

VIVA TIPS

1. Take a copy of your thesis to the viva!
2. Re-read it during the week before the viva.
3. Adopt an attitude of humility (they are the examiners, you are the student) but quiet confidence (you are the expert in your own area).
4. Be prepared to accept criticism (science is all about listening to criticism) and to offer self-criticism (the examiners are looking for whether you show a self-critical appraisal of your own work), whilst offering a reasonable defence against criticisms they raise if you judge they can be answered.
5. Bring along a list of typos you have spotted, so that the examiners don't feel they have to produce such a list.
6. Bring a note pad to make notes of what changes they request, and ask for clarification of which are required changes or simply points for discussion during the viva.
7. Expect that all theses require some changes whether minor (corrections), moderate (e.g. adding some new graph or analysis), or major (adding another chapter!). The latter is very rare, so expect the former outcomes.
8. Expect the questions will start off broad (why this topic? what were the major findings?), then become narrow (what did you find chapter by chapter?) and end up broad again (what would you do differently? what have we learned? where next?)
9. Take a glass of water with you and feel free to ask for breaks if you need them.
10. No need to rush your answers as the examiners will have decided on their recommendations BEFORE the viva and your performance during the viva can't lead them to lower their recommendation, only increase it. That is, they know vivas are stressful and the exam is on the written work, not on how you cope with stress!
11. Take your time in answering questions and feel free to consult your thesis as it's not a memory test!
12. Expect a viva might last 2 hours, although there is no hard and fast rule.
13. Some examiners may tell you the outcome at the outset but some follow the rules more strictly and save this until the end. Also, keep in mind the examiners can only make recommendations (e.g., that you should be awarded the PhD) but can't tell you directly that you have the PhD, as this comes from the Degree Committee later. In practice, whatever the examiners recommend the Degree Committee tends to ratify as the examiners are their expert advisors.
14. You may be asked for a brief overview of your thesis or of each chapter so prepare something succinct.
15. Briefly review the interests of your examiners - at times examiners will focus questions on what they know but it can also be useful to tie in your findings to other findings relevant to your examiners.
16. Some examinations are intended to find out the limits of your knowledge particularly if you are doing well. You cannot know everything and should be aware of your limitations. Add to this a statement that this is potentially important information and that you'll look this up.

17. Examiners are looking to have an interesting scientific conversation that may range outside of the work contained in the thesis to more general ideas. When re-reading your thesis, identify the aspects of your work that impact or challenge current thinking. Have conversations with your peers prior to the viva about these areas in preparation for discussion at a broad level.
18. Enjoy the viva as it's a conversation with 2 people who have actually read all your hard work.