

Doctoral assessment

When starting to prepare for your doctoral assessment you should consider the following questions:

To clarify your focus and purpose

What are you going to research – what topic?

What scope?

What research questions?

To explain its significance

Perhaps to you but certainly to your discipline (area/field/ profession) and perhaps more widely.

Why did this interest you?

Why is it worth doing?

What is it likely to contribute, accomplish, enable?

To identify and critique relevant literature, create a gap for your research

What has been done so far?

What is limited or problematic about this?

What still needs doing, or what needs doing differently?

How does your work relate to, draw on, differ from existing work?

To explain the theoretical underpinnings or approaches

What theoretical frameworks will you draw on and why?

To justify your research methods

Exactly how are you going to go about doing your research?

Why are you going to do it this particular way instead of some other way?

How will you collect your 'data'?

How will you analyse it? (For example, if you are interviewing people... who? How many? how will you find them? what selection criteria will you use? how will you analyse the interview data?)

To take into account ethical aspects

What ethical issues, if any, do you need to consider? What will you do about these?

To tentatively identify key issues or directions

What issues do you expect to arise?

What is your 'hypothesis'?

What do you expect to find, argue, create?

To identify timeline and resource list

What exactly will you do, and when?

How will you make sure that you will be able to finish on time?

What resources will you require of your Faculty?

Also think about: What do YOU want to get out of doing the doctoral assessment?

How can you use it to help YOU progress in your work?

Common pitfalls

Find out about some of the common pitfalls with doctoral assessment, and how to avoid them:

Boring your listeners by reading aloud a written text

- Use notes, note cards, highlighted text, overhead transparencies (OHTs), or PowerPoint slides
- Project your voice
- Maintain eye contact with your audience (across the room)
- Beforehand, note down the time that each new section of your talk should commence and decide what to leave out if you find that you're running over time



Using visual aids in ways that do not ‘aid’

- Be careful that you don’t include too much text on each OHT or PowerPoint slide
- Be sure to use a large font size (e.g. 18 points)
- When discussing an OHT or PowerPoint slide, don’t turn your back to the audience (point down to the slide, not back up at the screen)
- Order all your or PowerPoint slides so that you have clear idea of the stages that you need to go through

Confusing your audience

- Introduce your talk, begin by sharing the main headings with your audience so they know what to expect as they listen
- Beforehand, practise your talk and time it, so that you don’t run out of time at the end and have to conclude hastily or leave out something important

Talking at length about either the literature, or your study – but not connecting the two

- Be careful that you don’t talk at length about literature or theory, but without making it clear how this pertains to your particular study, why this literature or theory is important
- Conversely, be careful that you don’t talk at length about your study, but without contextualising it in relation to existing work

Not being sufficiently precise, critical or theoretical

- Be careful that you don’t use key terms without defining them, or without demonstrating that you are aware they are defined in various ways in the literature, but specifying how you are using them in your study, or why you are using these particular terms rather than others
- Make sure your work is not merely descriptive, but also analytical and critical, by discussing what is limited, inadequate or problematic about existing work
- Even if your work is ‘practice-based’, make sure that you clearly articulate a theoretical perspective



Not explaining or justifying your research methods in sufficient detail

- Not enough detail re your research methods – e.g. how are you going to collect data, from whom, how many, where will you find research participants, etc.

Not giving enough information

- Make sure you address key questions etc. :
 - What will you be investigating?
 - Why is your research needed?
 - How will you go about it, and why these choices?
 - Who will it interest and why?
 - When will you do what, to ensure that you submit on time?

Dealing with audience questions

- Beforehand, predict likely questions and practise answering them
- During, show that you understand the question
- Clarify the asker's intention – will you answer the question on the spot or think about it later?

Adapted from the following source:

Nelson, C & San Miguel, C 2002, *Preparing for your doctoral assessment*, ELSSA Centre, UTS.

