Literature & Criticism

Literature & Criticism Dissertation Defense Guidelines

Your dissertation defense is the culmination of your dissertation research and writing process, something you have been working toward for a number of years. It is usually a time of great joy, but can also prompt anxiety and nervousness. How do you prepare? What should you expect?

Your goal for your dissertation defense is to demonstrate that you have strong knowledge of your project and its implications and that you can speak with authority on it.

Dissertation defenses are open, publically announced events. You and your committee will be in attendance, but anyone from the university and beyond is also welcome to attend. In Literature & Criticism typically run about 1.5 hours, divided as follows:

- 15 minutes: Introduction and overview of your project
- 60 minutes: Committee questioning (sometimes questions are also invited from the audience)
- 15 minutes: deliberation and reporting of results.

Defenses may begin with brief comments by the chair. Then you're on! A good way to start is by thanking advisors and committee members for their time and efforts on your behalf.

Introduction of Project

You have 15 minutes to introduce your project to the audience, some of whom may not have read your dissertation or be familiar with your work. You should provide a concise overview of your research suitable to an uninformed audience, giving a clear sense of your argument, your theoretical framework and the central conclusions you arrived at. Your introduction should also give the audience a sense of how your work impacts or contributes to the field. Think of this as a moment when you're teaching others about the work you've done without reciting your dissertation to them.

Committee Questioning

You can expect that each of your committee members will have 15-20 minutes to interrogate you about your dissertation research. The inquiries can come in many forms, from questions about your argument and analysis to questions about your methodology and the implications of your research for the field.

Remember, your committee is mostly asking questions to see if you can think critically about your project. But if you are asked a question you don't understand, or for which you don't have an answer, don't be afraid to ask for a clarification or to acknowledge that you don't have a ready answer.

Deliberation and Reporting of Results

When all questions have been asked and answered, you and all guests will be asked to leave the room while the committee deliberates. At this time faculty will be deciding by vote whether to pass you on your defense and dissertation. Only you will be asked to return to the room, at which time you will learn the outcome of your defense.

Outcomes

Hopefully you'll be invited back in and will hear the words, "Congratulations Dr…" But even at successful defenses it is not uncommon to be asked to complete revisions before submitting your final dissertation to ProQuest. The committee will clearly inform you what needs to be completed and submitted for review to the committee when they report your results. Any required revisions will need to be completed and approved by the deadlines established by the School of Graduate Studies and Research.

Other Considerations

- Bring the dissertation defense copy of your dissertation to the defense. It should be the same copy you provided your committee prior to your defense.
- You should bring **THREE** correctly formatted copies of your signature page to the defense. Not two, not five. Once the signature pages are signed, you'll need to deliver **ONE** copy to the School of Graduate School and Research. Give one copy to the Graduate English Secretary and keep one copy for yourself as an emergency backup. If the committee is not ready to sign the signature pages at the end of your defense (which may happen if you're asked to complete revisions), give the signature pages to your Chairperson or to the Graduate English Secretary for safekeeping.
- You will be asked to fill out a Dissertation Defense form at your defense. Be sure to provide **NON-IUP** contact information on the form in case we need to reach you after your IUP email address has been deactivated.
- Feel free to invite your family and friends as support and to witness this milestone with you.
- Although it's not required, many people choose to provide light refreshments at their defense. If you choose to do this, you should plan to arrive about 15 minutes before your defense to set things up.

Tips

- The defense is on *your* dissertation. You are emerging as an expert on your topic. If you remember that, maybe those butterflies will settle down a bit.
- And since you're emerging as the expert, it's important to strike the right tone. Remember that your committee is committed to improving your work, and as such you want to take their questions and comments into serious consideration. But you also shouldn't be shy about defending the choices you've made in your research if you feel they are sound. The decisions you make about how to receive and respond to critical feedback are important as you take your next steps as a scholar.
- It's better to be overprepared than underprepared. Outline your opening statement so you're sure you're covering everything you need to cover. Time yourself so you're not exceeding the time you have to speak. Get comfortable with your opening so that you're feeling confident as everything gets started.

Finally, be sure you are following the procedures and deadlines established and distributed by the School of Graduate Studies and Research. For more information, visit https://www.iup.edu/graduatestudies/resources-for-current-students/research/thesis-dissertation-information/.