

## Practice your dissertation's oral exam (the Viva Exam)

### In-person course

**Lecturer:** Juan Camacho

**Duration:** 15 hours

**Sessions:** 13, 15, 20, 22, 27, 29, 31 January 2024 | 15:30-17:30 (Last session: 15:30-18:30)

**Classroom:** 18.0.A04, Carmen Martín Gaité Building [Getafe campus](#)

**English level required:** B2/C1 (with validation from lecturer)

**Credits:** 2 cross-curricular credits

*A minimum attendance to 6 sessions is required to obtain the credits.*

### Course description

This is a fundamentally practical course, which will allow students to rehearse the oral part of their dissertation defense, known as the 'Viva Exam' in English.

The aim of the course is to strengthen, practice and consolidate the elements that are essential for the students' oral skills, in order to perform a defense of their dissertation in front of a tribunal.

The student will present different parts of his/her dissertation in class for the purpose of identifying, correcting and avoiding possible problems in the oral delivery: sentence construction, appropriate use of vocabulary, connectors, correct pronunciation and intonation, body language, etc. To that effect, we will analyze and discuss examples of dissertation defenses.

Various other aspects regarding dissertation defense procedures will also be examined from several universities: rules and regulations, rubrics and criteria, samples of actual dissertation defenses, as well as experiences, testimony and advice from graduates who have gone through the 'Viva' process

We will also examine a wide array of possible questions posed by the examiners, and we will practice options for answers from a linguistic and grammatical point of view.

## Content

1. Introduction. What is the 'Viva exam'. Examples of different models of the 'Viva'.
2. How to prepare for the oral exam. The process up to the defense and its evolution: the candidate's frame of mind, doubts, questions and other obstacles. What do the examiners expect? Examples of rubrics. General questions (what is your next step, what have you learned, how have you grown?) Tips and suggestions.
3. Management of time. Scheduling. Pacing the process.
4. The day of the defense: how to act, dealing with questions, what not to do.
5. Anticipating and preparing for questions. What can they ask me?
6. Practicing for the oral delivery. Mastering the language: vocabulary, sentence building strategies, use of connectors. Diction: pronunciation, intonation, accents, pacing and pausing, chunking. Body language. Dealing with psychological and emotional aspects.
7. Practicing debating skills: pros and cons, strengths and weaknesses, advantages and disadvantages, supporting your points.

*Due to time constraints it will not be possible to engage in great depth in writing or specific academic terminology of the different academic fields and degrees.*

## Methodology

Having read and studied the course material, students will practice their dissertation delivery through presentations to the class. Group interaction and pair work will be used for the creation of questions, debates and simulation of different oral defense situations. Out of class work will be necessary in order to assimilate and practice the material presented in class. (Estimated self-study time: 60 minutes per session).

## Evaluation

The final grade will be based on 50% continuous assessment and 50% practical tasks. A minimum attendance to 6 sessions is required to obtain a passing grade.

## Bibliography

- University of London  
<https://london.ac.uk/news-opinion/london-connection/top-tip/memory-for-exams>
- The Guardian  
<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2003/sep/16/highereducation.postgraduate>
- 12 examination questions – Goldsmiths College – University of London  
[https://www.academia.edu/32648635/PhD\\_Viva\\_Voce\\_Examination\\_Questions\\_-\\_Goldsmiths\\_College\\_University\\_of\\_London](https://www.academia.edu/32648635/PhD_Viva_Voce_Examination_Questions_-_Goldsmiths_College_University_of_London)
- Murray, Rowena. *How to Survive Your Viva*. Open University Press-McGraw-Hill, 2003.  
<https://1lib.eu/book/928572/baddcb?regionChanged>
- Fuller, Mary (2005). *How to Survive Your Viva: defending a thesis in an oral examination*. Rowena Murray Maidenhead and Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2003. Learning and Teaching in Higher Education.  
<http://eprints.glos.ac.uk/3620/>
- Guide to writing a Master thesis in English  
[http://digilib.k.utb.cz/bitstream/handle/10563/26214/Guide\\_to\\_Writing\\_Master\\_Thesis\\_in\\_English.pdf?sequence=6](http://digilib.k.utb.cz/bitstream/handle/10563/26214/Guide_to_Writing_Master_Thesis_in_English.pdf?sequence=6)

## Online resources

- UC3M  
<https://www.uc3m.es/doctorado/escuela-doctorado>  
<https://uc3m.libguides.com/en/thesis/defense>  
<https://www.uc3m.es/ss/Satellite/Doctorado/en/TextoMixta/1371210914290/#thesisdefense>
- UCL - University College London  
<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/students/exams-and-assessments/research-assessments/viva>
- University of Leicester  
<https://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/doctoralcollege/training/eresources/study-guides/viva>
- University of Birmingham  
<https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/as/student-services/graduateschool/rsa/vivaexamination.aspx>
- University of Cambridge  
<https://www.cambridgestudents.cam.ac.uk/your-course/examinations/graduate-exam-information/submitting-and-examination/phd-msc-mlitt/oral>
- Harvard University  
<https://www.seas.harvard.edu/office-academic-programs/graduate-policies-procedures-and-forms/phd-degree-requirements/dissertation-and-final-oral-exam>