

GUIDE FOR CHAIRING A MASTER'S THESIS DEFENCE

Prepared by the Division of Research, Innovation, and Graduate Studies

The Examining Committee:

The Examining Committee will consist of the following three (or more) members:

- (1) External Examiner
- (2) Internal Examiner
- (3) Supervisor(s)

The members of the Examining Committee are expected to review the thesis.

Individual academic units will determine whether the participation of the Head/Director (or delegate) at the thesis defence is required.

A Chair will be appointed by the Graduate Studies Officer to facilitate the defence. The role of the Chair is to ensure the procedures (listed below) are followed. The Chair is not expected to review the thesis prior to the defence.

It is expected that the Supervisor and Internal Examiner will participate in the defence, either in person or remotely. If there are emergency circumstances (e.g. medical) where a Supervisor or Internal Examiner is unable to participate in a defence, and the defence date has time constraints (e.g. student visa expiring), then the defence may go ahead as previously scheduled following approval of the Graduate Studies Officer. When such approval is granted, the Department Head or School Director (or delegate) will be required to attend the defence on behalf of the Supervisor or Internal Examiner. If both the Supervisor and Internal Examiner are unable to participate, the defence will need to be rescheduled.

In cases of co-supervision, it is expected that one or both supervisors will be in attendance (barring any emergency circumstances as noted above).

If the External Examiner is unable to participate in person (or remotely), they are required to submit a list of questions directly to the Graduate Studies Officer one week in advance of the defence. The supervisor will present the questions at the defence. These questions **must not** be shared with the Candidate prior to the defence.

Procedures to be followed when acting as Chair of a defence:

Part 1 – Candidate’s presentation and question period (open to the public)

- Acknowledge that we are in Mi’kma’ki, the unceded ancestral territory of the Mi’kmaq nation.
- Introduce the candidate, yourself as Chair, and the members of the Examining Committee. Welcome the External Examiner and thank them for participating in the defence.
- **The candidate is then asked to present a concise summary of their research, emphasizing the conclusions that have been reached.** This should take a MAXIMUM of 20 minutes.

- Questions from the Examining Committee will follow the presentation. Typically, there are two rounds of questions, using the following order for each round:
 - External Examiner
 - Internal Examiner
 - Head/Director (if participating in the defence)
 - Supervisor
- Committee members may ask as many questions as they deem necessary. As a guide, the External Examiner should be allowed about 15 minutes during the first round. Once two rounds of questions have been completed, you should ask the Committee if they are finished with their questions.
- Members of the audience/public are then invited to ask questions.
- Part 1 of the defence will usually take no more than 1½ to 2 hours.

Tips/advice for the Chair:

- It is the candidate who is being examined. If members of the Examining Committee start debating among themselves, or if the Supervisor answers for the candidate, then the Chair must politely regain control, reminding members of the Committee of the purpose of the defence.
- If the candidate is having difficulty, then the Chair can suggest a short break to allow the candidate to collect their thoughts.
- It is unreasonable for a candidate to be expected to interact with the committee members beyond two hours from the start time of the defence.

Part 2 – The deliberation of the Examining Committee (closed to the public).

- **The candidate and audience will be asked to leave the meeting until deliberations have concluded.**
- The Chair should ask the Committee starting with the External Examiner their thoughts on the thesis overall and the performance of the candidate, followed by a determination of needed revisions, if any.

By majority vote (not including the Chair), the thesis is:

- acceptable without revisions;
- in need of minor revisions; or
- in need of major revisions.

Minor revisions are defined as, “Corrections which can be made immediately to the satisfaction of the supervisor.” Examples: typographical or grammatical errors; missing footnotes; formatting issues; need for further discussion on the findings; incorporating a glossary of acronyms or terms; changes to the Appendices; incomplete references; improvement in phrasing; or need for minor clarification of content.

Major revisions are defined as, “Corrections requiring further research, or structural changes, or other substantive revisions.” Major revisions generally require **more than two weeks to complete** and may require re-reading by the external examiner. Examples, often in combination: technical errors; insufficient evidence of research findings; inaccurate generalizations; misinterpretation and/or misuse of the matter covered; omission of relevant materials; unfounded conclusions; illogical argument; improper or lack of analysis of data; seriously flawed writing and presentation; faulty conceptualization; inappropriate or faulty use of research methodology; failure to engage the scholarly context; or rewriting of substantial portions to strengthen the thesis.

- The Committee must take the time to communicate all suggested revisions to the Supervisor, who should take detailed notes. The Committee should be clear about which recommendations are mandatory, and which ones are not.
- The last step is to consider the candidate for the Acadia Outstanding Master’s Research Award.

Acadia Outstanding Master’s Research Award – Nomination Procedure

The Chair will ask the supervisor(s), and both internal and external examiners whether they wish to recommend the candidate for the award based on the criteria below. A unanimous recommendation is required, noting that the Chair is nonvoting.

Selection guidelines for the Acadia Outstanding Master’s Research Award

The award (1 per faculty, per academic year) is restricted to Master’s thesis-based programs at Acadia University, namely, M.A., M.Sc., MCD, MAK (Research Stream), and M.Ed. Nominated students who have completed their thesis requirement during or after May will be considered for the award when the adjudication committee meets the following April.

The student must have completed the degree requirements within the time limit of their graduate program (6 years for MSc, MCD, MAK, and MA in SOPT students; 5 years for all other MA programs; and 8 years for M.Ed. students).

Other criteria:

1. **The Academic Record:** Outstanding graduate academic record (at least 3.5 GPA).
2. **The Research:** Highly original, innovative, and makes a strong contribution to the discipline.
3. **The Thesis:** Thesis is impeccably written, and all substantive sections are strong.
4. **The Defence:** Student’s presentation and responses to questions are accurate, clear and thoughtful.
5. **Equity, Diversity and Inclusion:** Considerations, if any, should be addressed in the supervisor’s letter if the student is nominated.

Part 3 - Inform the candidate

- The candidate is called back to the room and the Chair informs the candidate of the decision and next steps in working with the supervisor(s) towards completion and submission of final thesis.
- The Committee congratulates the candidate and may offer parting comments.

After the defence

The Chair is to provide the following to the Graduate Studies Officer (Theresa.starratt@acadiau.ca) at the conclusion of the defence:

- ✓ The result of the defence by majority vote; and
- ✓ If applicable, recommendation for the Acadia Outstanding Master's Research Award