

Preparing for the postgraduate viva

What is the viva?

The viva is an oral examination in which internal and/or external examiners will ask you questions about work already completed. You will have the opportunity to talk about your work and present your ideas. It is the final assessment in a research degree. Most vivas last between one and three hours.

What will I be asked about?

You are likely to be asked to **summarise** your arguments, **explain** your methods, **discuss** your evidence, **justify** your conclusions, and **reflect** on the effectiveness of your work.

The viva often includes questions about:

- **Content:** what is your work about?
- **Methods:** what did you do? What sources did you use?
- **Results:** what did you find out?
- **Evaluation or reflection:** what is the significance or impact?

How can I prepare?

Make sure that you are familiar with the **policies and procedures** of your institution regarding the viva: [PGR thesis and examination policy](#).

Re-read your work. Re-familiarise yourself with the arguments and sources you have used.

Prepare a summary of your main points. Can you give an elevator pitch, introducing your main points and arguments in three minutes?

What is your contribution?

Think about potential questions in advance. What will examiners want to discuss? Are there any weak points or things you could have done better?

Think about **who is on your panel** and try to familiarise yourself with their work. Examiners tend to focus on areas where they have expertise. Are there any areas of your thesis that might interest your examiner especially? Have you put forward any views they might agree or disagree with? Think about some of the questions they might ask.

Look again at your sources. Are you familiar with the sources you have used and their main arguments? Can you situate your own arguments in the context of your reading?

Practice giving analytical answers. Never answer questions with yes or no. Always develop and justify your answers, giving examples and evidence.

Learning Development

Keep up to date with **current research**. Have there been publications or developments in your field since you submitted? You should be able to demonstrate familiarity with these.

Can you identify the problems with your research? You don't have to defend everything in your viva; with hindsight there are some points you may wish to concede. Show that you have considered what you could have done differently or better.

Attend the Graduate school's [Preparing for the viva workshop](#).

On the day:

- Listen to questions carefully and don't be afraid to ask for clarification.
- Make sure you bring a printed copy of the same version of your thesis the examiners have. You can refer to this during the viva and may want to markup sections you think will be useful with sticky notes.
- Stay calm: try to enjoy the process and see it as an opportunity to discuss and showcase your work.

Murray, R. (2015) *How to Survive Your Viva*. 3rd edition. Maidenhead: Open University Press.