

Your Role as an Arm's Length Examiner for a PhD candidate:

Thank you very much for sharing your valuable time and expertise with us in this manner. Your contribution is essential to the success of our graduate programs. Please note, an arm's length examiner must attend the defense either in person or *via* audio, video, or computer conferencing.

If, on reading the dissertation or thesis, you find that it meets the required standard **please indicate clearly that you recommend that this dissertation go to defense.** In this case, please send your report(s) to fgssec2@uvic.ca **no later than ten (10) working days prior to the oral examination.**

However, if, on reading the dissertation or thesis, you have **SERIOUS DOUBTS** about whether it meets the required standard we ask that you communicate your concerns directly to the [Dean of Graduate Studies](#) **AT LEAST TWO WEEKS (14 days) PRIOR TO THE SCHEDULED EXAMINATION DATE.** In this case, the Dean may choose to delay the oral examination until the most significant issues have been resolved.

We respectfully request that the arm's length examiner not contact the student or the supervisor(s) or any other member of the examining committee before the oral examination.

Examination of the Dissertation

Your first task is to carefully **examine the dissertation** and **prepare a written assessment** of it. As you review and write your report on the dissertation, you may want to consider the following questions:

- Is the research question sufficiently original? If so, please comment on those aspects of the dissertation that make the most significant contribution.
- Is the methodology used appropriate and has it been applied correctly?
- Explain briefly how the scope of the research is appropriate to the field.
- Are the results of the research clearly presented?
- In your opinion, would this research be of interest to the general public? If so, please explain which aspects of the study would be important and why.
- The external examiner's report is valued when considering dissertations for awards. Given your experience, would you rank this dissertation in the top 2%, 5% or 10%? If yes, why?
- Please include any other comments or concerns using whatever space is necessary.

In addition you may wish to include, as part of your report to the Dean, specific notes and comments for the student, e.g., grammar & typos, additional citations, other minor corrections. Your report, once approved by the Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies, will be provided to the supervisor and the chair of the examination, a week prior to the defence. It will only be available to the student after the examination has ended.

You may also wish to provide optional, separate and confidential comments to the Dean. If you wish to do so please attach your comments as a separate file marked 'Confidential to the Dean.'

Conduct of the Oral Examination

1. The **Chair introduces him or herself.**
2. The **Chair introduces the candidate.**
3. The **Chair asks the examining committee members to introduce themselves.**
4. The **Chair reviews the process.**
5. The **examination is conducted** (*normally lasts from 1 ½ - 2 hours*):
 - a. Candidate begins with a brief (10—20 minutes) summary of work
 - b. Examining committee asks two rounds of questions
 - Examiner begins each round
 - Committee member(s) from outside the academic unit questions the candidate

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- Committee member(s) from the academic unit then questions the candidate
 - Supervisor goes last
- c. If there is sufficient time, other members of the Faculty of Graduate Studies may ask questions
- d. If there is sufficient time, members of the audience may ask questions
- e. When questioning is completed, the candidate and the audience withdraw so that the examining committee can consider the thesis and defense *in camera*.
6. **Post-oral discussion *in camera***
The discussion and decision of the examining committee should be based on the content of the dissertation as well as the candidate's ability to defend it.
7. The **committee chooses an outcome** from the options listed below.
8. The **candidate is asked to return** to the examining room and the results are discussed.
9. The **members of the examining committee sign the Thesis/Dissertation Approval form** (brought to the exam by the supervisor).

Possible outcomes of the oral examination

1. **The dissertation or thesis is acceptable subject to editorial changes as presented and the oral defense is acceptable.**

ACTION: All members of the examining committee sign the Thesis/Dissertation approval form (brought to exam by supervisor).

2. **The dissertation or thesis is acceptable subject to minor revisions and the oral defense is acceptable.**

Minor revisions are more than corrections of typographical or punctuation errors. Typical examples of minor revisions include: clarification of textual material, the qualification of research findings or conclusions, or minor additions that improve the reading and understanding of the dissertation or thesis.

ACTIONS:

- i) All members of the examining committee except the supervisor sign the Thesis/Dissertation approval form (brought to exam by supervisor).
- ii) All members of the examining committee draw up a list of required revisions.
- iii) The supervisor is responsible for ensuring that the revisions are satisfactorily completed.
- iv) The supervisor signs the Thesis/Dissertation Approval Form and the Letter of Recommendation when the dissertation or thesis had been revised to meet the committee's requirements.

3. **The dissertation or thesis is acceptable subject to major revisions and the oral defense is acceptable**

An example of when a dissertation or thesis is acceptable subject to major revisions and the oral defense is acceptable might be when a candidate has orally convinced the examining committee of the validity of the research results but has failed substantively to express this in the dissertation or thesis.

ACTIONS:

- i) No one on the examining committee signs the Thesis/Dissertation Approval form.
- ii) The Chair makes a detailed and complete record of the required major revisions as agreed to by majority vote of the examining committee and provides this to the student at the conclusion of the examination.
- iii) After consultation with the candidate, the maximum length of time permitted for the revisions shall be set by majority vote of the committee, but shall not exceed one year from the date of the oral examination.
- iv) The supervisor oversees the major revisions.
- v) When the dissertation or thesis is acceptable to the supervisor, s/he distributes it to the remaining members of the examining committee.
- vi) When it is acceptable to the entire committee, the supervisor ensures that each committee member signs the Thesis/Dissertation Approval Form.
- vii) The head of the academic unit and the student's supervisor sign the Letter of Recommendation.

4. **The examination is adjourned.**

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

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

ACTIONS:

- i) 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.
- ii) The Dean will set a date for reconvening the examination. The date for reconvening shall be no later than six months from the date of the first examination.

- *Where the external examiner casts the lone dissenting vote.*

ACTIONS:

- i) 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.
- ii) The Dean will set a date for reconvening the examination. The Dean shall also determine whether or not the composition of the original committee is appropriate for the reconvened examination. The date for reconvening shall be no later than six months from the date of the first examination.

- *Where the thesis is acceptable but the student has failed the oral defense.*

ACTIONS:

- i) 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.
- ii) The Dean will set a date for reconvening the examination. The Dean shall also determine whether or not the composition of the original committee is appropriate for the reconvened examination. The date for reconvening shall be no later than six months from the date of the first examination.

5. The examination is failed.

If two or more members of the examining committee are opposed to passing the student, the student will not be recommended for the degree.

ACTIONS:

- i) The examining committee collectively makes a written report to the Dean of Graduate Studies within 14 calendar days of the date of the oral exam outlining the reasons for the failure.
- ii) A student who fails an oral exam has the right to appeal and may consult with the Dean of Graduate Studies regarding the appropriate procedures.