



Office of Graduate Programs
University of Northern British Columbia
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GUIDELINES FOR CONDUCTING ORAL DEFENCES FOR MASTERS DEGREES

The Chair's role is to ensure that the defence is conducted fairly, in an orderly and timely fashion, and with appropriate attention and discussion being given to evaluating the quality of the thesis and defence with respect to national standards in the discipline.

The defence is usually two hours in length, including the candidate presentation, questions from examiners and in-camera deliberation.

Normal defence procedure is as follows:

Pre-defence, Introduction & Presentation

Arrive at the defence approximately ten minutes prior to the start time. Introduce yourself to the candidate and the examining committee members. Begin the defence on time.

The Chair convenes the defence, welcomes the candidate, examiners and the audience, and outlines the process to be followed.

The Chair asks the people in attendance to turn off their cell phones and any other device that may disrupt the examination.

The Chair ensures NO recording equipment (of any type) has been set up at the defence (unless pre-authorized by the Dean of Graduate Programs in advance of the scheduled date)

The Chair introduces the supervisor, then the supervisor introduces the examining committee members, the candidate and the thesis topic the Chair asks the candidate to make a presentation of the results. Normally the student presentation is within a time span of 20 to 25 minutes. This normally equates to between 20 and 25 PowerPoint slides.

After the presentation, provide the candidate and committee time to settle in and allow for the audience members to leave.

Question Period

After the presentation, the Chair introduces the question period which will normally be a maximum of two hours in duration. The initial questioner will be the external examiner followed, if required, thereafter by the members of the supervisory committee. It is recommended that there will be two rounds of questions in total by all members of the examining committee, followed by a final opportunity for the external examiner to ask any outstanding questions.

Throughout questioning, the Chair ensures that the questions are on the research topic, are clear, and fairly examine the candidate on the topic represented in the research document.

At the end of questions from the examining committee and, if time permits, the Chair invites questions from the audience.

Post-Question Period

Thereafter, the Chair asks the audience and the candidate to withdraw, instructing the candidate to remain nearby while the examining committee deliberates.

In-Camera Deliberation Meeting

In opening the committee deliberations the Chair asks examining committee members to evaluate the candidate's work relative to their perceptions of national standards of performance in the discipline. An extra ½ hour is booked for the room in case extensive deliberations need to occur for the committee to reach a decision.

The Chair then distinguishes between a clear pass (see attached definition), pass with minor revisions (those that are to be made through discussion between the candidate and supervisor), a pass with major revisions (those that the entire committee must review and approve before the passing grade is awarded), an adjournment (i.e., further research or experimentation is required, etc) or a fail.

The Chair then invites, beginning with the external examiner and ending with the supervisor, each member of the examining committee to give their assessment of the candidate's work and their verdict. The Chair records the discussion, including remarks by the examining committee, their verdict and necessary corrections to be made, if any, by the candidate.

If there are discrepant verdicts the Chair facilitates discussion, always ensuring fair consideration of all viewpoints and orderly discussion.

If, after discussion, discrepant verdicts remain, the Chair will summarize the discussion and the distribution of verdicts. The Chair will also recommend a global verdict and poll the committee whether all members agree with the recommended global verdict. The majority shall prevail. In the case of an irreconcilable tie the Chair will suspend deliberations and confer, as soon as possible, with the Dean of Graduate Programs. The Dean will reconvene the committee at the earliest possible opportunity to reach a clear verdict.

The Chair asks Examining Committee members to sign one copy of the approval page if appropriate (i.e. clear pass, pass with minor revisions) with the pen that is provided. The student's supervisor does not sign the approval page until all required revisions are made, unless a clear pass.

If the Examining Committee determines any required revisions and change to the title of the thesis/project, must be indicated on the *Result of Oral Examination Form*. If there is a change to the title and the result of the defence is a clear pass or a pass with minor revisions, then have the appropriate people sign off on the Approval Page (the Approval Page does not change, even if the title changes) and the Office of Graduate Programs will note a change in title.

Post In-Camera Meeting

The Chair invites the candidate to return, and informs the candidate of the global verdict (i.e. clear pass, pass with minor revisions, etc) reached by the committee in the presence of the examiners. Then the revisions should be outlined to the candidate that is indicated on the *Result of Oral Examination Form*; the Candidate must sign the form as well.

New: The Chair must sign the *Result of Oral Examination Form*.

After the Oral Examination has ended, the Chair delivers the verdict, approval page, and thesis box containing name plates and pens, to the Office of Graduate Programs.