

THESIS EXAMINATION

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Thesis Examination

- By the time you have listened to this talk you will understand:
- The nature of Australian thesis examination process
- What you need to do for your thesis to be examined
- How to respond to examiners' recommendations

Examination process

- Doctoral and masters theses are examined by at least 2 external examiners.
 - Doctoral theses can be examined by 3 examiners
 - Most theses examined by 2 external examiners
- Each examiner normally provided with e-thesis
- Examiners are asked to submit:
 - summative recommendation + formative narrative report
- Examiners asked to submit report within 6 weeks and GRS makes every effort to ensure this happens
- Examiners can be recalcitrant and it may be necessary to appoint replacement examiner

Choosing examiners

- At or before Pre-Completion Evaluation, candidate and Advisory Panel jointly identify a pool of 4-5 possible examiners
- Final examiners selected from this pool by Dean of College (or their nominee)
- If candidate has concerns about any potential examiner, advise GRS in writing
- Advisory Panel required to confirm in writing that the nominated examiners have no conflicts of interest with **candidate, Advisory Panel or JCU** (checked by GRS independently and in formal letter inviting them to be thesis examiner)
- Final examiners approved by Dean, Graduate Research

Including an oral examination: Why?

- Unlikely to change outcome but
- Educationally rewarding and personally satisfying finale to your candidacy
- Benefit of advice from an external expert in the field of the thesis who has read the thesis
- Clarification of points of principle or of detail in the thesis
- Assessment of candidate's contribution to the content and presentation of the thesis (important if you include multi-authored papers)
- A firm deadline for the preparation of examiners' reports
- Norm in many countries
- Under consideration at many universities in Australia

Including an oral examination: What's involved

- At least one examiner must agree to participate in the oral examination on the agreed date prior to agreeing to examine the thesis.
- A copy of thesis sent to the examiners as per standard procedure
- Each examiner's report includes questions to be asked during the oral examination
- Questions provided to candidate prior to the oral examination which may be conducted in person or by telecommunications
- Oral examination attended by a trained facilitator, at least one examiner and candidate and normally lasts 1-2 hours

Thesis submission

- Submit an electronic copy (PDF) of your thesis to the HDR Administrator, in your College.
- Complete forms that must be submitted with the thesis
- GRS will then formally approach the nominated examiners when they receive the thesis + forms
- GRS will advise when the thesis has been sent to examiners
- All communication regarding the examination(s) of the thesis must be through GRS

What examiners do?

- (1) be broadly consistent
- (2) expect a thesis to pass
- (3) judge a thesis by the end of the first or second chapter
- (4) read a thesis as an academic reader and as a normal reader
- (5) be irritated and distracted by presentation errors
- (6) favour a coherent thesis
- (7) favour a thesis that engages with the literature
- (8) favour a thesis with a convincing approach
- (9) favour a thesis that engages with the findings
- (10) require a thesis to be publishable
- (11) give summative and formative feedback

Examiners' recommendations: 1684 JCU reports

%NA	%MA	%SA (A)	% PASS	%SA (B)	%RR	%SA (B)+RR	%F
22	43	26	91%	4	5	8	1

Fate of candidates in which at least one examiner recommends Revise and Resubmit

- Of 87 HDR candidates who received grades of RR or Fail
- 16 (18%) have taken out different degree, withdrawn or not done the corrections
- Much safer to get your thesis right before submission rather than leave it the examiners

Examiners' reports

- When all examiners' reports received by GRS, usually released immediately to candidate unless one or both of the examiners recommend:
 - 'passages to be revised to the satisfaction of the examiner'
 - 'revise and resubmit'
- In such cases, reports usually released to candidate via Primary Advisor, who should talk with candidate about them
- If an examiner recommends 'fail' (very rare), the reports will go to the Research Education Sub-Committee (Executive) first

Responding to examiners' reports

- All examiners recommend PASS
 - Candidates makes recommended amendments prior to submitting a final thesis copy to Dean of College (or nominee) for checking and signoff.
 - Summarise amendments preferably in a table with the following format: examiner's recommendation:
 - referenced page number in original thesis copy
 - candidate's response, and referenced page number in revised thesis copy.
 - If candidate disagrees with a recommendation of an examiner they can refute it in a neutral tone

Examiners ask to see revised thesis

- Revised passages for checking by examiner
 - Respond as for all examiners requesting pass
 - Take particular care to ensure that summary response is neutral in tone and suitable for return to the examiner.
- Revise and re-submit for further examination
 - Candidature Committee invited to work with candidate to develop rejoinder to the examiners' reports for the University's Research Education Sub-Committee (Executive), who will consider the examiners' reports and the evaluative statement before deciding on the next steps
 - In most such cases, the candidate will be required to revise and resubmit their thesis for further examination. Rejoinder will be sent to the examiner(s) requesting 'revise and resubmit' with revised thesis and table of revisions unless they advise that they will be unavailable

Examiner's make different recommendations

- If discrepancies cannot be resolved, the University's Research Education Sub-Committee (Executive) may invite an adjudicator to evaluate the examiners' reports
- Adjudicator not an additional examiner
- JCU normally seeks additional examiner only if one or more examiners submit an inadequate report (rare)
- Under these circumstances, the Research Education Sub-Committee (Executive) may decide that the inadequate report(s) be set aside

Important information

Go to the GRS website and read:

- HDR Thesis Format Guidelines
- HDR Thesis Submission Procedure
- HDR Nomination of Examiners Procedure
- HDR Examination Procedure
- HDR Thesis Examination - Conflict of Interest Procedure
- HDR Consideration of Examiners' Reports Procedure
- Evaluative Statement to RESC on Behalf on HDR Candidate
- Framework (Template) for Response to Examiners' Comments
- Summary Sheets for Thesis Examiners