



THESIS AND PROSPECTUS EXAMINATIONS IN COGNITIVE SCIENCE
Expectations for the Chair, the Supervisor, and the Committee Members
Updated: September 10, 2024

Everyone should be familiar with the rules for thesis examinations. Consult the document available on the FGPA website well before a defense is imminent:

<https://gradstudents.carleton.ca/wp-content/uploads/Thesis-Examination-Policy-revised-Jan-2022-1.pdf>

The details in this document provide some additional information about the expectations for the committee (Chair, Supervisor and Members).

BEFORE the Defense

The supervisor or the student must send the Graduate Administrator the form specifying the defense details by the university-imposed deadline – that is **3 weeks** prior to defense for Masters and at least **6 weeks** prior to defense for PhD. The form is on our website (<https://carleton.ca/cognitivescience/graduate-forms/>). The information on the form is needed to find the Chair. If the form is submitted more than 3 days late, the supervisor becomes responsible for finding the Chair or the defense must be postponed. For a PhD final defense, the supervisor must also submit the name, contact information, and CV of the external examiner to Jo-Anne at least 8 weeks prior to the defense. It is the job of the supervisor to identify this person and obtain their CV (the student must not have any contact with them).

The **committee members** are expected to have read the thesis or prospectus document **well** before the meeting. One week before, each committee member will be expected to submit a form (which will come from the Graduate Administrator) asking whether you agree that the thesis is ready for defense. If you are not sure if the thesis is ready, then contact Kasia (Graduate Supervisor) or myself (Chair of the Department) to discuss the situation. It is not in the student's best interest to go forward with a document that is going to need major revisions. It is much better to postpone, giving the student additional time to make sure the thesis is acceptable. FGPA will manage the contact with the external examiner, who is also required to submit a written report. Committee members are NOT required to submit a written report, although it is not a bad idea to write down your major concerns and questions before the meeting.

Supervisors – it is your responsibility to make sure that the thesis document is well-written, complete, formatted correctly, and the student is ready to answer questions. Although students can, and occasionally will, demand to move forward against a supervisor's advice, it up to you to provide sufficient feedback and advice so that the document is acceptable. Remember – the final defense is intended to be final – it is not a dress rehearsal (that should happen in your lab well before the defense), and the goal is not to receive a "revise and resubmit" decision but instead an "accept with minor or no revisions".

Finally, supervisors should pay attention to the title and the abstract – these are the components that are most likely to be read by other people. The Ph.D. thesis title is read aloud at Convocation and is in the program.

DURING AND AFTER the Defense

The **Chair** is there to make sure that protocol is followed and that any decisions are made appropriately. The Chair is not required to read the thesis. If there are problems arising from the defense, the Chair will be asked to weigh in, so notes taken by the supervisor (see below) when things are going awry are critical. The Chair is responsible for making sure that all the forms are completed, the list of recommendations is uploaded (see below), and that the standards of the university are upheld.

The **Supervisor** is a committee member and is permitted to ask questions in both rounds of the defense (although they are not required to ask questions). **More critically, the supervisor should take detailed notes during the defense, keeping track of any issues that arise.** Most theses fall into “**Category 2 – minor revisions**”, but the word ‘minor’ is interpreted very liberally, so the list may be long. The supervisor will need to compile the list of required changes, using their notes from the meeting and the in-camera discussion that occurs after the student leaves the room. This list should be circulated to, and receive assent from, all committee members **within a day or two** of the defense and sent to the Chair who will upload it in Carleton Central. For **Ph.D. prospectus** defenses, the list of ‘changes or recommendations’ will need to be sent to the Graduate Administrator to retain in the student’s file. This list should include any weaknesses of the prospectus and the expectations for improvement in the final thesis. This list should also be sent to the student. The prospectus requirement is not satisfied until this list and the signed form is received by the Graduate Administrator.

For theses/prospectus’ that fall into “**Category 3 – major revisions (with or without another meeting required)**”, it is critical that there is a clear and detailed list of the issues/recommendations/changes that are needed. For this category, a sub-committee to review those changes may be struck. The Chair will be very important in guiding the process if the thesis is deemed to be in this category or, worse, it is rejected.