



Viva and Defence Preparation Checklist

A practical checklist for explaining, justifying and defending your own research with clarity, evidence and academic honesty.

DESIGNED FOR

Master's, PhD and professional candidates preparing for examination

How to use this resource

- 1 Complete the readiness audit using your final submitted document, not memory alone.
- 2 Write short evidence-based answers to likely questions, then rehearse them aloud without memorising a script.
- 3 Record feedback after each rehearsal and correct the document or presentation where necessary.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Use this tool to organise, question and improve your own work. It does not replace your institution's guidance, your supervisor's advice or your responsibility as the author.

A Research story readiness

Rate each statement from 1: not ready to 5: ready

Problem and purpose

I can explain the problem in one minute using current, verifiable evidence.

Not ready Ready

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

I can state the knowledge or practice gap without exaggeration.

Not ready Ready

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

I can show how the title, purpose, objectives and questions align.

Not ready Ready

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Literature and theory

I can identify the main debate rather than list individual authors.

Not ready Ready

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

I can explain why the selected theory fits the study and where it has limits.

Not ready Ready

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

I can show how prior studies informed my variables, concepts or questions.

Not ready Ready

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Methods

I can justify the approach, design, setting, participants and sampling decisions.

Not ready Ready

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

I can explain how each tool produced data for a specific objective.

Not ready Ready

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

I can explain validity, reliability or trustworthiness and the ethical safeguards used.

Not ready Ready

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Findings and contribution

I can distinguish findings from interpretation and recommendation.

Not ready Ready

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

I can explain unexpected or contradictory evidence without hiding it.

Not ready Ready

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

I can state the study's contribution and limitations in realistic terms.

Not ready Ready

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

My three weakest areas

Name the issue, the evidence or section to revisit and the action needed before the defence.



B

Question and answer planner

Use Claim - Evidence - Reasoning - Limitation when shaping each answer

1. Why this study?

What evidence made this problem worth studying in this setting?

ANSWER NOTES

Evidence or page reference: _____

2. Why this theory?

What does the theory explain, and what does it not explain?

ANSWER NOTES

Evidence or page reference: _____

3. Why these methods?

Why were the approach, design, sample, tools and analysis appropriate?

ANSWER NOTES

Evidence or page reference: _____

4. What did you find?

Which finding is most important, and what evidence supports it?

ANSWER NOTES

Evidence or page reference: _____

5. What is your contribution?

What does the study add to knowledge, practice, policy or method?

ANSWER NOTES

Evidence or page reference: _____

6. What would you change?

Name one limitation and one realistic improvement for future research.

ANSWER NOTES

Evidence or page reference: _____

c Presentation and rehearsal

A clear defence is organised, timed and responsive

Slide and content check

- ☐ The presentation follows the institution's required structure and time limit.
- ☐ Every slide has one clear purpose and readable text or visuals.
- ☐ Tables and figures are legible and have accurate labels, units and sources.
- ☐ The objectives appear before findings and guide their presentation order.
- ☐ Recommendations arise from the findings and identify responsible actors.
- ☐ References, quotations and numerical claims have been verified.

Delivery and response check

- ☐ I can present without reading full paragraphs from the slides.
- ☐ I can explain every table, statistic, theme and quotation I included.
- ☐ I pause, listen to the full question and ask for clarification when needed.
- ☐ I can respectfully disagree and support my position with evidence.
- ☐ I acknowledge limitations without undermining the whole study.
- ☐ I practise pronouncing key names, concepts and technical terms correctly.

Rehearsal record

Date	Audience	Time used	Strongest area	Question I struggled with	Action before next rehearsal
1					
2					
3					

Opening and closing lines

Write one confident opening sentence and one closing sentence that states the study's contribution.



D

Defence day and follow-up

Prepare the practical details so you can focus on the academic discussion

Before and during the defence

- ☐ I have confirmed the date, time, venue or online link and reporting instructions.
- ☐ I have the final submitted document, presentation and required identification.
- ☐ Files are saved on the main device, a backup drive and secure online storage.
- ☐ The device, charger, adapter, internet, microphone and screen sharing have been tested.
- ☐ I will arrive or connect early and keep water, a pen and blank paper nearby.
- ☐ I will answer from my own understanding and acknowledge when I need to check a detail.

After the defence

- ☐ I will record every examiner comment accurately before responding.
- ☐ I will separate required corrections from suggestions needing clarification.
- ☐ I will create a correction matrix with comment, action, location and response.
- ☐ I will make changes consistently across chapters, tables, appendices and references.
- ☐ I will preserve an unchanged copy of the submitted version.
- ☐ I will verify the corrected document before resubmission.

If I do not know an answer

Write a calm response that acknowledges the question, states what you know and explains how you would verify the missing point.

Questions to clarify with my supervisor or mentor

Final commitment

State the last three actions you will complete, who will help and the deadline for each.
