

Tips on preparation for the Viva Voce

This is designed for students who have used social science methods in their research - which many, but not all, health researchers have.


It is designed for the manuscript type of thesis (rather than PhD by publication) although, could probably inform people doing the latter as well.

- Take about 3 sheets of lined A4 paper and draw a line down the centre. On each half line you then summarise what you are saying on each page of the thesis. This makes sure you have read it thoroughly and understand the point you were making. These quick notes can then be skimmed before the viva.

Potential Viva Questions

- What did I enjoy about doing the research?
- What surprised me within my own data (given the knowledge that I already had)?
- Looking back, what would/might you have done differently?
- How did your research question emerge/come up?
- What made you interested in this topic?
- Ethical issues relating to your research?
- How did you deal with them?
- What problems did you encounter and how did you overcome them?
- What contribution to knowledge do you do I think your thesis makes?
- What have you done that merits a PhD?
- What are the key results/most important findings of your thesis?
Summarise your thesis in 5 minutes. What is the thesis?
- What points in the thesis might someone object to?
- Are there any implications for policy and practice that emerge from your research?
- Is there anything missing from your literature review?
- Who are the main theorists who influenced your thinking and why?

- What are the conflicts in the field?
- What studies contributed most to your understanding of the issues?
- Explain your selection criteria in choosing certain books, periods etc.
- What were the key messages you identified in your literature review?

- What was your epistemological stance?
 - Why did you use your chosen theoretical framework?
 - Why did you follow the selected methodology? Explain the rationale for analysis.
 - What advantages and disadvantages are there to the study design? Are there any flaws in the design? Any aspects that are incompatible with the epistemological stance?
 - Did you consider alternate methods?
 - What are the strengths of your thesis?
 - What are the limits of the thesis/study design & interpretation? What would you have done differently?
 - If you were to take forward this work as a theoretical challenge what would that be? i.e. what theoretical issues raised in findings or limitations of this study could be tested in further research?
 - Ideas for further research?
 - What papers will you write from this thesis?
 - What did you learn during your PhD research and how will it affect your practice as a researcher?
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Tips on Conduct at the Viva Voce

- Remember, the aim of the exam is to give you the opportunity to show that you understand your thesis and can defend the arguments within it.
 - Expect your examiners to argue with you. It is their job to ask you to justify what you have written in your thesis.
 - Don't be defensive.
 - Take your time.
 - Let the examiner finish the question.
 - Don't be afraid to pause to think for a few moments.
 - If in doubt, always seek clarification of the question.
 - Questions for the examiners:
 - Advice on publications strategy?
 - Advice/update on recent related work elsewhere?
 - Do not defend every point. Be prepared to concede some, but not too many.
 - Remember, you can go into the exam with a list of corrections and or typographical errors that you have identified.
 - Take in a pen and paper to note down any suggestions that the examiners may have.
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