Writing your Thesis and Preparing for your viva

Additional Reading

- How to survive your Viva – Rowena Murray, Open University Press (ISBN 0-335-21284-0)
- The Research Student's Guide to Success, Pat Cryer, Open University Press (ISBN 0-335-20686-7)
- The Unwritten Rules of PhD Research, Gordon Rugg, Marian Petre, Open University Press (ISBN 0-335-21344-8)
- How to get a PhD, Estelle M Phillips and Derek S Pugh, Open University Press (ISBN 0-335-20550-X)
- Other sources are websites – there are many – type in "preparing for your viva"

Writing your Thesis

- Follow the rules
- Make it easy to read
- Think about the examiners
- Get it in well on time

Introduction 1

- The purpose of the viva is an oral defence of:
  - your research;
  - your knowledge of the academic area in which your research has been carried out.
- The sooner you start preparing for it the better

Introduction 2

- You need to be able to explain and defend:
  - what you have done;
  - what you know about the subject area;
  - the other research that has been carried out on this general topic; and
  - the foundations of knowledge on that topic.
- You need to demonstrate that the work is yours and that you can defend it

Prior experience

- Reflect on and then share
  - What previous experiences (a viva; the questions after a talk or poster presentation; a job interview) help you to assess yourself
  - what you learnt from it – strengths and weaknesses

  Tell the whole group.

Preparation that examiners do

- Read the Thesis;
- identify typos;
- look for material that is unclear, poorly presented or possibly wrong;
- mark every point with a post it note;
- extract key issues and select questions to explore the candidate's knowledge. Examiners may reinterpret data if appropriate.
- They may check on prior work.

Answers to some common questions

- Length of viva = from 1 to 5 h
- There may be Chairperson
- Your supervisor cannot be there
- You can make suggestions about who should be your External examiner

Questions

- Common structure
  - An area of general background that you seem strong on
  - An area of general background that appears weak;
  - A piece of research immediately prior to what you have done;
  - The key question you have been investigating and why it is important;
  - The key finding that you have made;
  - Future work – what would you do next.

Advice for during the examination

- **Don’t rush your answers.** Take your time. Have a drink of water or use phrases such as ‘That’s a good question’ to give yourself time to think.
- **Discuss.** Don’t answer questions with ‘yes’ or ‘no’, but justify your comments with examples or evidence.
- **Answer assertively** but don’t be defensive. The examiners are not there with the intention of failing you; they’re on your side.
- **Stay calm.** Don’t forget, this is the one exam where you are likely to know more about the subject than those giving the marks! The examiners want to get the best out of you. As long as you do the preparation, you’ll be fine.