

GUIDELINES FOR UWA HDR EXTERNAL EXAMINERS

Thank you for agreeing to act as an external examiner for our student. Your assessment of this thesis allows us to continue to maintain and monitor our high academic standards and ensure that our students remain comparable and globally competitive with PhD and Masters graduates in their field.

You have been approached to examine this work because you are an experienced academic of international standing with a high degree of expertise in this area of research. We understand that you are very familiar with examination processes at this level and that you are likely to be an experienced reviewer of the key journals in your field. However, we also know that expectations about the detail and content of examination reports vary across countries and the following brief is intended to clarify our expectations from you.

Doctoral Degrees at UWA

A doctoral degree from UWA complies with national frameworks and international best practice. Graduates of a UWA doctoral degree will have made a substantial and original contribution to scholarship in their field(s) of research, displaying highly advanced knowledge of research principles and methods applicable to the field(s). They will display superior skills in critical reflection, synthesis and evaluation and be able to develop, adapt and implement methodologies to extend or redefine existing knowledge or professional practice.

If you agree to examine a PhD thesis from UWA you will be asked to assess the work in two stages: by a written report and at a viva voce examination (unless advised to the contrary):

1) Examiner's Preliminary Report

This written report allows you to provide a substantial commentary on the thesis paying attention to each section or chapter and summarising your views on the strengths and weaknesses of the thesis. The length of your report will be determined by disciplinary norms and the range of issues you wish to raise, but it should be at least two pages long to give a full overview of your judgement on the work and underscore the rationale for the classification you recommend.

Examiners must consider the thesis solely on its merits and with particular reference to the following criteria:

- The thesis as a whole is a substantial and original contribution to knowledge of the subject with which it deals.
- The student shows familiarity with, and understanding of, the relevant literature.
- The thesis provides a sufficiently comprehensive study of the topic.
- The techniques adopted are appropriate to the subject matter and are properly applied.
- The results are suitably set out and accompanied by adequate exposition.
- The quality of English and general presentation is of a standard for publication.

On the cover sheet of the report, you are also asked to assess the thesis in relation to these six key criteria by providing a numerical score for each category. Scores range from:

- 1 = Exceptional (Of the highest merit, at the forefront of international PhDs in the field. Fewer than 5% of students worldwide would fall in this band)
- 2 = Excellent (Strongly competitive at international levels. Fewer than 20% of students would fall in this band)
- 3 = Very good (An interesting, sound and compelling thesis. Approximately 30% of students would fall in this band)
- 4 = Good (A sound thesis but lacks a compelling element in some respect. Approximately 30% of students would fall in this band)
- 5 = Fair (The thesis has potential but requires major revisions. Approximately 20% of students would score in this band)
- 6 = Flawed (The thesis does not meet the required standard for this criterion)

This numerical summary of the overall evaluation of the work should align with the substance of the examiner's commentary. All components are important aspects of a high-quality thesis, but the first summarises the defining feature of a PhD thesis – that it makes a substantial and original contribution to knowledge.

For theses containing creative practice elements, examiners must also consider whether the combined creative work and exegesis demonstrate a sufficiently comprehensive investigation of the artistic form and creative content and that the research questions are identified and tested through the creative work. The creative work and dissertation/exegesis should together constitute a substantive original contribution to knowledge in the subject area. The methods and techniques applied in the execution of the work should be appropriate to the subject matter and the work as a whole should be presented in a sufficiently professional manner, and demonstrate a sufficiently high standard of literary, visual, digital, musical or performance literacy and quality.

At this stage, you are asked to make a recommendation for classification. This helps us help us determine whether the student should proceed to an oral examination.

The possible recommendations are:

Recommendation	Meaning of Recommendation
Pass	The thesis satisfies the requirements for the award of the degree without the need for corrections or revisions (other than for minor typographical errors).
Pass with minor revisions	<p>The thesis largely satisfies the requirements for the award of the degree, but minor changes are required to the thesis as detailed in the Examination Report.</p> <p>Parts of the thesis require minor modification but there is no requirement for additional data collection, substantial revision or other changes that may affect the conclusions.</p> <p>Examples of minor revisions include but are not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corrections to calculations or equations • Rewriting of sections to improve clarity of argument • Addition of references and discussion of the material therein • Typographical and presentation errors

	The revised thesis will be assessed by the student's supervisors and school, who will ensure that the required revisions have been undertaken to a satisfactory level.
Pass with substantive/major revisions	<p>The thesis requires major rewriting of certain sections as detailed in the examiner's report.</p> <p>Some re-evaluation of the data may be required, but additional data collection is not.</p> <p>The revised thesis and a report of revisions will be assessed by the Board of the Graduate Research School to ensure that the required revisions have been undertaken to a satisfactory level.</p>
Resubmit	<p>The thesis does not meet the required standard for PhD but has the potential to do so with the addition of more data and/or substantial re-evaluation of the data and/or substantial re-writing and/or addition of significant material.</p> <p>The revised thesis will be sent back to the external examiners within a 12-month period, who will recommend either Pass or Fail.</p>
Award of Master of Philosophy	The thesis satisfies the conditions for a Master but not a Doctoral degree.
Fail	The thesis does not have the potential to be revised sufficiently for the award of a Doctoral or Master's degree, or the candidate does not have the required understanding and abilities to bring it to an appropriate standard within a reasonable period of time.

If you and the other examiner's assessment of the quality of the thesis results in the recommendation of 'Resubmit', 'Award of Master of Philosophy', or 'Fail', the reports will be reviewed by the Board to determine a classification. If the agreed recommendation is 'Resubmit', the candidate will be given 12 months to revise the work and resubmit for examination and where applicable, undergo a viva voce examination at this point.

2) Viva voce (oral examination)

If there is a viva voce examination, it will go ahead if the agreed preliminary recommendation for classification is 'Pass', 'Pass minor revisions' or 'Pass with substantive revisions'. As outlined in more detail in the [viva guidelines for examiners](#) your report will be shared with the student and their supervisors, the other examiner and the viva chair. The detailed analysis and discussion provided in your report will help the other examiner to review your responses in light of their own and will present topics and themes for the student to prepare for the oral examination. Once the viva voce is complete you and the other examiner are invited to review your preliminary recommendation and determine a final recommendation which may or may not differ from your original verdict.

(Please note that while the candidate will review examiners' comments and suggestions for revision prior to the viva voce there is no expectation for them to begin revisions until after the viva voce is complete and a recommendation is approved.)

Research masters degrees at UWA

Masters candidates are not required to attend a viva voce oral exam. The examination is completed by written reports which are assessed by the Board of the Graduate School. The classification options are as for doctoral students (except the award of master for a thesis that does not meet the standards of a PhD). Students at this level will have the specialised knowledge and research skills and/or professional practice expertise. In line with national guidelines, graduates at this level will have expert, specialised cognitive and technical skills in a body of knowledge or practice to independently:

- analyse critically, reflect on and synthesise complex information, problems, concepts and theories;
- research and apply established theories to a body of knowledge or practice;
- interpret and transmit knowledge, skills and ideas to specialist and non-specialist audiences.

The thesis of a student at this level should demonstrate autonomy, authoritative judgement, adaptability and responsibility as a scholar in the field.

Recommendation for Dean's List

UWA acknowledges outstanding student theses with a citation on the Dean's List each year. In making this acknowledgement we rely solely on the judgement of our external examiners who are asked whether the thesis being assessed ranks in the top 5% of theses they have examined in the field. Both doctoral and masters graduates are eligible for a citation.

To qualify for consideration by the Board of the Graduate Research School, the thesis must have been recommended for a pass or pass with minor revisions and be ranked either exceptional (1) or excellent (2) in each of the six criteria noted above. You will also be asked to acknowledge that this thesis ranks in the top 5% of those you have examined. This assessment must be supported by extremely strong statements in each examiner's report about the extent of the contribution of the work to the wider discipline, or its capacity to transform future work in the area. (In relation to a PhD candidate, examiners can agree to retract their recommendation for Dean's List in the viva report if they have reason to change their view of the thesis strengths).

If you are supportive of making such a nomination, providing one or two sentences in your report which amplify your assessment will assist the Board in making a determination.