



PGR tips: Preparing for the viva

The viva can be a daunting prospect but presenting and defending your research to fellow researchers, your supervisor, or at conferences will help to build your confidence.

Use the viva checklist below:

- Know your own thesis thoroughly - it might help to write a one page summary of each chapter in your thesis. Give yourself enough time to prepare
- The viva is also a test of understanding of the context in which your research took place, so make sure you're up to date
- Have a mock viva with your supervisor
- Practise with different people: friends or colleagues in your own or other disciplines, who might be better at challenging your assumptions. Ask them to interrupt you, so that you can work out how to deal with this
- Check the backgrounds of your examiners and their areas of particular interest
- Find out what your institution will ask your examiners to do in reading your thesis and examining you in the viva, and be sure you understand what they will be looking for
- Try to anticipate questions you will be asked and prepare example answers
- Think especially about results or claims that are controversial or could be open to interpretation and expect to be asked about them
- Mark the highlights in your thesis with post-its and practice working these into answers to different questions
- Have a look at 'How to survive your Viva' by Rowena Murray, Open University Press (ISBN 0-335-21284-0)

Things to take into the viva:

- Your thesis - marked with post-its if you wish
- The list of your anticipated questions and how you might respond to them
- Any notes you made in revision

During the viva

- Ask for clarification of ambiguous questions or ask for the question to be repeated if necessary
- Take time to think before answering
- Score points by mentioning very specific details, eg names, titles, journals and dates of publication, of key articles or books by key people in your field
- Be prepared to ask questions and enter into a dialogue with your examiners
- Don't be afraid to admit you don't know the answer to a question
- Be prepared to express opinions of your own

Remember that the PhD is a qualification in research and you need only to demonstrate that you have added to the knowledge-base in your subject area and that you can write and defend a book on your research.

Practice your communication and presentation skills at the Newcastle GRADschool, 18-21 September!

The Newcastle GRADschool will not only give you the opportunity to develop your communication and presentation skills but also your creativity, teamworking, networking and time management skills. You will also have the chance to share tips and experiences with other researchers. For more information and to apply visit www.grad.ac.uk/courselist