

# How to Survive in Viva/ Proposal Defence

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Universiti Malaysia Perlis

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## Gentle Reminder

All the shared contents were based on the speaker's experiences managing postgraduate students when she was the Postgraduate Chairman at the Institut Matematik Kejuruteraan, UniMAP, supervising postgraduate students, being the chairman and examiners for proposal defence and viva session, her own experience as postgraduate student and some insights from shared-related workshops. Therefore, there could be some variations in the practices of the rules and regulations for viva and proposal defence form one university to another. Thus, you may refer to your university for further details. However, the speaker believes that the shared inputs in this documents are generally been applied in our public universities in Malaysia.

May this sharing useful to your MSc and PhD journey.



### **Personal Details**

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### **Education Background:-**

PhD (Statistics), UUM (2017)  
M.Sc. (Decision Science), UUM (2005)  
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Lansing, USA (1997)  
Diploma (Statistik), ITM Shah Alam (1995)

### **Research Interest:-**

1. Discriminant Analysis – Classification
2. Feature Selection
3. Statistical Pattern Recognition
4. Multi Level Data Fusion

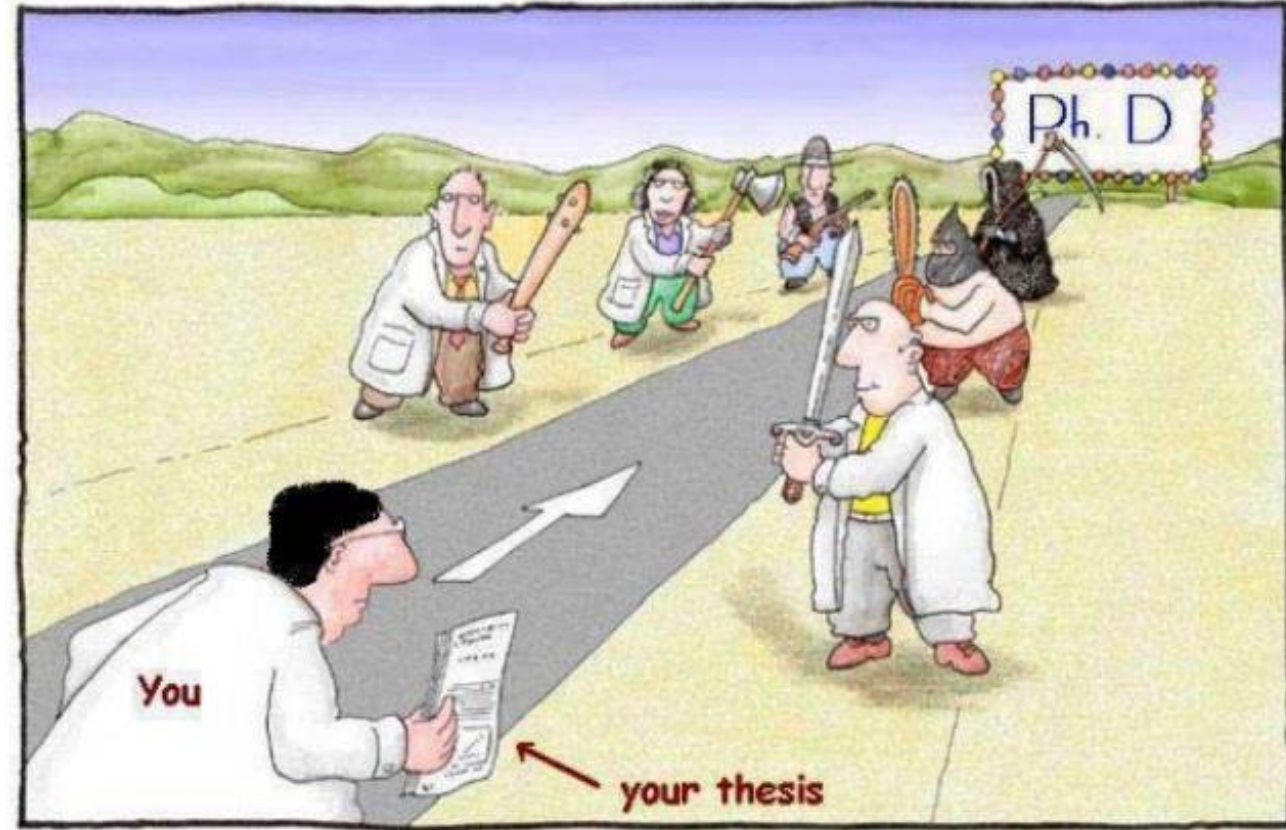
### **Research Cluster:-**

Mathematical Sciences & Data Analytics  
Centre of Excellence Social Innovation & Sustainability

# Content

1. Definition
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## Viva time



**the misperception?**

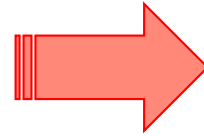


**Surviving the viva depends fundamentally on preparation and students' ability to demystifying the examination procedure.**

**(Burnham, 1994:34)**



Have you had an experience telling a story and everyone listen to you excitingly?



Turn your nervousness to **CONFIDENT**

Let your audiences get the feeling that you are ready to begin your battle!



# Definition

## Viva Voce

“**Viva voce**” means **by or with the living voice** - i.e., by word of mouth. It is **an examination** where you will give a **verbal defence of your thesis**.

Put simply, you should think of it as a verbal counterpart to your written thesis. **Your thesis demonstrates your skill at presenting your research in writing. In the viva examination, you will demonstrate your ability to participate in academic discussion with research colleagues.**

## Proposal Defence

The purpose of the **proposal defence** is to **assure that your plan of researching your proposed research question is complete and holds academic merit**. Students work closely with their supervisory committees in **determining the composition of the dissertation proposal and in writing the proposal**.



# The Expectation Towards You ... position your research

## Nature (scope) of Study in General

<b>PHD</b>	<b>MASTER (BY RESEARCH)</b>	<b>MASTER (MIXED MODE)</b>
1. Fundamental research.	1. Fundamental or applied research	1. Applied research
2. Contribution to the new knowledge.	2. Contribution to new knowledge or new application	2. Contribution to new application
3. Very strong technical knowledge – focus on depth specific niche area.	3. Strong technical knowledge in <b>focus area</b>	3. Medium or strong technical knowledge to <b>focus area</b>

# The Expectation Towards You ... position your research

## Literature Review

	<b>PHD</b>	<b>MASTER (By Research)</b>	<b>MASTER (Mixed Mode)</b>
1. Reporting other works	<b>Must Have</b>	<b>Must Have</b>	<b>Must Have</b>
2. Critically commenting other works	<b>Must Have</b>	<b>Must Have</b>	<b>Nice to Have</b>
3. Able to highlight research gaps	<b>Must Have – at least 2 clear research gaps</b>	<b>Must Have – at least 1 clear research gap</b>	<b>Must Have – at least 1 research gap</b>
4. Ideal number of references	<b>&gt;150</b>	<b>&gt;100</b>	<b>&gt;30</b>



# The Expectation Towards You ... position your research

## Research Gap & Objectives

	<b>PHD</b>	<b>MASTER (BY RESEARCH)</b>	<b>MASTER (MIXED MODE)</b>
1. Designed from real world issues	<b>Must Have</b>	<b>Must Have</b>	<b>Must Have</b>
2. Designed from current state-of-the-art methods	<b>Must Have</b>	<b>Must Have</b>	<b>Nice to Have</b>
3. Number of Research Gap	<b>2 – 3</b>	<b>1 – 2</b>	<b>At least 1</b>
4. Number of research objectives	<b>2 – 3</b>	<b>1 – 2</b>	<b>At least 1</b>

# The Expectation Towards You ... position your research

## Contributions – Methodology

Types of Contribution	PHD	MASTER (By Research)	MASTER (Mixed Mode)
1. New techniques / methods	Very High	Very High	Very High
2. Modified techniques / methods	High	Very High	Very High
3. New concepts / pipeline	High	Very High	Very High
4. Modified concepts / pipeline	High/Medium	High	High
5. Hybrid techniques / methods	Medium	High	High
6. Integrated techniques / methods	Low	Medium	High
7. Same techniques / methods with different applications	Very Low	Low	Medium



# The Expectation Towards You ... position your research

## Analysis - Results

	<b>PHD</b>	<b>MASTER (By Research)</b>	<b>MASTER (Mixed Mode)</b>
1. Comparison with current state-of-the-art methods	<b>Must Have</b>	<b>Must Have</b>	<b>Nice to Have</b>
2. Comparison with conventional methods	<b>Must Have</b>	<b>Must Have</b>	<b>Must Have</b>
3. Number of benchmark / standard datasets	<b>Must Have – ideally at least 4</b>	<b>Must Have – ideally at least 3</b>	<b>Must Have – at least 1</b>
4. Real case study	<b>Must Have</b>	<b>Nice to Have</b>	<b>Nice to Have</b>
5. Qualitative and quantitative analyses	<b>Must Have</b>	<b>Must Have</b>	<b>Must Have</b>

# Be ready with your knapsack – meeting the expectation

**Table 3: Minimum period for proposal defence for PhD and MSc after the main (initial) registration.**

Programme	Mode	Minimum Period	Maximum Period
PhD	Full-Time	6 months	12 months
	Part-Time	12 months	24 months
PhD by Publication (PhD. Pub.)	Full-Time	6 months	12 months
	Part-Time	12 months	24 months
MSc	Full-Time	4 months	9 months
	Part-Time	9 months	18 months



- Submitted Proposal:-**
1. Introduction
  2. Literature Review
  3. Research Methodology
  4. Expected Result
  5. Gantt Chart
  6. References



- Submitted Thesis:-**
1. Introduction
  2. Literature Review
  3. Research Methodology
  4. Result & Discussion
  5. Conclusion & Future Work
  6. References
  7. Appendices





# Requirement for Viva Voce

Has fulfilled all the university requirements including:-

- i) passed the pre-viva & submitted the thesis corrections and table of correction
- ii) achieve the publication points
- iii) Appointment of internal and external examiners have been endorsed by the Jawatankuasa Ijazah Tinggi Universiti (JITU), Centre for Graduate Studies & University Senat.
- iv) No extending fee
- v) Other university requirements – if any.

# Requirement for Proposal Defence

The purpose of the **proposal defence** is to assure that your plan of researching your **proposed** research question is complete and holds academic merit. Students work closely with their supervisory committees in determining the composition of the dissertation **proposal** and in writing the **proposal**.

# Get to Know Your Battlefield – *Viva / Proposal Defence?*

How long is the viva?

1. There is no formal time limit.
2. A viva can last between 1-2 hours, even more.
3. Student presentation should be within 20-25 minutes.

Who will examine me?

1. Normally 2 examiners (external & internal examiners) will be appointed.
2. For university staff (registered as student) – both are external examiners.
3. Supervisor(s) may be present during examination, but is not allowed to ask any question or impact the outcome.

What is the purpose of a viva

1. Did you do the work yourself?
2. Have you done the reading?
3. Do you have a good knowledge of the field?
4. Do you write the thesis yourself?
5. Can you do research independently?
6. Can you teach your subject?
7. Have you contributed to knowledge?
8. Did you learn anything?

When will I know the outcome

1. After the viva has ended, your examiner will ask you to leave the room – to allow the examiners and chairman to make decision.
2. How long? Varies depending on the condition of student's thesis.



# Get to Know Your Battlefield – *Who are your audiences*

1. **Supervisor.** Refers to the member of academic staff who worked closely with the student over the full term of the doctorate/masters course. Usually has no speaking role in the oral examination.
2. **External examiner.** Refers to a member of academic staff from another university/institution whom are the expert in the student's research area and methodology.
3. **Internal examiner.** Refers to a member of academic staff in the candidate's department or faculty, often (but not always) knowledgeable or with some expertise in the area of the student's research or in a related area; may also conduct progress reviews during the doctorate.
4. **Chairman.** Refers to a neutral academic who was not involved in the study. The neutral academic should have had no previous contact with the research and thesis being examined. Responsible for ensuring that regulations and procedures are followed.
5. **Committee.** The group of academics involved in the project, including the supervisor(s), external and internal examiners and perhaps others, as well as the faculty dean or his/her representative.

# Get to Know Your Battlefield – *Roles & Responsibility of Audiences*

<b>Audience</b>	<b>Role &amp; Responsibility</b>
Supervisor	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. The supervisor may attend the examination, but may not examine or question the student and should only provide clarification on any matters when requested by the board.</li><li>2. The supervisor does not participate in the final decision and should leave the examination room while such deliberations take place, unless asked to remain by the chair.</li></ol>
External examiner/ Internal examiner	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. The thesis is assessed by standards appropriate for the research degree.</li><li>2. The student in his/her Viva Voce is assessed by standards appropriate for the MSc/PhD degree.</li><li>3. Judge whether the work is of an appropriate amount and standard; check that it is presented and discussed appropriately in the thesis; reassure themselves that the thesis is the student's own work, and that the student can defend it appropriately.</li></ol>
Independent chair	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. To ensure the examiners are aware of, and adhere to, the institution's regulations and procedures;</li><li>2. the assessment is rigorous, fair, reliable and consistent;</li><li>3. the examiners' questioning is appropriate;</li><li>4. the candidate has an opportunity to defend the thesis; and</li><li>5. the examiners' reports are completed in line with regulations</li></ol>

# My Role?

## Prior Viva

1. Mock Viva –you and supervisor(s) even though you have gone through your pre-viva.
2. Master your thesis content.
3. Prepare your presentation slides earlier-plan the moment you get the viva date or earlier.
4. Know your main journal reference(s)

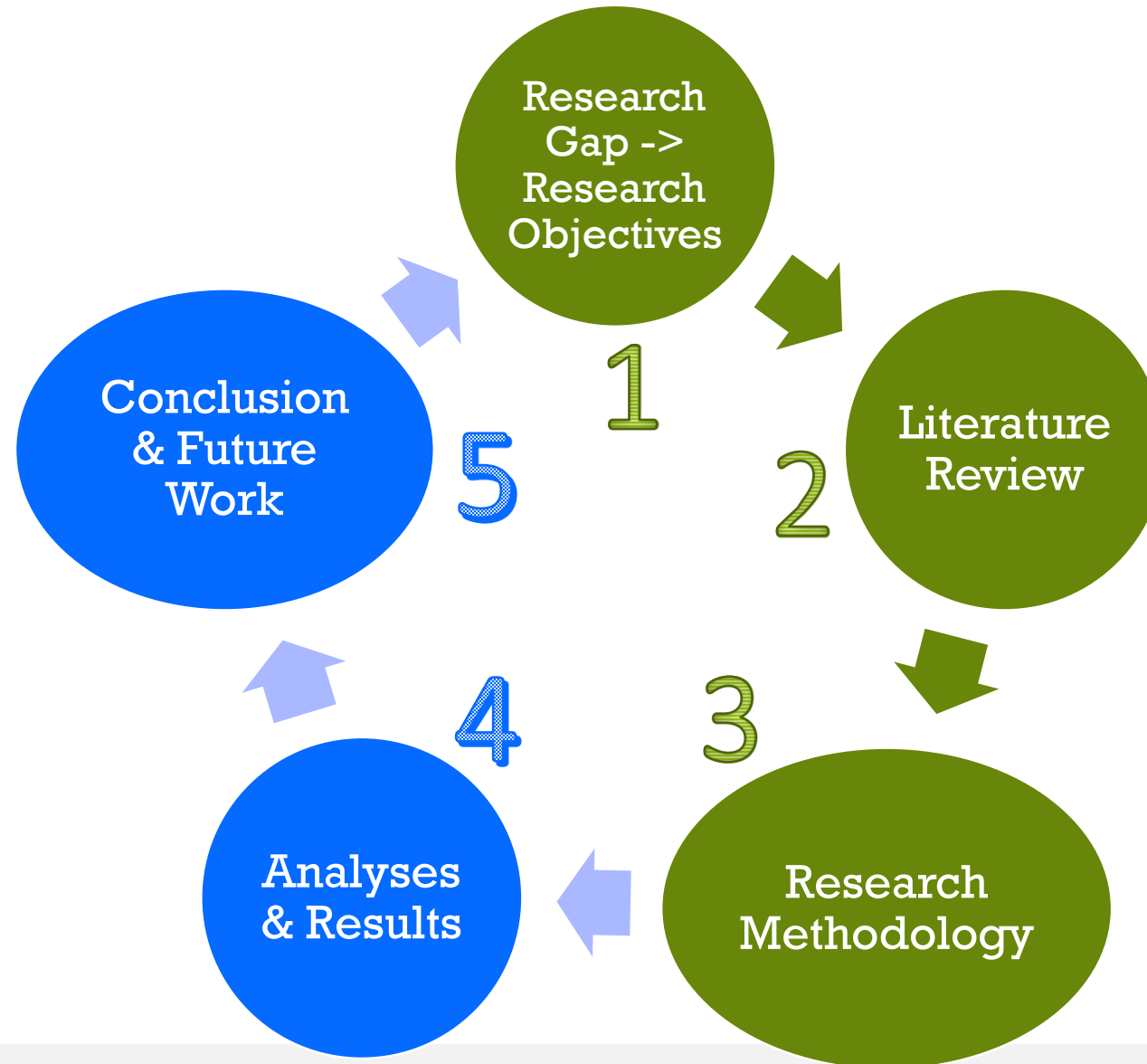
## During Viva

1. Bring all the research materials – thesis (hardcopy, softcopy), short notes, blank paper, pen, slides presentation (softcopy, hardcopy), pointer, software\*, hard drive\*
2. Self condition – keep calm, eye contact-audience, right costume & well mannered-body language and conversation.
3. Presentation - story telling your thesis – easily understood and memorable – 18 presentation slides
4. Take note and/or record the session (ask for permission from the chairman before the session begin). Some university record the session but for administrative use only.

## Post Viva

1. Leave the viva room with knowing exactly what corrections are needed.
2. If necessary, ask the examiner to specify the scale & scope of revisions.
3. The more you define revision tasks before the examination end, the less you will have to think about them, and easier it will be to do them.
4. Thank your examiners, chairman, supervisors, dean, faculty admin and all your supporters.
5. Do all the required corrections based on the evaluation forms by the external & internal examiner, chairman comment (if available) using the table of correction prepared by the faculty.

# Key Points for Viva/Proposal Defence





# Proposal Defence Verdict

1. Pass without correction.
2. Pass with minor correction #1 / 2
3. Pass with major correction - #1/3 or 2/3
4. Pass with major correction & re-defence proposal #1, 2, 3
5. Proposal Rejected #1, 2, 3



**BAHAGIAN B (HASIL PEMBENTANGAN KERTAS CADANGAN PENYERAJAAN)**  
**SECTION B (OUTCOME OF THE RESEARCH PROPOSAL DEFENCE)**

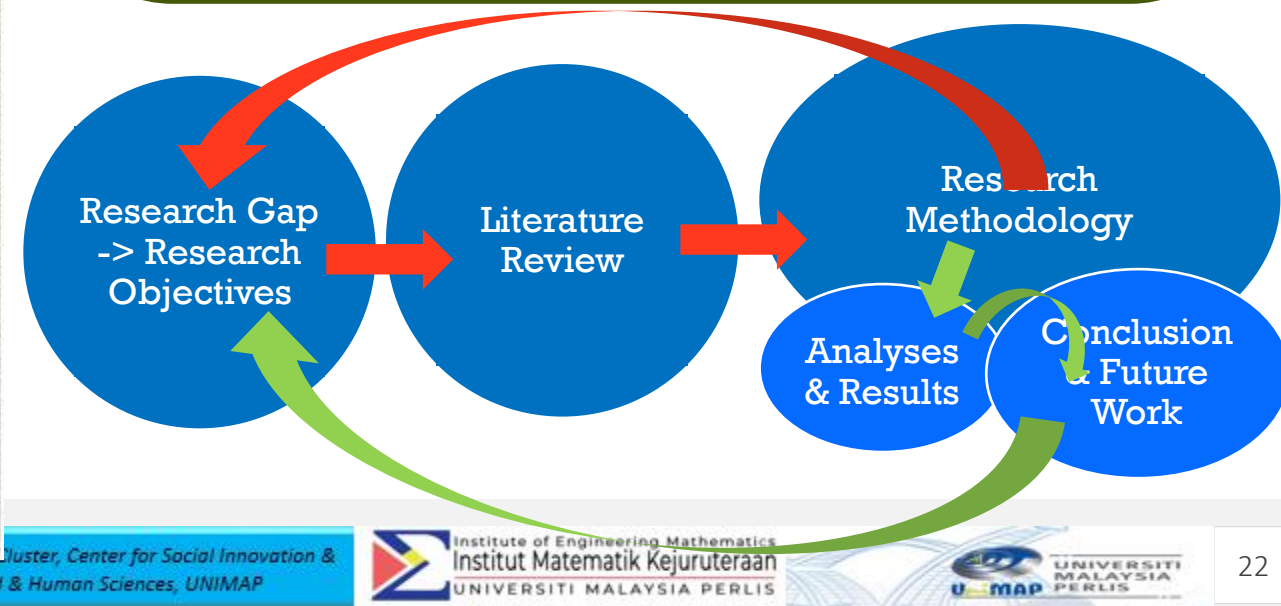
Ranking	Interpretation
1	Research proposal accepted without amendments. Student may proceed.
2(a) ✓	Proposal accepted with <sup>minor</sup> <del>major</del> amendments. Proposal with amendments (as recommended by the panel) is to be submitted to the School/Institute for re-defence session in 6 months for <del>Doctoral Degree</del> . <i>not required for re-defence session</i>
2(b)	Proposal accepted with major amendments. Proposal with amendments (as recommended by the panel) is to be submitted to the School/Institute for re-defence session in 3 months for Master Degree.
3	Proposal rejected

# Viva Verdict

Ringkasan Perakuan / Summary Recommendation

1. Calon dianugerahi Ijazah Doktor Falsafah/Sarjana. <i>The candidate is awarded a PhD/Master's Degree.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Calon dianugerahi Ijazah Doktor Falsafah/Sarjana tertakluk kepada pindaan /pembetulan kecil kepada tesisnya seperti di dalam laporan Lembaga Pemeriksa <i>The candidate is awarded a PhD/Master's Degree subject to minor changes/corrections to the thesis as listed in the Panel of Examiners' report.</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
3. Calon dianugerahi Ijazah Doktor Falsafah/Sarjana tertakluk kepada pindaan /pembetulan major kepada tesisnya seperti di dalam laporan Lembaga Pemeriksa. Tesis <b>PERLU</b> disemak dan disahkan oleh Panel Pemeriksa selepas calon membuat pindaan/pembetulan. <i>The candidate is awarded a PhD/Master's Degree subject to major changes/corrections to the thesis as listed in the Board of Examiners' report. The thesis <b>MUST</b> be revised and verified by the Panel of Examiners after the candidate has made the changes/corrections.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Calon dibenar menyerahkan semula tesis untuk pemeriksaan semula selepas calon membuat perubahan/pembetulan kepada tesis seperti dalam laporan Lembaga Pemeriksa. Calon juga boleh diminta menghadiri viva semula. <i>The candidate is allowed to resubmit the thesis for re-examination after the candidate has made changes/corrections to the thesis as listed in the Panel of Examiners report. The candidate maybe required to attend another viva voce.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Calon tidak memuaskan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah tetapi dicadangkan satu ijazah yang lebih rendah. <i>The candidate is not to be awarded the degree of Doctor of Philosophy but a lower degree.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Calon tidak layak dianugerahi Ijazah Doktor Falsafah/Sarjana dan juga tidak dibenarkan untuk menyerahkan semula tesis. <i>The candidate is not eligible to be awarded a PhD/Master's Degree and is not allowed to resubmit the thesis for examination.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>

1. Pass the viva.
2. Pass with minor correction.
3. Pass with major correction & require examiner verification.
4. Resubmit thesis and re-viva.
5. Not satisfactory – awarded lower degree.
6. Fail – no eligible for awarded degree & not allowed to resubmit thesis.





# Some Common Rules of Thumb

## DOs

Speak clearly and slowly to make sure that the examiners can follow you, especially when answering more complex questions.

Make eye contact and don't be too stiff. Try to show that you are enjoying the discussion.

Remain quiet after you have answered a question and give the examiners some time to think.

If you don't understand the question ask for it to be repeated or clarified instead of answering something you haven't been asked.

## DON'Ts

Don't talk incoherently and formulate answers without giving them any structure.

Don't digress in your answers or talk about things you haven't been asked.

Don't try to use jargon, especially to bluff your way out of a question you don't know.

Don't start answering before your examiners have finished the question.



# TOP 10 PHD VIVA HINTS

1

## IT'S A TEST TO PROVE THAT YOU WROTE YOUR OWN THESIS.

If you have written it yourself and your supervisor feels you are ready then you have nothing to worry about.



2

## IT'S AN 'OPEN BOOK' EXAM

It isn't a memory test so bring an annotated copy of your thesis with you and refer to it when answering questions.



3

## YOUR EXAMINERS WANT YOU TO PASS

Don't expect an easy ride, but don't expect some kind of mediaeval hand to hand combat. Try to relax.



4

## FOLLOW THE NORMAL RULES OF CONVERSATION

Listen carefully, don't interrupt but don't worry about respectfully disagreeing with your examiners.



5

## IT NORMALLY LASTS 2 HOURS

Prepare for a marathon not a sprint. Don't rush into poorly conceived answers and try to stay focused throughout.



6

## TELL A STORY OR TWO

Bring 3 or more years and 80,000 words to life but stick to the question asked and don't wander off topic.



7

## TRY TO ENJOY THE DIFFICULT QUESTIONS

Your examiners are likely to point things you haven't considered. Don't panic. Acknowledge this and explain what you did and why.



8

## KNOW WHAT A PASS IS

Failing is uncommon but passing with corrections (minor or major) is still passing.



9

## THE EXAMINERS WANT TO HEAR YOU

This is a golden opportunity to speak in depth with two senior academics about your research. Make the most of it.



10

## IT'S RARELY FATAL

Despite your anxieties, few people die during their viva. Try to be optimistic, it will be over in a flash.



@Rob\_MacIntosh



@KDOGorman






# Online Viva / Proposal Defence - Tips

1. Prior Viva – get the faculty approval for online viva/ proposal defence. Discuss with your supervisor.
2. Before viva - find a station where your internet connection is best to support long hours of online discussion. Test your computer equipment is well functioned (video, speaker, microphone). If you encountering a problem, inform the chairman.
3. During viva – follow all the instructions and give ample time for smooth conversation (2-way) for the examiner-chairman-you.
4. Make sure that all the required forms are available for you to access.



# Thank You

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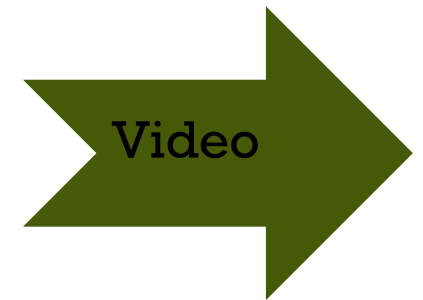
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