS IT!

JORGE CHAM © 2005

www.phdcomics.com



What happens at the viva session?

- Before candidate enters the room, the chairperson of the viva committee will invite the examiners to comment on the thesis in terms of knowledge and competency
- A discussion on the comments made in the reports will follow
- A note will be made where clarification is required
- Candidate invited to present (20-30 minutes)
- Q & A session
- Candidate leaves the room
- Examination committee discusses the presentation and thesis, make a conclusion and recommendation
- Candidate is re-invited to the room
- Result is announced
- Candidate is informed of amendments required (where appropriate)

Favourite Question of PhD Viva

The examiners will ask you to introduce your work:

- *“Please can you tell us about your PhD work”?*
- *“Please give us an idea of what your thesis is about and the ideas behind it?”*

- **Remember who’s the BOSS**

- You know your work better than anyone
- You are the expert not your examiners or your supervisor!



CHECKLIST: TOP TEN VIVA QUESTIONS

- Value-added/ Originality

1. What are the most original parts of the thesis?
2. Which propositions would you say are distinctively your own?
3. How do you think your work takes forward or develops the literature in this field?
4. What are the “bottom line” conclusions of your research?
How innovative or distinctive are they?

Origins/Topics

5. Can you tell us how you came to choose this topic for your doctorate?
6. Why have you defined the topic in the way you did? What were some of the difficulties you encountered and did they influence how the topic was framed?

Methods

7. What are the core methods used in this thesis? Why did you choose this approach? In an ideal world, are there different techniques you'd have liked to use?

Data

8. What are the main sources or kinds of evidence? Are they strong enough to sustain the conclusions you draw?
9. How do your findings fit with or contradict the rest of the literature in this field?

What next?

10. What are the main implications of your research for the rest of the field?

Do's and don'ts during the viva

- Anticipate Questions
- Answer questions clearly and concisely
- Be able to refer to the thesis; do not fumble through the thesis (use tags to mark key chapters)
- Use eye contact
- Ask for clarification if you do not understand the question
- Relate to and answer the questions
- If problems are pointed out, think carefully; agree or provide your point of view (indicate issues that are beyond the scope of the thesis)
- Talk as an intellectual

Answering questions

- Why are you being asked these questions?
- The examiners are:
 - **Not** trying to catch you out
 - Looking for positive evidence to tick criteria boxes
 - Genuinely want to engage in debate
 - Test what your view, as an academic equal, think about a topic
 - Clarify muddled or ambiguous expression in thesis



Dealing with questions

- Listen to the question
- Pause and take your time
- Talk precisely and move from the general to the specific
- Use appropriate rhetorical strategies:
 - First person and the active voice
 - Speaking in the past tense (if in English)

Answering questions: Some Pointers

- Don't rush answers
- Don't interrupt!
- Don't be defensive
- Answer assertive but don't be defensive.
- Defend your ground, but concede where appropriate.
- Don't be flippant
- Don't undersell yourself
- Don't volunteer flaws
- **DON'T SAY MY SUPERVISOR ASKED ME TO THIS or DO THAT.**

Answering questions: Some Pointers

- Ask for clarifications where necessary
- Give clarifications if necessary
- Be honest
- Stay calm. You are likely to know more about the subject than those assessing your thesis!
- Be forthcoming and allow discussion to develop. Don't just use 'yes' or 'no' responses and await the next question.
- Accept references if offered.

What if you get a tricky question that you need to think about?

- Ask for clarification
 - **Recast in your own words 'Do you mean...'**
- Buy some time to think of the answer:
 - **'Now the answer to that is not obvious/straightforward...'**
 - (buying time...)
 - **'that's a good question'**

- If you really can't answer a question:
 - Be honest.
 - But if you have any ideas on the subject, say so.
 - Or Say, "I can't answer this without some more detailed thought, but I should be able to work it out with a bit of time."
 - If it relies on literature or ideas you are not familiar with, thank the examiner for the useful pointers and references.

What if you get a question which uncovers a flaw in your work?

- Don't panic
- Remember you are engaging in a debate with equals.
 - Don't be aggressive (or defensive)
 - Rather, seek to find out your examiners views on how the problem might be remedied.

What if you get a question which uncovers a flaw in your work?

- Can it be addressed in future work which develops on what you've done in your thesis?
 - ...or in a resubmission
 - Better than not showing awareness and not being given the chance to resubmit.
- If it's something you are already aware of, prepare your discussion on why it doesn't undermine your whole thesis.
 - Showing you are aware of this will show you have good critical skills.
 - But don't volunteer flaws unnecessarily!

Dealing with criticisms

- Keep the faith, but respect and accommodate examiners' criticisms/suggestions
- Remind the examiners of the (limited) scope of a PhD thesis
- Talk about making amendments in the correction version

Examiners report

1. Thesis topic/title

- Grammatically correct
- Contains keywords found in abstract and reflects the actual research issues

2. Abstract

- Accurate – brief statement of problem or objectives, concise description of methods and design, summary of major findings, brief conclusion

3. Research problem/objectives

- Determine whether the background to the research issues is well discussed, the research problem is well-defined and the hypotheses addresses the problem, objectives are clearly stated and met by methods/design and findings

Examiners report (contd.)

4) Scope and Relevance

- Determine whether the study is appropriate for the degree, field of study, research issues, practicability of research problems and research objectives

5) Literature Review

- Relevant to the research issues, comprehensive, well-reviewed, summarised, organised
- Proportionate to the rest of the thesis

Examiners report (contd.)

6) Methodology

- Strengths and weakness of data, research design/methods suitable, clearly described, appropriate statistical method used

7) Analysis and interpretation of results

- Results are in agreement with objectives
- Interpretation of finding logical/acceptable
- Analysis of data correct
- Findings are discussed with appropriate references

Examiners report (contd.)

8) Presentation

- Sequence of chapters able to facilitate the understanding of research issues
- Tables and figures are properly labeled and clear

9) References/bibliography

- Current, extensive and correct format (Gaya Penulisan UMS)
- Missing references or wrong citations

Examiners report (contd.)

10) Accomplishments and/or merits

- Indicate that findings are clearly identified and discussed
- Findings contributed to new knowledge and has application
- Other accomplishments

11) Demerits

- Main weakness of research
- Author has addressed the impact of the study
- Others (e.g. language, relevance, content)

12. Recommendation

Decision

- You'll be given clear direction of what the outcome is.
- You'll be given a list of corrections
 - or instructions of what needs to be changed/added (usually for more substantial changes)



How to fail a viva

- One word or irrelevant answers
- Showing reluctance to engage in discussion
- Showing disrespect to the examiners
- Getting angry
- Getting defensive
- Asking examiners questions
- Showing examiners that you do not know your work; confused
- Not understanding the questions

**A Guide to the outcome of the
viva**

BORANG LAPORAN
PEMERIKSAAN TESIS UPDATE -
pindaan 2015.docx

Dealing with corrections

- Work with your supervisor
- Plan a work agenda
- Make sure that corrections are made in a timely manner
- Agree on a work agenda and timing



RELATIONSHIP WITH SUPERVISOR

- Important and INTENSE professionally
- Good relationship will have a happy ending
- Choose your supervisor carefully, need to assess what you would like from supervisor and arrange things that will suit both parties
- Some supervisors are more critical, more demanding, provide less emotional or technical support
- No perfect match, ask yourself what you are willing to deal with
- You are ultimately responsible for your work

WHY DO PEOPLE BECOME SUPERVISORS?

- To fulfill performance indicator?
- Direct order from Head of Dept?
- Feeling of duty?
- Love of working with students?
- Self-interest (to further their career)?

Supervisors have other duties and problems such as lecturing, committees, meetings on curriculum, exams, academic advisors, ISO, administrative duties, write grants and fill in reports, frustration with bureaucracy, financial stress due to lack of research funding and infrastructure support, etc

To make the relationship work

- Have regular meetings with an agenda
- Agree on meeting time, tasks and milestones
- Keep supervisor informed on status of your work
- Inform supervisor of interesting literature ; intellectual exchange result in synergy
- Voice your concern about the research
- Inform supervisor of feedback from your presentations
- Inform supervisor of your change in personal circumstances
- Be honest, articulate, informative, respectful
- Don't hide, ignore, gossip, belittle, by-pass supervisor
- Don't mix business and personal issues
- Don't assume (in doubt always ask)

The lonely journey to PhD



*There is no one correct way to do a PhD
BUT many ways to do it the wrong way*

Thank you
and
Good Luck!!

**GOOD LUCK
MOST OF THE TIME
IS MADE!!!**

