
**PROCEDURES AND INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE EXAMINATION OF PhD THESES:
Instructions for PhD Students**

Congratulations!

Your PhD journey is coming to an end and you have reached your final major milestone: the Final Oral Examination. Earning a PhD degree is no small undertaking and you should be commended for your efforts up to this point.

General Guidelines for your Upcoming Examination

The PhD Final Oral Examination on the thesis takes the form of a brief statement by the candidate and questioning by the Examining Committee. You should prepare a statement which will take between 15 and 20 minutes to deliver. In preparing it, you should consider that you are speaking to an audience who have read your thesis. A simple summary is therefore neither necessary nor desirable. What you should endeavour to do is stress the main points of your contribution to the advancement of knowledge and the technical difficulties either of an experimental or theoretical nature which you have overcome. Notes or other aids may be used but the statement should not be read from a prepared script. Presentation slides should be numbered in the event that an Examining Committee member is unable to access the technology or connect remotely so they can follow along.

You should also be aware that the final oral defence, chaired by a representative of the Dean of Graduate Studies, is a university examination as contrasted with a departmental one, and that the Committee can involve one or more members from other departments. Our view is that in a meaningful exchange with almost any member of the academic community, a PhD candidate should be able to discuss the significance of their work, explain at least some of its details, and speculate about its implications.

For more detailed information on the defence procedures, there is an outline in Appendix 2 of our Guide for the Preparation of Theses. The web address for the Guide is: https://gs.mcmaster.ca/app/uploads/2019/10/guide_for_the_preparation_of_masters_and_doctoral_theses-december_2016.pdf

Two Styles of PhD Oral Examination

1. In Person Defence

In an Accelerated stream PhD defence, the Supervisor will identify the location of the defence. The room should have the capacity for the Examining Committee and any invited guests (if applicable). The technology in the room should include a projector and phone (if remote connection is needed for a member). **A projector is available for you to collect from Grad Studies ahead of your defence.** You will also need a computer to share your presentation (if applicable). For Standard stream defences, the location of your examination will typically be the thesis defence room in the School of Graduate Studies, located in Gilmour Hall 212/B. This room has the projector, laptop and phone needed. It is advisable to visit Grad Studies in advance of your examination to confirm that your laptop is compatible with our projector. If this is not possible, it may be a good idea to bring a flash drive with your presentation file. If the defence room is not available for your defence, an alternate location will be arranged in MUSC.

2. Online Defence

The School of Graduate Studies has established a process for addressing PhD Final Oral Examinations remotely. The expectation is that the Chair or Supervisor will set up the online web meeting using either Zoom or WebEx. Ideally, there will be a practice session in advance of your defence to test the functionality. There are two major components to the web technology for the purposes of the defence:

- **Moving in and out of the meeting** – during the “in camera” discussion of the Examining Committee including the evaluation, the student will be moved to the “waiting room” or “lobby”. You will be temporarily removed while the discussion takes place and then “admitted” back in to the meeting.
- **Changing the role of the presenter** – to facilitate your ability to present your findings and corresponding presentation files (e.g. PowerPoint), the host of the meeting will pass over the controls and you so that you can share your screen and navigate for your audience.

It is preferable for you to join the call using both audio and video so that the Examining

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Committee can see you present.

At this point, licenses through McMaster for WebEx and Zoom are available only to faculty and staff but you can request free licenses through their websites if you want a better understanding of the technology:

- WebEx - <https://www.webex.com/free-video-conferencing.html>
- Zoom - <https://zoom.us/signup>

Results of the Final Examination

During the period of “in camera” discussion, the Chair will ask the Examining Committee to vote on the success or failure of the oral defence. If the result is to reconvene the oral defence to a future date, you will be given clear direction on how to improve the defence of your thesis. If your thesis is approved conditionally, you will be given written conditions (e.g. edits to the thesis) that must be made before you can be cleared to graduate.

Becoming Cleared to Graduate

The School of Graduate Studies is responsible for assessing that you have met your degree requirements and approving you to graduate. The final steps to be completed include:

- Sign two license forms: License to McMaster University & Thesis/Dissertation Non-Exclusive License
- Complete your Final Thesis Submission Sheet
 - Decide whether or not you need to “embargo” your thesis in order to delay the publication of your full thesis to MacSphere and sign in the designated area – only the abstract will appear until the end of the embargo period
 - The signature of your Supervisor is required in two places – under the delay of publication and the corresponding box to approve changes have been made (if applicable)

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- Send all three forms to your Graduate Administrator to be uploaded to a Service Request
- Upload your thesis to MacSphere <https://macsphere.mcmaster.ca/>
 - You cannot make changes after it has been uploaded
 - Your thesis will be embargoed for the duration approved on the form (if applicable)
 - The date of your upload will be used as your cleared to graduate date
- Verify with your department that all of the remaining degree requirements and milestones for your program have been met
 - Your final thesis will be added as a milestone when you are cleared to graduate

More details on these steps can be found on our website:

<https://gs.mcmaster.ca/current-students/completing-your-degree/doctoral-degree/>

Once you are approved to graduate, you will be designated into a convocation. More details about convocation can be found through the Registrar's Office:

<https://registrar.mcmaster.ca/grad/details/>

Additional Resource

Article from Nature Research Journal - How to defend a PhD remotely:

<https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-00971-z>