



NUI Galway
OÉ Gaillimh

PhD *Viva* Guide

A Springboard for your PhD *Viva* Preparation



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Author's Preface

Few students realize why there are external and internal examiners, and what they are supposed to do ... or how long the whole process from submission to viva may take (Delamont et al., 2004, p. 141).

This guide aims to support PhD students in preparing for their oral examination, the *viva voce*. The motivation for developing such a resource is borne out of the recognition that PhD candidates' understanding of the *viva* process may be uneven. Although they are directed to sources about the PhD process, candidates experience considerable tension and fear around the preparation for their *viva*; it is the "indeterminacy of thesis examination" that worries candidates (Rudestam and Newton, 2001, p. 148). Unsurprisingly, PhD candidates seek reassurance their approach to the *viva* is adequate. Hence, this guide aims to demystify the process by compiling useful advice from a variety of texts to serve as a springboard for their *viva* preparation.

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Dean's Preface

This booklet is one in a series¹ developed within NUI Galway to support graduate students in their journey towards their PhD. We are delighted Dr. Torres wrote this booklet taking into consideration best practice internationally and the local guidelines for research degree programmes. I am sure you will find this booklet helpful as you prepare for your *viva*. Please consult our website (www.nuigalway.ie/graduatestudies) and Blackboard site (1GST1) for additional resources.

Dr. Pat Morgan

Dean of Graduate Studies

National University of Ireland Galway

¹ *Postgraduate Student Guide, 2010*

University Guidelines for Research Degree Programmes (2011)

Communicating Research: Understanding Knowledge Transfer Opportunities
Guide to writing a PhD Thesis: For Engineering, Medical & Science Graduates

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Purpose of the *Viva*

The PhD is not meant to be flawless and definitive. It is a research training. It is a 'master piece' in the old guild sense of the carefully-done job which shows that an apprentice is now qualified to practice this trade (Connell, 1985, p. 38 as cited in Leonard, 2001, p. 237).

The *viva voce*, which translates from Latin as *living voice* (Rugg and Petre, 2004), represents the culmination of the doctoral experience. The *viva*, also referred to as the oral defence or the oral examination, is a long-standing tradition, which provides the PhD candidate with the opportunity to speak publicly about their research by demonstrating their ability to advocate and justify their research (Roberts, 2004). It is an opportunity for candidates to be at their *best*, as they are *the* experts in *their* research (Burton and Steane, 2004).

From a holistic perspective, the *viva* is not only an examination, but also a “formative and highly educational” component in the candidate’s academic

apprenticeship (Pearce, 2005, p. 79). Moreover, it is deemed “appropriate that the entry to an academic career should include a requirement to be clear and articulate and to defend one’s ideas when challenged” (Leonard, 2001, p. 241).

From the examiners’ perspective, the purpose of the *viva* is to assess the candidate’s research as a piece of high-level scholarship. The examiners seek to ensure the candidate’s research is authentic – that is, it is the candidate’s own work, to locate it in a wider academic context, and to assess how it contributes to the literature (Lee, 2012; Delamont *et al.*, 2004). The *viva* is also an opportunity for the examiners to

clarify aspects of the candidate's research, as well as to assess the candidate's ability to critique and analyse. Critical thinking is the essence of the doctorate, as the research process requires the candidate to solve a series of problems and to reflect how each stage may progress towards addressing the research question. Hence, the examiners seek evidence of the candidate's ability to conceptualise findings, develop theoretical frameworks, synthesise ideas, and to establish links among constructs (Lee, 2012).

The University's criteria for awarding a PhD relate to whether a candidate's research:

- Has made a significant contribution to understanding and knowledge
- Has completed work that is suitable for publication in whole or in part
- Can display an appropriate depth and breadth of knowledge and understanding of the relevant field(s) of study
- Has gained significant expertise with respect to basic and advanced methodologies and techniques

(NUI Galway Guidelines, 2011, Sec. 6.1).

Although, "evidence as to whether ... these criteria are met is found in the thesis, ... the oral examination is critical ... [in confirming] the required standards have been achieved (NUI Galway Guidelines, 2011, Sec 6.1).

What to Expect

[The] viva will consist of a panel comprising of [the] internal and external examiners, [the] supervisor ... and a neutral chair. The one universal principle is that thesis and student are examined by someone who has not yet been involved in the project (Murray, 2009, p. 44).

Supervisors, Examiners and the Chair

The candidate's primary supervisor is responsible for making the necessary arrangements for the examination process. The primary supervisor works with the examiners, one internal and one external, as well as the chair in confirming a date for the *viva*, which should be within two months of the candidate's submission of their thesis (NUI Galway Guidelines, 2011, Sec. 6.4). The chair is independent and is not an examiner; the chair's role is to ensure the *viva* is managed fairly and according to the University's PhD regulations. For example, at the beginning of the

examination, the chair formally introduces the parties present and outlines the regulations and procedures attached to the *viva*.

The internal and external examiners are responsible for assessing the candidate's thesis, as well as the *viva voce*. The internal examiner is an academic staff member who has the requisite expertise and experience (NUI Galway Guidelines, 2011, Sec. 6.3.2). The external examiner should also have expertise in the candidate's field of study and be an academic staff member in a University outside of the NUI system (NUI Galway

Guidelines, 2011, Sec. 6.3.3). “Because of their specific expertise, external examiners have a critical role and normally lead the oral examination process” (NUI Galway Guidelines, 2011, Sec. 6.3.2).

Either of the candidate’s supervisors, primary or secondary, may attend the *viva* subject to the agreement of the examiners, chair and the student (NUI Galway Guidelines, 2011, Sec. 6.3.3). However, the supervisor neither participates nor intervenes in the examination process and may only observe the *viva* proceedings. Further, the supervisor is expected to leave during the examiners’ final deliberations (NUI Galway Guidelines, 2011, Sec. 6.3.3). The supervisor’s presence in the *viva* may be reassuring; and the supervisor may also be helpful by taking notes of the proceedings for the candidate’s benefit (Russell, 2008). It is also important to note the candidate is

consulted about the selection of the external and internal examiners, as well as the chair. Further, the candidate may object to the appointment of a suggested examiner or chair (NUI Galway Guidelines, 2011, Sec. 6.3.2 & 6.3.4).

Further information about the roles of supervisors, examiners and the chair during the *viva* process may be found in Murray (2009; see *Chapter 3 Roles and Responsibilities*); Pearce (2005; see *Chapter 5 The Viva*) and Delamont *et al.* (2004; see *Chapter 9 A Lack of Genuine Interest: Choosing the Right External and Preparing the Student for the Examination*).

Duration, Location and Possible Outcomes

The length of the *viva* may vary; though, it is reasonable to expect the examination will be at least one hour and not more than three hours in duration (NUI Galway Guidelines, 2011, Sec. 6.4). The *viva* is usually held on campus and it is preferable for all examiners to be physically present (NUI Galway Guidelines, 2011, Sec. 6.4).

The examiners are expected to give the candidate feedback as soon as it is feasible. After the question and answer discussion, it is customary to ask the candidate to step outside while the examiners deliberate. This period of deliberation may be as short as a few minutes or as long as an hour (Sternberg, 1981). Naturally, to the candidate, this period of deliberation may seem unbearably long. The chair will invite the candidate to return and the examiners will give informal oral feedback as to their recommendations to the Standing

Committee of Academic Council, which is the body that makes the award. The broad elements included in the examiners' reports and the possible outcomes to the examination process are outlined in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1 : Elements of the Examiners' Report

The contribution the work performed makes to knowledge and scholarship.

Candidate's capacity for original and critical thought, and depth and breadth of knowledge and understanding of the relevant field(s) of study, including performance at the *viva*.

Candidate's expertise with respect to relevant methodologies and techniques.

The extent to which the thesis contains matter suitable for publication.

The structure, written style and overall presentation of the thesis.

The nature of corrections to the thesis required, if any.

Adapted from EOG 031 NUI Galway Guidelines, 2011, p. 57.

Table 2 : PhD Examination Process: Possible Outcomes

| Possible Outcomes | Nature of Corrections (Time Limits) |
|-------------------------------|--|
| <i>Award PhD</i> | None |
| | Typographical corrections (1 month) |
| | Minor corrections in content (1 month) |
| | Major corrections in content (3 months) |
| <i>Refer</i> | Permit submission of a revised thesis <i>without</i> a second <i>viva</i> (1 year) |
| | Permit submission of a revised thesis <i>with</i> a second <i>viva</i> (1 year) |
| <i>Award a Masters Degree</i> | None |
| | Subject to typographical corrections |
| | Subject to corrections in content |
| <i>Reject</i> | No recommendation as to resubmission |

Adapted from EOG 031 NUI Galway Guidelines, 2011, p. 58.

Possible Outcomes

The outcomes range from *award, as is to reject, with no recommendation for resubmission*. “Outright failure is uncommon, but not unknown” (Delamont *et al.*, 2004, p. 158). Such a scenario normally reflects a major weakness or problem that is known to the supervisors and the candidate prior to submission of the thesis. In principle, failure at the *viva* is avoidable. In conducting their research, candidates should follow their supervisors’ advice. In addition, candidates should present their research in seminars and publications in advance of their *viva* as a means of highlighting possible oversights (Rugg and Petre, 2004).

The majority of candidates are successful and many are asked to make some form of amendments to their thesis. Please note, the PhD “candidate may not graduate until the revised thesis, incorporating the required changes as confirmed by the internal examiner(s), has been lodged with the Examinations Office” (NUI Galway Guidelines, 2011, Sec. 6.6). Hence, a candidate may not officially use the title, *Dr.*, until the corrections have been made, accepted, and registered with the examinations office, all of which indicate the University has awarded the degree to the candidate.



Preparation is Key

A candidate must prepare for the defense in three areas: 1. total mastery of the substance of the [thesis]; 2. packaging of the [thesis] for the social ritual of the formal defense; 3. cultivation of a set of self-protective and realistic attitudes about the defense which will carry the [candidate] through both the predefense period and defense itself with relative equanimity (Sternberg, 1981, p. 196).

The candidate's performance during the *viva* may be as important as the written thesis. The examiners will have assessed the thesis prior to the *viva*, however, "a strong performance at the *viva* could sway them if they were unconvinced about parts of the [candidate's] thesis. Equally, a weak performance might make them question their inclination towards passing the candidate" (Russell, 2008, p. 122). Please note, the criteria for assessing a candidate's *viva* performance is admittedly vague. Nonetheless, examiners seek to establish whether the candidate can engage in a

discourse about their research. In this respect, the candidate can prepare for the *viva* by: submitting a polished thesis, reading the University's policies and procedures, reviewing the logistics for the oral defence, participating in a mock *viva*, preparing and answering potential *viva* questions.

The Written Thesis

[Candidates] rarely appreciate how long it takes to proofread a text ... they must find a friend and read the whole thing aloud, punctuation and all, especially checking the tables, figures, and data (Delamont et al., 2004, p. 155).

Ideally, preparation for the *viva* should begin prior to submitting the thesis. Indeed, the thesis should only be submitted when the candidate, the supervisors and the members of the Graduate Research Committee (GRC) believe the research is substantially complete and reflects high-quality scholarship (Roberts, 2004). In this respect, the candidate should aim to submit an *excellent* draft of their thesis. “A manuscript replete with errors ... invites criticism” (Glatthorn, 1998, pp. 183-184). Therefore, the candidate should invest time in careful proofreading and correction before the thesis is submitted, as well as to ensure the thesis adheres to the University’s regulations for submission (Thomas and Brubaker, 2000).

The candidate should be prepared to answer questions on any aspect of the thesis. Further, anything the candidate has failed to include or chosen not to include in the thesis is also permissible during the *viva*. The introduction of new information during the oral examination should be treated with some caution, as it may lead the examiners to suggest the candidate should do further research (Wisker, 2008).

University Policies and Procedures

Among the first steps in preparing for the *viva* is to read and to become thoroughly familiar with the University's policies and procedures for managing the PhD process, which may be found in Section 6 of the *NUI Galway Guidelines, 2011*. The University's Graduate Studies website², and Blackboard site (1GST1) offer a number of resources for PhD candidates who are in the process of preparing their thesis for submission, as well as rehearsing for their oral examination. The primary supervisor and the chair will normally discuss the policies and procedures with the candidate to ensure they are clear, as well as to answer queries arising from the examination process.

² Available at: www.nuigalway.ie/graduatestudies/

Reviewing the PhD and Logistics

The next step is to review the written thesis thoroughly so as to “respond readily and authoritatively to questions” posed (Roberts, 2004, p. 182). Candidates should know the major sources they consulted, be able to explain and defend their methods, and be equipped to interpret and discuss their findings, as well as outline the implications of their research (Glatthorn, 1998). During the process of this review the candidate should aim to play *devil's advocate* in identifying weaknesses that may attract the examiners' attention (Roberts, 2004).

It is advisable not to fumble through the thesis during the *viva*, as examiners expect the candidate to *know* their work. Some candidates use tabs, stickers or labels to allow easy access to pages and passages that may be

useful during the *viva*, such as conceptual frameworks, problem points, key findings and implications (Wisker, 2008; Pearce, 2005). Other candidates prefer to condense their thesis as a means to identify the key ideas, concepts, findings and implications. If this process of systematic reduction appeals, then please refer to Phillips and Pugh's (2010) *Chapter 12 The Examination System*, which outlines these authors' suggested approach for revising the complete thesis within two to three pages.

Prior to the *viva*, it is worthwhile to look over the room in which the *viva* will take place so as to be more comfortable during the examination process. If possible, go to the room during a vacant hour to sit where the oral examination will be held and to envisage a *successful defence* of the research.



A Mock *Viva* and Presentations

Difficulties that may arise during the oral defense can often be foreseen, ... candidates who are aware of potential problems can be prepared ahead of time to wend their way safely through the minefield of professors' questions and suggestions (Thomas and Brubaker, 2000, p. 257).

In this respect, a mock *viva* and conference presentations are particularly constructive in preparing for the oral examination and to address queries with clarity and confidence (Burton and Steane, 2004). This practice by proxy is an effective way for candidates to become comfortable with the question and answer format typical of most oral examinations and affords the opportunity to address potential *viva* questions. The critiques resulting from these simulation sessions aid the candidate in articulating and clarifying their thoughts (Russell, 2008). Ideally, the questions posed during these simulations should encourage

the candidate to probe further into the rationale, analysis and implications associated with the research. However, please note that supervisors and colleagues can “never be sure what the examiners will come up with during the examination” (Graves and Varma, 1997, p. 94).

Preparing, Answering and Asking Questions

The more [the candidate] can frame the final oral defense of the [thesis] as an opportunity to present [their] research publicly, the better the experience is likely to be (Rudestam and Newton, 2001, p. 194).

The questions asked within a *viva* normally offer the candidate an opportunity to restate the hypotheses, methods and findings associated with the research (Russell, 2008). It is advisable to anticipate the kinds of questions the examiners may ask and to prepare appropriate responses. Indeed, preparing a list of *undesirable* or *feared* questions, along with the responses is a constructive way to rehearse for the *viva* discussion (Roberts, 2004). Appendix 1: *Questions Typically Asked in a Viva* is adapted from various sources (Glatthorn, 1998; Delamont *et al.*, 2004; Pearce, 2005 Roberts, 2004; Rugg and Petre, 2004; Russell, 2008; Wisker, 2008); it may serve as

a resource for preparing for the question and answer discussion with the examiners. Further, as the external examiner is typically the specialist expert on the topic, it is worthwhile considering the external examiner's academic interests and perspectives in preparing responses to questions (Delamont *et al.*, 2004). Hence, it may be worthwhile reading the examiners' most recent journal articles and considering the *lens* through which the examiner may review research.

Answer questions clearly, "precisely, ... concisely, and then STOP" (Thomas and Brubaker, 2000, p. 263). That is, answer the question first and then elaborate if required. After answering, the candidate may seek

confirmation from the examiners by asking “Does that answer the question?” or “Would you like me to elaborate?” (Roberts, 2004, p. 184). In answering the examiners’ questions, use the arguments, ideas and examples from the thesis. In the situation where the candidate is repeating a point too frequently, “just *stop* and *smile*, or simply say “Sorry, I’m repeating myself” (Rugg and Petre, 2004, p. 177).

There is no need to respond to questions instantly. It is acceptable to take one’s time in responding to questions. A candidate may create time to think by briefly pausing to reflect and then paraphrasing the question before answering (Roberts, 2004). Alternatively, a candidate may generate thinking space by flattering the examiner with the phrase “That’s a good question”, which has the added advantage of suggesting the issue has been considered already

(Burton and Steane, 2004). As well, it is reasonable for the candidate to respond by saying “That’s an interesting question; I’ll need to think about that for a moment” (Rugg and Petre, 2004, p. 173). Overall, the candidate should endeavour to “defend [their] work firmly, but calmly” (Delamont *et al.*, 2004, p. 153).

On occasion, the questions asked will not be entirely clear; it is perfectly reasonable to ask for clarification before responding. Similarly, examiners may ask questions that require a response based on opinion or judgment, rather than a response based on the research findings. If the candidate is unsure as to what kind of response is required, then ask for clarification. Some questions may either go beyond the scope of the study or may not be related to the study. In these instances,

the candidate should refer to the section in their thesis that outlines the scope and boundaries of the study (Trafford and Leshem, 2008). Further, it may be prudent to “concede that it is an interesting question and would make an excellent topic for a follow-up study” (Roberts, 2004, p. 184).

It is important to note, there is always at least one question posed by an examiner that the candidate cannot answer (Rudestam and Newton, 2001). In this situation, “there is no harm in saying “I don’t know.” It is better to tell the truth, than to fake it” (Roberts, 2004, p. 184). Furthermore, if a candidate becomes rattled during the *viva*, take time to breathe, think, and regroup by referring to the thesis. It is also acceptable to take a short break (e.g., for the toilet or for drink of water), so as to recollect one’s thoughts and readjust one’s mindset.

Table 3 summarises typical errors candidates make in responding to *viva* questions and offers suggestions on how to avoid these errors. Rugg and Petre (2004) offer pertinent advice on how to tackle *killer viva questions* (see pages 179 to 180). Murray’s (2008) *Chapter 6 Answers* also outlines a number of useful strategies in responding to examiners’ questions. Further, Trafford and Leshem’s (2008) *Chapter 12 Dynamics of the Doctoral Viva* proffer a model of sequential phases of questions for a doctoral *viva*: prelude, opening, consolidating opinion, and closing.

Table 3 : Typical Errors in Responding to Viva Questions

| Possible Error | Suggested Response |
|--------------------------|---|
| Lacking Clarification | If a question is unclear, it is advisable to ask for a clarification of what is meant. |
| Missing Knowledge | If a question is posed for which the candidate does not have an answer, it is advisable to be honest by saying “I don’t know.” |
| Becoming Defensive | If asked a question that seems to be a veiled attack, respond calmly rather than counter-attacking or becoming emotional. |
| Making Excuses | If an error, flaw or serious problem is pointed out - listen, acknowledge the merits of the observation, and be appreciative of the assistance. |
| Blaming Others | It may be that the chair or the supervisor(s) have given poor advice. However the <i>viva</i> is not the time to make it known. |
| Overstating Contribution | Even if the contribution to the field is distinguished, let others indicate it, as modesty is appreciated. |

Adapted from: Glatthorn, (1998, p. 185); Roberts (2004, p. 184); Wisker (2008, p. 380).

Preparing, Answering and Asking Questions

Many candidates fail to realise they are also allowed to ask questions and to engage the examiners in conversation. As part of their personal and professional development, candidates should avail of the examiners' expertise by asking questions (Bolker, 1998). For example, if the examiners neglect to mention key ideas, findings or contributions, the onus is on the candidate to ask the examiners what they think of these issues (Wisker, 2008). This kind of discourse allows the candidate to show their enthusiasm for their work and demonstrates the candidate's *doctorateness* (Trafford and Leshem, 2008). Certainly, the supervisors, the examiners, and the chair all want the candidate to succeed. Indeed, the stronger the thesis, the more likely the examiners may test a candidate's convictions about their research design, analysis and implications.

Although the *viva* may be a daunting experience, it may also be stimulating and enjoyable (Leonard, 2001).

The Viva and Beyond On the Day

To reassure the candidate, it ought to be said that his or her knowledge of the subject after a three- or four-year period of study for the thesis ought to be superior to that of the examiners, so that if he or she has confidence in the thesis, the oral examination ought to be an interesting intellectual exercise rather than an ordeal (Graves and Varma, 1997, p. 93).

On the countdown to the *viva*, it is worthwhile developing an agenda of activities to facilitate preparation. For suggestions as to what these activities may entail, refer to Murray (2008; see *Chapter 4 Countdown to the Viva*); Tinkler and Jackson (2011; see *Chapter 10 Viva Preparation – Final Stage*); and Rugg and Petre (2004; see *Chapter 14 The Viva*).

On the day of the *viva*, it is advisable to arrive 20 to 30 minutes prior to the appointed time. It may be a good idea to have an article to read to occupy the time should there be a delay. Although it is important to feel physically comfortable during the *viva*, it is a formal occasion. In recognition of the importance of the event, it is appropriate to dress accordingly – “smart and business-like”, yet something in which the candidate can feel relaxed (Leonard, 2001, p. 251). Table 4 offers additional tips for the day of the *viva*.

Table 4 Tips : On the Day of the Viva

| What to Bring to the Viva | What the Candidate Should Demonstrate During the Viva |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Copy of the thesis • Pencil, a pen with <i>black</i> ink, and a note pad • Clean handkerchief • List of typing mistakes spotted since the thesis was submitted • Bottle of water | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respect for the academic system and discipline • General mastery of the domain and its intellectual tools • Demonstrate intellectual independence • Join the academic discourse |

Adapted from: Delamont et al. (2004, p. 152) and Rugg and Petre (2004, p. 175).

The chair often begins the *viva* by outlining the process, which in some instances includes a brief presentation of about 15 to 20 minutes by the candidate on their research. If a presentation is not required, then the examiners may begin by asking the candidate to explain the broad nature of the study, the initial interest in the topic, how the research has been conceived, the methods used and the outcomes (Glatthorn, 1998; Thomas and Brubaker, 2000). “The intent is to give [the candidate] a chance to explain something [they] are intimately acquainted with and, in doing so, [the candidate conquers their] initial nervousness” (Thomas and Brubaker, 2000, p. 261).

If the candidate has taken time to rehearse for the *viva*, it is more likely the discussion with the examiners will be constructive. It is helpful if the candidate pursues a “proactive, nondefensive position” (Rudestam and Newton, 2001, p. 194) and complements this attitude with “body language of composed listening

and reflecting” (Leonard, 2001, p. 251). Hence, it is important to make eye contact with the members of panel, listen actively to the discourse, and by all means *smile*.

Candidates should not be under the mistaken assumption that the oral examination is no more than a friendly chat. The examiners are there to assess the academic standard of the thesis and the *viva* is an opportunity for the candidate to represent their work. Nevertheless, a “*viva* is more like a seminar than an interrogation” (Russell, 2008, p. 121); it is an opportunity to discuss and debate issues the candidate’s research has highlighted. Consequently, the atmosphere during the oral examination is normally “collegial and non-inquisitorial” (Wisker, 2008, p. 302). “In most instances, it is an exciting, congenial and pleasurable experience” (Roberts, 2004, p. 179).

After the Viva

A PhD is a life-changing personal journey. It is the mental equivalent of running the London marathon or swimming the Channel (Russell, 2008, p. 132).

After the *viva*, there is an element of grieving, as the thesis is something with which the candidate has *lived* for a considerable period of time (Murray, 2009). Some candidates may find aspects of the *viva* to have been difficult or stressful, or perhaps the outcome has been disappointing. Indeed, this kind of disappointment is best handled in a supportive environment; that is, with family and friends whose love and friendship is independent of the *viva* outcome.

Once the result is known, *celebrate!* By passing the *viva*, the candidate has joined the academic community and is an academic peer of those who once were their supervisors, advisors or professors. It is a rite of passage and, in a sense, a *private* conferring (Bolker,

1998). Moreover, candidates have completed a rigorous piece of research and contributed knowledge to their discipline; such an endeavour deserves to be celebrated. Without doubt, some candidates are so exhausted by the *viva* process that they schedule the celebrations for a few days or a week after the oral examination. Regardless of the timing, do make the effort to celebrate the significant achievement of earning a doctorate.

Completing Corrections

There tends to be a significant letdown for students at the conclusion of successful defending their dissertations. Often this emotional letdown includes not wanting to see the dissertation ever again (Rudestam and Newton, 2001, p. 195).

Once the *viva* is complete, it is advisable not to lose momentum and to finish the required revisions as soon as is practicable (Sternberg, 1981; Rudestam and Newton, 2001). Minor corrections the candidate needs to make to the thesis must be completed within one month, whereas major corrections should be made within three months of the examiners' report (NUI Galway Guidelines, 2011, Sec. 6.6). In most instances, it will be the internal examiner who will supervise the successful completion of revisions. Hence, it is worthwhile to work closely with the internal examiner to ensure the thesis is amended as per the examiners'

written report, which should provide specific instructions as to what is to be achieved (Pearce, 2005).

Concluding Comments

There is no doubt the PhD is a transformative experience. At certain intervals candidates may have found the process of completing a doctorate to have been "gruelling, overwhelming, and oftentimes aversive," nonetheless it is also "an important transition into the world of the professional scholar" (Rudestam and Newton, 2001, p. 196).

Good luck!



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*Indicates a highly recommended text.

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Appendix 1: Questions Typically Asked in a Viva³

Topic

1. What is original about your research? What are the questions underpinning the research?
2. What prompted you to undertake this research? Why did you choose that particular problem? Why did you not study this other problem instead?
3. What exactly were you trying to find out? I'm unclear about the meaning of your problem statement.

Literature

4. What are the major theoretical strands in this area: what are the crucial ideas and who are the main contributors?

5. What are the main issues (i.e., matters of debate or dispute) in this area?
6. How are the questions underpinned and answered by the theories and literature? What are the relevant conceptual frameworks drawn from the literature?
7. What theories inform your work? Why this particular one?
8. What other theoretical approaches did you consider, but reject?
9. You have reviewed the important literature, but can you clarify for me what you learned from the review of the literature?
10. When you reviewed the literature, why did you decide to review that particular study?
11. What did you find especially useful in X's book/article?

³ Adapted from: Glatthorn (1998, pp. 186-188); Delamont et al. (2004, p. 153); Pearce (2005, pp. 72-76; Roberts (2004, pp. 183-183); Rugg and Petre (2004, pp. 180-181); Russell (2008, pp. 128-129); Wisker (2001, pp. 299-300).

12. Your review of the literature seems to omit these important contributions. Can you explain why these works and their findings do not appear in your review? Are there any limitations due to the methods chosen?
13. Your review of the literature includes this particular work, which is no longer considered a serious contribution. Why did you choose to include that work?
14. I see you cite X in your bibliography. What do you make of their more recent work?
15. Where is your thesis *placed* in terms of the existing theory and debate? How would the major researchers react to your ideas?
16. Since you wrote your literature review, have you noticed any new work published?

Methods

17. What are the relative advantages and limitations of the methods of enquiry you employed?
18. How do the methodology and methods enable you to ask and consider the questions and deal with the ideas?
19. Why did you choose that particular method? Why did you not instead use this other method?
20. Can you clarify for me how the particular method you chose relates directly to the problem you chose to study?
21. Take us through the main features of your sample. Were there any differences in the planned and achieved samples? Are you satisfied with the sample you achieved?

22. What specifically was your relationship to the context and subjects of the study? Do you think that relationship in any way contaminated your study?
23. In what ways was that context or those subjects not representative? Have you been sensitive to that problem of atypicality?
24. Can you clarify for me what procedures you followed to ensure your research observed canons of the profession with regard to ethical procedures?
27. I am unclear as to what that table means. Can you interpret it for me?
28. In the text of your thesis you refer to these particular data, but I cannot find any table or other support for that figure.
29. The results you cite on this page seem to conflict with the results you cite elsewhere. Can you explain the discrepancy?
30. Can you account for this particular result, which seemingly would not have been predicted?

Findings

25. How do the findings fit in with the extant literature?
26. I think you may have misinterpreted the findings of that study. Could you review for me what you think the study showed?

Conclusions, Recommendations and Implications

31. You posed certain specific questions in your first chapter. I am not clear that you answered each of those questions. Can you review those specific questions and relate them directly to your findings?

32. Your summary seems a bit generally stated. Could you speak more specifically about your important findings?
33. I am not persuaded that your conclusions are supported by your findings. Could you explain specifically to me how this conclusion derives from the results of the study?
34. Your recommendations or your discussion of the implications of the study seem too sweeping to me. Can you explain specifically how you arrived at this particular recommendation?
35. If you had 5 minutes to speak to a group of colleagues about the implications of your study, what would you say?

Reflection, Contribution and Future Research

36. What were the surprises for you in conducting this research? Any disappointments?
37. What kinds of problems have you had in your research? How did you deal with and overcome any problems?
38. If you were doing the study all over again, in what ways would you change it?
39. What is your assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of your study?
40. What would you consider was the most significant aspect of the work you've done?
41. Your thesis contains several proofreading errors. Were you aware of those errors?
42. What did you learn about the subject area? About yourself?

43. Can you relate your findings to other important research in the field? In what specific ways do you think you have made a contribution? What might others do with the research findings?
44. What does your study say to professionals in your field?
45. What advice would you give a new student entering this area?
46. What do you see as the next steps in this research?
47. What are your plans for continuing your research in this area?
48. What is your publication plan for the material in your thesis?
49. What haven't I asked you that I should have done, and what would your answer have been?

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