

PGR Guide: Online Viva Voce Examinations

In light of the recent coronavirus pandemic, we have updated our guidance to help prepare you for a Virtual Viva Experience.

The arrangements for your viva will be made by your Lead Supervisor in consultation with you and your examiners so please make sure to keep in touch with them.

A General Overview

- Having a viva voce examination online minimises the impact of the ongoing pandemic and means that all participants (candidate and examiners) can participate from the safety of their own homes
- If you would like an Independent Chair to facilitate your online viva experience then please notify PGRExaminations@ljmu.ac.uk at the earliest opportunity to enable colleague's time to appoint a Chair for you.
- All participants must be agreeable to the viva voce examination taking place online; you must not feel pressurised into proceeding with an online viva if you would prefer not to. You should consider if your circumstances (including your sponsor if you are a funded PGR candidate) permit postponing it until the coronavirus crisis is over.
- Having an online viva is not in itself, grounds for an academic appeal or complaint should you receive an unsuccessful outcome.

Preparing for a Virtual Viva Experience

- Your viva voce examination can be both an exciting and daunting prospect, even before you combine it with meeting your examiners in an online format; try to remain calm throughout and remember that everyone will be wanting the viva and technology to work on the day.
- Online meetings can be a little awkward if you are unfamiliar with the format, we would encourage you, where possible, to have a mock viva online. Alternatively, you could have an online meeting with a friend or colleague to practice using the technology.
- You should consider arranging someone to be on standby on the phone or video conference, particularly at the end of the viva for moral support. This could be your supervisor if they are available, but in the circumstances could also simply be a friend or family member.
- Be clear on the arrangements in advance
 - What the chosen method for the online viva is
 - Have the appropriate login details established in advance
 - Trail run has been completed to check everything is working (connection, video camera, microphone etc.)
 - How/when the examiners will advise you to join the online viva
 - Have exchanged telephone/mobile numbers in advance in case there are any technical glitches
 - Understand the arrangements should the connection be lost and cannot be re-established.
- As with an 'in person' viva voce you are welcome to have an annotated copy of your thesis with you that you can refer to over the course of the examination.
- Prepare your exam space – choose a location in your home which is quiet and you will not be disturbed. You should also be clearly seen on the video link, so try avoid a location which may have too much glare from a window or light (again a trial run can

help avoid little niggles like this). Prepare a clear desk space, with only the essentials laid out, such as your thesis, notepad and pen, and perhaps a glass of water.

During the Virtual Viva

- Treat the experience as though it were a typical 'in person' examination and expect the usual protocols to apply.
- We recommend that your mobile phone should be on silent, rather than switched off. That way you can still see calls coming through should the examiners be trying to contact you.
- Be patient – whilst your examiners are experts in your area of research they too may be getting used to conducting a viva virtually.
- Take your time – you may experience some speech distortion or delay in the sound connection, so you may need to pause occasionally whilst speaking. You should also indicate if you haven't heard something, or need it repeating.
- Ask questions – as with an 'in person' viva you should feel comfortable to ask questions for clarification.
- There is no time limit on a viva, so it is perfectly acceptable to ask for a comfort break.

After the Virtual Viva

- You can expect to receive the outcome of your viva on the same day, so when the examiners bring the questions to a close make sure you know how and when they will be making contact again.
- The outcome you receive will be verbal on the day, and this will be followed up with a formal report and list of any amendments required which the examiners will submit to the Doctoral Academy in the first instance. Typically, examiners should submit their reports within one working week, however, you may wish to clarify if under the circumstances the usual timeframes apply.

We hope that you find your Viva Voce a positive experience and alongside all your academic preparations, don't forget to plan some celebrations – even if that means they are only be virtual for now!

If you have any further queries or concerns you can discuss them with your Lead Supervisor or the Doctoral Academy by emailing PGRExaminations@ljmu.ac.uk

Doctoral Academy Team.