Guidelines for Chairs of Final Oral Examinations
PhD and Thesis-based Masters

As the representative of the Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies, Chairs for Final Oral Examinations are responsible for the integrity of the examination. Chairs are expected to remain impartial, and have the responsibility to preside in a manner fair to students and examiners, including maintenance of decorum.

In interpreting these guidelines it is important for the Chair to distinguish between the "***examining committee***" and the "***supervisory committee***." Any reference to the "***committee***" shall be taken to be the **examining committee**.

If the student or any member of the **examining committee** is participating virtually, the Chair should familiarize themselves with the **Guidelines for Video Oral Examination**.

In the case where the candidate is supervised at the time of the examination by a **Co-Equal Supervisory Committee**, for the purposes of the Final Oral Examination, the "Supervisor" shall be that member of the **supervisory committee** named as the **Primary Contact** with the Faculty of Graduate Studies.

1. **Arrive at least 10 minutes prior to the examination start time.** Introduce yourself to the candidate and ensure that all members of the examining committee are present before the examination begins.
   a. *The examination **may not proceed** in the absence of the **candidate, the supervisor,** or the **external examiner**.*
   b. *The examination **may not proceed** in the absence of **any other member of the supervisory committee** (or their proxy) without the unanimous consent of the **candidate** and **committee members in attendance**.*
   c. *The examination **may not proceed** in the absence of more than **one** voting member of the **supervisory committee**. Proxies do not vote.*
   d. *Without an indication that all necessary individuals will arrive in a timely manner, the Chair shall **adjourn** the examination after 30 minutes, as per Outcome 4a, below.*
2. To begin the examination, **welcome all in attendance and introduce yourself** as Chair acting on behalf of the Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies. Begin with the **Territorial Acknowledgment**: "*Welcome – We acknowledge and respect the Lək̓ʷəŋən (Songhees and Xʷsepsəm/Esquimalt) Peoples on whose territory the university stands, and the Lək̓ʷəŋən and W̱SÁNEĆ Peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.*"
3. **Introduce the candidate**, including the degree being defended, and the title of the dissertation or thesis.
4. **Ask examining committee members to introduce themselves and state their role.**
5. **Review the process for all in attendance** *(read aloud points a – f)***:**
   a. In keeping with UVic's academic integrity policy, using unauthorized materials or methods during assessments, such as the use of electronic recording devices or AI tools is prohibited.
   b. The candidate will begin with a brief (10 – 20 minute) presentation summarizing their work.
   c. The **examining committee** will normally ask two rounds of questions, in the following order, with the external examiner offered the greatest relative share of time:
      (i) External examiner
      (ii) Any committee member(s) from outside the student's academic unit, or their proxy
      (iii) Committee member(s) from the student's academic unit, or their proxy
      (iv) Supervisor(s), or their proxy
   d. If time permits, the Chair may call for questions from other members of the Faculty of Graduate Studies present.
   e. If time permits, the Chair may call for questions from the audience.
   f. When questioning is complete, the candidate and the audience will be asked to withdraw so that the **examining committee** can consider the thesis and oral examination *in camera.*
6. **Conduct the Examination.** Examinations normally last from 1½ – 2 hours, including *in camera* committee discussions. While this time may be extended, the total may not exceed 2½ hours from the scheduled start.
7. **At the conclusion of questioning, thank the candidate and respectfully ask them and the audience to leave.** Only the Chair and **examining committee** members may remain.

8. Conduct post-oral discussion *in camera* to determine the Outcome. The discussion and decision of the **examining committee** shall be based on the content of the dissertation or thesis as well as the candidate's ability to defend it. ***The Chair shall not vote in any decision taken by the examining committee.***

The Chair shall begin the *in camera* discussion by advising committee members that, *allowing that some significant level of revision may be required to bring the dissertation or thesis to the required academic standard, their first duty is to determine if the dissertation or thesis and the oral examination are acceptable*. Remembering that proxies of committee members do not vote, the Chair shall take a preliminary vote of the committee, in the same order used in the questioning above:

- *Is the **oral examination acceptable?***
- *Is the **dissertation or thesis acceptable, either as presented or subject to revision?***

If the preliminary votes are not unanimous, the Chair shall facilitate a collegial discussion among the members of the committee, usually by asking members to justify their assessment and allowing members to exchange viewpoints. Remembering that proxies do not vote, the Chair shall then take the final vote:

a. *For the dissertation or thesis, or for the oral examination, to be found acceptable no more than one member of the examining committee may be opposed. The exception is if the lone vote opposed to finding acceptable EITHER the dissertation or thesis OR the oral examination is cast by the external examiner, in which case the **examination is adjourned**. See Outcome 4b, below.*
b. *If **two or more members** of the examining committee are **opposed** to finding BOTH the dissertation or thesis AND the oral examination acceptable, the student has **failed the examination** and will not be recommended for the degree. See Outcome 5, below.*
c. *If the dissertation or thesis is acceptable, but two or more members of the examining committee are opposed to finding the oral examination acceptable, the **examination is adjourned**. See Outcome 4c.*
d. *If the oral examination is acceptable, but two or more members of the examining committee do not find the thesis or dissertation acceptable, it is clear there is merit in the research not yet manifested in the written work and the **Outcome** for the thesis or dissertation shall be **Major revision**.*

If BOTH the dissertation or thesis AND the oral examination are acceptable, the Chair shall then ask the examining committee to consider the level and nature of any revisions.

The Chair shall begin this phase by informing the examining committee that it is their duty to ensure that the final form of the dissertation or thesis meets the academic standard of the field.

The Chair shall read aloud the definitions from the Outcome, below, corresponding to 1. **Editorial**, 2. **Minor**, and 3. **Major** revision, taking care to emphasize the differences between Minor and Major revision. The Chair shall then take a preliminary vote of the committee members, in the same order used in the questioning above, as to the level of revision required:

In the case where the committee is not unanimous, the Chair shall facilitate a collegial discussion among the members of the examining committee, usually by asking members to justify their assessment and allowing members to exchange viewpoints. The Chair shall then take the final vote.

In the continued absence of unanimity, deference shall be offered to those committee members requiring a greater level of academic rigour. For example, if one member recommends Major revision and the remaining members recommend Minor revision, the Outcome shall be Major revision.

In determining the Outcome, members should be mindful that in the case of Major revision the time frame and necessary revisions required shall be determined by majority vote, as described below.

9. All examining committee members sign the Chair's Report to confirm the Outcome.

10. **Invite the candidate only (not the audience) to return** to the examining room for discussion and presentation of the Outcome. *The Chair shall then read fully to the committee and candidate the remaining instructions corresponding to the determined Outcome, below, and oversee the compilation of any list of revisions, as required.*

11. **The Chair completes the Chair's Report** and returns it to Graduate Studies within two days. **The Chair's Report must contain the names and signatures of all examining committee members present:**
    a. *The Chair should sign the Chair's Report on behalf of any members participating virtually.*
    b. *The Chair shall note on the Chair's report if a committee member is absent or has been substituted.*

Guidelines for Chairs of Final Oral Examinations
PhD and Thesis-based Masters

Graduate Calendar Instructions for the Determination of Outcomes

Results of oral examinations (Dissertations and Theses)

*In the case where the student is supervised at the time of the examination by a **Co-Equal Supervisory Committee**, for the purposes of determining the Outcome of the Oral Examination and for oversight of any revision, the "Primary Supervisor" shall be that member of the supervisory committee named as the **Primary Contact** with the Faculty of Graduate Studies.*

Outcome

The decision of the examining committee shall be based on the content of the dissertation or thesis as well as the student's ability to defend it. At the conclusion of the examination, the committee shall recommend one of the following results:

1. **The dissertation or thesis is acceptable as presented or, at most, subject to Editorial changes, and the oral defence is acceptable.**

   Editorial changes include any revision that does not substantively alter the content or argument of the written work, such as correction of typographical or punctuation errors, adjusting the pagination, or moving figures or tables to be proximal to the textual reference.

   ACTIONS:

   i) All members of the examining committee sign the Thesis/Dissertation Approval Form (brought to examination by the Primary Supervisor) and the Chair's Report.

   ii) The Primary Supervisor shall review and approve all editorial changes.

   iii) The Chair of the academic unit and the student's Primary Supervisor shall sign the academic unit's Letter of Recommendation.

2. **The dissertation or thesis is acceptable subject to Minor revision and the oral defence is acceptable.**

   Minor revisions are more than correction of typographical or punctuation errors. Typical examples of Minor revisions include clarification of textual material, the qualification of research findings or conclusions, the addition of supplemental bibliographic references and their acknowledgement in the primary text, or minor additions that improve the reading and understanding of the dissertation or thesis.

   ACTIONS:

   i) All members of the examining committee sign the Chair's Report.

   ii) All members of the examining committee except the Primary Supervisor sign the Thesis/Dissertation Approval Form.

   iii) The Chair ensures that all members of the examining committee forward or commit to forwarding their corrections to the Primary Supervisor and/or student. This shall usually take the form of a written list or an annotated dissertation or thesis from each member.

   iv) The Primary Supervisor is responsible for ensuring that the revisions are satisfactorily completed. In the case where the committee members' suggested minor revisions are not in agreement, the Primary Supervisor shall determine the appropriate revision to be made with deference given, if possible, to the external examiner's revisions.

   v) The Primary Supervisor signs the Thesis/Dissertation Approval Form and the Letter of Recommendation when the dissertation or thesis has been revised to meet the committee's requirements.

3. **The dissertation or thesis is acceptable subject to Major revision and the oral defence is acceptable**

   Major revisions are those of sufficient scope to warrant further review of the thesis or dissertation by the entire examining committee. *A few examples of when a dissertation or thesis is acceptable subject to major revisions and the oral examination is acceptable include:*

   - *the student has convinced the examining committee of the validity of the research results during the oral examination but has failed substantively to express this in the dissertation or thesis, and the dissertation or thesis must be restructured.*
   - *the dissertation or thesis requires that substantive revisions or additional new work be undertaken to meet the standard expected of the credential sought.*

   Note that while Major revision may include any number of minor revisions, a large number of minor revisions do not in themselves constitute Major revision.

   ACTIONS:

   i) All members of the examining committee sign the Chair's Report.

   ii) No one on the examining committee signs the Thesis/Dissertation Approval Form at the examination.

   iii) After consultation with the student, the maximum length of time permitted for the revisions (not to be less than 12 weeks and not to exceed one year) shall be set by majority vote of the committee. In the case where no recommendation receives a majority, the longest proposed time limit shall be accepted.

   iv) **The general nature of each necessary revision** shall be set, one at a time, by majority vote of the committee. In the case of a tied vote, the requested revision shall be deemed necessary. The **final list of necessary revisions** must be provided to the student at the conclusion of the examination. *No examiner may later require any further revision to the dissertation or thesis.*

   v) The Primary Supervisor oversees all revisions, and may seek the advice of other members of the examining committee, as appropriate.

   vi) When the Primary Supervisor agrees that the **necessary revisions** to the dissertation or thesis have been made and are complete, the Primary Supervisor shall distribute the revised dissertation or thesis to the rest of the examining committee without unnecessary delay and at least 4 weeks before the expiration of the time limit for revision.

   vii) Once the entire committee agrees that the **necessary revisions** have been made and are complete, the Primary Supervisor ensures that each member signs the Thesis/Dissertation Approval Form.

   viii) If the time limit for revision has expired and two or more members of the examination committee do not agree that the **necessary revisions** to the dissertation or thesis have been made and are complete, the student will not be recommended for the degree (*see* 5. Failure, *below*).

   ix) If the time limit for revision has expired and one and only one member of the examination committee does not agree that the **necessary revisions** to the dissertation or thesis have been made and are complete, the Dean of Graduate Studies will sign for the single member opposed.

   x) Once the Thesis/Dissertation Approval form has been signed, the head of the academic unit and the student's Primary Supervisor sign the Letter of Recommendation.

4. **The examination is Adjourned**

   This result should not be confused with Failure (*see* 5. Failure, *below*). Adjournment may be called for three different types of circumstances:

a. A sudden illness or personal emergency that does not allow for the examination to be completed; an external environmental situation arises that forces the examination to be prematurely terminated (such as fire alarm, power failure, or civil emergency); or when the technology being used breaks down and cannot be repaired in time to continue the examination.

ACTIONS:

i) All members of the examining committee sign the Chair's Report.

ii) The Chair shall make a written report to the Dean of Graduate Studies within three (3) working days of the date of the oral examination.

iii) The Dean of Graduate Studies shall set a date for reconvening the examination, which shall occur without unnecessary delay and no later than six months from the date of the first examination.

iv) The student may not revise the dissertation or thesis before the reconvened examination.

b. The external examiner casts the lone vote against finding acceptable EITHER dissertation or thesis OR the oral examination.

ACTIONS:

i) All members of the examining committee sign the Chair's Report.

ii) Each member of the examining committee shall make a written report to the Dean of Graduate Studies within 10 working days of the date of the oral examination.

iii) The Dean of Graduate Studies will set a date for reconvening the examination which, while taking into account that a new external examiner may need to be secured, shall nevertheless be no later than six months from the date of the first examination.

iv) The Dean shall determine whether or not the composition of the original committee is appropriate for the reconvened examination.

v) The student, with the permission and advice of the supervisory committee, may choose to revise the dissertation or thesis before resubmitting the document for examination. In this case, the student must submit a new Request for Oral Examination in order to attest that the supervisory committee has approved all revisions.

c. The thesis is acceptable but the student has failed the oral defence.

ACTIONS:

i) All members of the examining committee sign the Chair's Report.

ii) Each member of the examining committee shall make a written report to the Dean of Graduate Studies within 10 working days of the date of the oral examination.

iii) The Dean of Graduate Studies will set a date for reconvening the examination, which shall be no later than six months from the date of the first examination.

iv) The Dean of Graduate Studies shall determine whether or not the composition of the original committee is appropriate for the reconvened examination.

v) The student may not revise the dissertation or thesis before the reconvened examination.

5. **The examination is Failed.**

If two or more members of the examining committee are opposed to finding BOTH the dissertation or thesis AND the oral examination acceptable, the student will not be recommended for the degree.

ACTIONS:

i) All members of the examining committee sign the Chair's Report.

ii) The examining committee shall collectively make a written report to the Dean of Graduate Studies within 14 calendar days of the date of the oral examination outlining the reasons for the failure. Members of the examining committee who disagree with the outcome may submit separate reports to the Dean.

iii) A student who fails an oral examination has the right to appeal and may consult with the Dean of Graduate Studies regarding the appropriate procedures.

iv) Under exceptional circumstances, upon the advice of one or more committee members and of the head of the student's home academic unit the Dean of Graduate Studies may set aside the determined Outcome of "Fail" and sign the Thesis Approval Form and the Letter of Recommendation on behalf of the Primary Supervisor.

v) A student who is not recommended for the degree by the examining committee is ineligible for readmission to a graduate program in the same academic unit and will receive a failing grade.