

Defending your PhD Workshop Videos

ARCOM are pleased to announce that the videos of the interactive Defending your PhD Workshop held at the University of Salford in February 2014 are now available, providing not only a record of the day for those unable to attend, but also a great resource for all doctoral students as they prepare for their vivas in the future.

Please use the links below to access the videos - you may need to copy and paste them into your browser if you are unable to click them directly.

The workshop day has been split into four videos:

1. An introduction by Prof Charles Egbu
<http://myplayer.anglia.ac.uk/Play/3801>
2. Prof Egbu's guidance and top tips on how best to prepare for your viva
<http://myplayer.anglia.ac.uk/Play/3806>
3. A mock viva
<http://myplayer.anglia.ac.uk/Play/3816>
4. The post-viva review and reflection
<http://myplayer.anglia.ac.uk/Play/3809>

PREPARING FOR YOUR PHD VIVA



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2014

I thought I put together the following pointers to help you prepare for your forthcoming PhD VIVA

Please, note that there is no substitute to being the “master” of your PhD work. You need to know the content of your PhD work. You need to present yourself at the viva with the utmost level of confidence. It is important that you defend your work robustly. Be disciplined and not “arrogant”. You need to remain civil and courteous at all times. It is important that you attempt to answer all the questions asked. However, this may not be possible. Not being able to answer a few questions during your VIVA does not mean “bad news”. Where a question is asked and you are not able to offer any response at all, be first to accept that it is a question you do not have a valid response, but would be grateful to receive feedback and, if given the opportunity, you would be willing to accommodate and discuss the particular point with your supervisor as part of any corrections and amendments to be made. Never waffle or attempt to bamboozle the examiners. It never works. But make every attempt to answer all questions the best you can. Also don’t be “too defensive” – and don’t be defensive to a fault that you enter into “serious arguments” with your examiners. It will never do you well. The VIVA day is, however, your day, and the last assessment in your PhD programme. Be calm, cool and collected throughout. Remain positive throughout. Have a positive mental attitude. And your motto should be - “no one will ruin my day, I will be victorious at the end of the VIVA”. After all, over 80% of students pass their viva - and why not me! Dress appropriately and professionally for the VIVA (Don’t overdo it...)

THE START OF THE VIVA

Depending on the postgraduate research regulations of your university, you may have an Independent Chair of the VIVA (who chairs the VIVA). If not you will normally have one external examiner (or two if you are a member of academic staff in the University) and one internal examiner (none if you are an academic staff in the University).

You will be introduced to the examiners. You will be informed of the viva process; how it is to be conducted; and what happens at the end of the viva, including how the outcome of the viva would be communicated to you.

THE FOLLOWING ARE SOME OF THE QUESTIONS YOU MAY WANT TO CONSIDER AND PREPARE FOR YOUR PHD VIVA.

(1). GETTING THE STUDENT SETTLED

- ✓ Please kindly tell me about your previous educational/and working background.
- ✓ How has your background or interest influenced your choice and motivation to do a PhD in “this area/topic”?

(2) INTRODUCTION, JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY, AIMS AND OBJECTIVES; SCOPE OF THE STUDY:

- ✓ Why have you done a PhD in this area?
- ✓ Why have you chosen to focus on a particular area (e.g. a particular country; particular domain/subject area/sub-sector)?
- ✓ Elicit answers from the student on what the (i) PhD set out to achieve (ii) how the candidate set out achieving this (iii) and the main conclusions/findings/outputs and recommendations
- ✓ Ascertain the scope/boundary of the PhD work (what is in and what is not in)
- ✓ Ask the student to clarify exactly what the aim of the study is.
- ✓ If the student has documented Research Questions; Research Hypotheses; Research Proposition; ask the student to explain the thinking that went through documenting research question/hypotheses and Research Aims and Objectives. What was first considered – research questions before research objectives?
- ✓ What are the main limitations/de - limitations of the study?
- ✓ What is/are the main unit(s) of the research study (Is it organisation, project, teams, Individuals? Is/are there embedded unit of study – if relevant?)
- ✓ What contributions would this PhD make, and how is this PhD different from previous PhDs in this area?
- ✓ Ascertain what aspects of the PhD the student is most proud of; and what aspects they are least proud of.

(3) DEFINITIONS, CONTEXT, AND LITERATURE REVIEW

- ✓ Ask the student questions on (i) key operational definitions used in the study and (ii) the key assumptions made in the study. Make sure that the student is very familiar with the definitions and the assumptions used in the study. And that these are “reasonable” and “defendable”.
- ✓ Ask the student to explain the process that was adopted for the literature review (What articles were targeted; What areas were covered and which was covered first and why/ how was the literature review started and how did it end; how did the student know that a thorough review of literature was conducted/completed; how did you know when to stop the literature review?)
- ✓ Ask questions to ascertain the depth and breadth of understanding of the literature. Ascertain both the national, regional, and international perspectives of literature coverage (making sure that seminal works and current literature have covered).
- ✓ Ask questions on gap the student has established through the literature
- ✓ Ask the student to name five (5) articles that informed the study the most; and made the greatest impact on the student and the work undertaken. Ascertain the main schools of thought, and what writers/authors have influenced the PhD work and why? (What are the underpinning theoretical bases/foundation for the study)

(4) RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY, METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

- ✓ What is the research philosophy? (Epistemology, Ontology, Axiology) of the study
- ✓ Elicit from the student various issues surrounding the choice of research methodology; reasons for choosing what was finally adopted; benefits, etc.
- ✓ What is the methodology (Qualitative, quantitative)?
- ✓ Is your research approach inductive or deductive – or both; and why? Did you start off with deductive or inductive and why? (As the case may be)?
- ✓ The student needs to be able to explain how the research philosophical position informed the methodology, and in turn how the methodology informed the research methods/techniques used.
- ✓ The student needs to be able to show how the review of literature has helped/ informed the research philosophical position(s)
- ✓ Be able to discuss the sample choice in your study?
- ✓ How was the data (i) obtained, and (ii) analysed?
- ✓ What data analysis techniques were used for analysing the data, and why were they used?
- ✓ Ascertain reliability, validity, and replicability of the data used (as appropriate)
- ✓ Ask questions to ascertain the student’s command of his/her work – Also, period/time when the research started; time when the Questionnaire/ and or interviews commenced and when they were both completed (as applicable).

- ✓ How can we have credibility, validity in the data you have used in your work?
- ✓ What major difficulties/challenges did you face in doing your work, and how did you manage these (e.g. difficulty in obtaining data, etc...). How did you manage these challenges? What did you do to increase response rate/participation of respondents in the study – interviews/postal questionnaires/focus groups; etc?

(5). ASK THE STUDENT QUESTIONS AT RANDOM DRAWING FROM THE THESIS ITSELF (FROM THE FIRST PAGE TO THE LAST PAGE)

- Questions for clarity, questions on explanation of inferences drawn from Tables and figures
- ✓ Seek explanations on possible inconsistencies; lack of depth and breadth in certain areas; issues of completeness and robustness of different aspects of the work (including literature review; analysis of data); and grammar and syntax and omissions.
- ✓ Student must be able to answer questions on all the Tables and Figures and Equations provided. Pick these at random and get the student to explain.
- ✓ Ask questions to test the students level of originality, critical thinking and understanding of previous works in the area; and the extent to which the student has compared his/her work with previous work in the area.
- ✓ Ask questions to make sure that the work is the student's own work – and that the student knows where certain things are in the work/in different chapters and sections of the work
- ✓ Ask specific questions to ascertain where in the main body of thesis the research objectives/research questions/hypotheses (as applicable) have been satisfactorily addressed.
- ✓ Ask questions, which clearly shows that you are seeking the extent to which the PhD appears strong/ weak; well integrated or less integrated, structured or un-structured, and incoherent/cohesive
- ✓ Ask questions on the different techniques the student has used in analysing qualitative/quantitative data. Get the student to explain other techniques that could have been used.

(6) MODEL, FRAMEWORK, GUIDANCE/GUIDELINE, TOOL-KIT

- If a model/framework, guidance or toolkit is produced as part of the deliverable of the PhD, ask questions on:
 - ✓ When was the idea of model/framework/guidance/tool-kit first conceived?
 - ✓ Why and how was it developed? What processes/stages were involved in its development? When was it completed?
 - ✓ How was the framework/model/guidance/ tool-kit validated/tested (If at all)? What was the outcome of the validation (If this was done)? If not, why was it not validated/tested? Who were involved in the validation/testing and how were they chosen?
 - ✓ How was the view of those involved in the validation/testing finally incorporated and integrated into the model/framework/guidance/tool-kit (as appropriate)?
 - ✓ How will the model/framework/guidance/tool-kit be used?
 - ✓ What might be the benefits of the model/framework/guidance/tool-kit?
 - ✓ What are the weaknesses/limitations of the model/framework/guidance/tool-kit?

(7) CHECKING TO MAKE SURE THAT THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS/HYPOTHESES, AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY HAVE ALL BEEN SUCCESSFULLY ADRESSED

- ✓ How can you show and assure me that you have addressed the main aim(s) and objectives, research questions/hypotheses of your PhD Study?

(8) WHAT ARE THE MAIN CONTRIBUTIONS OF THIS PHD STUDY TO THE FOLLOWING STAKEHOLDERS (AS APPROPRIATE)?

- ✓ To industry
- ✓ To academics and researchers
- ✓ To policy makers
- ✓ To organisations
- ✓ To individual professionals
- ✓ To decision makers generally
- ✓ To training providers (if at all)
- ✓ To the community at large

(9) CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- ✓ What would you say are the five (5) main conclusions and five (5) main recommendations of your PhD?
- ✓ Ask the student question to explain the extent to which the conclusions in the last chapter of the thesis reflected what was in the thesis.
- ✓ How does the candidate propose to take the study area forward, if at all? Also ask the question on how the student proposes to disseminate the outputs of the study?
- ✓ What lessons have you learned from doing the PhD?
- ✓ If you were to do the PhD all over again, what will you do differently, if at all?

(10) ENCOURAGE THE STUDENT TO ASK ANY FINAL QUESTIONS:

- ✓ Ascertain from the student if they consider that the VIVA has been fair.
- ✓ Ask the student if there are any questions they would like to ask the examiners, or issues you would like to raise in connection with?

(11) END OF VIVA QUESTIONS AND DELIBERATING ON STUDENT'S PERFORMANCE

- ✓ Please, can I ask you (student) and your supervisor to leave the room for us to deliberate on the VIVA? We'll call you back into the room shortly.

(12) WELCOME THE STUDENT AND THE SUPERVISOR BACK

- ✓ Inform the student of the outcome of the VIVA
- ✓ Provide clarity to the student on what the outcome/verdict means as per the University regulations (including any necessary corrections and duration for finalising and submitting revised thesis after correction)

Some Tips for Making a PowerPoint Presentation during Your PhD Viva

- Making a PowerPoint presentation during the VIVA is not compulsory in some institutions. Discuss with your supervisor well in advance of your viva date if you plan to make a presentation.
- If you are to make a PowerPoint presentation, give yourself a maximum of 15 minutes for the presentation. Try not to exceed 12 PowerPoint Slides. Your slides need to follow the three (3) B's. Big, Bold and Brilliant. Use the slides as Aide Memoire/Prompts (Do not read line by line from the slides).
- Make sure you rehearse/practice your presentation several times before presenting on the day of the VIVA. Don't take anything for granted. Also check your PowerPoint slides to make sure there are no mistakes on the slides. Establish logic on how to go through the slides, and make sure your presentation can be fully delivered within the time allocated for this (maximum 15 minutes).
- Remember that the examiners have already read your thesis by now, so use the presentation to clarify key issues/areas; provide important definitions and contexts; and explain key issues you believe would help provide additional clarity and focus of your work to the examiners.

❖ THE FOLLOWING ARE KEY ASPECTS WORTHY OF CONSIDERATION DURING POWERPOINT PRESENTATION:

1. First Slide: Title of PhD; Name of Student; Date and Year of viva
2. Statement of the problem / justification for the study
3. Research Questions/Hypotheses/Aim(s) and objectives
4. Scope and boundary of the study; unit of study; limitations and de - limitations of the study
5. Contribution to knowledge

6. The approach taken to review the literature; and evidence of breadth, depth, key schools of thought; and literature that had the greatest influence on the study.
7. Conceptual research framework (if this is developed as part of your PhD)
8. Clarity of research philosophy, methodology & methods adopted
9. Present how data was analysed (including the main analysis techniques employed); and how data was presented.
10. Present final framework; model; guidance, etc... developed; and how this was validated (if this was set out to be done as part of the study)
11. Present selected findings/conclusions; and Recommendations. Make sure that, at least, these follow the research questions/hypotheses; and main research objectives of the study. Check to see how you have provided conclusions and recommendations on each of the study objectives.

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