



How to prepare for your viva

Once your thesis has been submitted the focus turns to the viva which can often be a daunting challenge. A well planned approach and careful preparation will help reduce the anxiety and confusion sometimes felt and this is crucial to a positive and successful outcome.

Remember your examiners are not trying to trick you or catch you out, the purpose of the viva is to establish that the work is your own, that you can do research independently, that you have a good knowledge of the field and that you have made a useful contribution to furthering knowledge in the field. Here are some tips to help you prepare:

1. Your examiners will have been appointed well ahead of your viva; they may even be appointed before you submit your thesis. Do your research on your examiners. Think about what they may be interested in about your work and what their angle might be.

2. Talk to other researchers who have recently been through the process.

3. Check out the Completing Your Doctorate section of the Vitae website (www.vitae.ac.uk/researchers/1239/completingyour-doctorate.html).

4. Reread and revise your thesis. This will allow you to approach your viva with maximum confidence. Be prepared to talk about the highlights of your thesis. Prepare a one sentence summary of each chapter. Think about the key authors you refer to and their work.

5. Prepare your defence. Plan answers to likely questions and rehearse them. Prepare to introduce topics you would like to discuss should you get the opportunity to bring them into the discussion.

6. Take part in a mock-viva if your supervision team has arranged one and if they haven't ask them to. This has proved to be a valuable and effective way of preparing for your viva.

7. Approach the whole day by planning it ahead of time. What image will you present? What will you wear? Wear something you are comfortable in, and that presents the image you want to portray. What will you do before the examination? Ensure you have planned how to get to your viva and have given yourself plenty of time. What will you do afterwards? Who will you contact?

8. Know what to expect on the day. Usually, the Chair will introduce everyone and examiners will welcome you and introduce themselves (they will probably tell you a little about themselves although you may already know this if you have done some preparation beforehand). The structure of the examination will be explained to you. Examiners may start things off by giving you the chance to say a little about yourself and may ask a question like: Tell us a little about yourself or what was the highlight of your programme of research?

9. During your viva, speak slowly and clearly. Take a deep breath before you answer and smile.

10. Finally, remember that you have done a considerable amount of very valuable research and that you are one of the foremost world experts in this specialised area. You will know more about your research than anyone else in the examination room!

