

ORAL DEFENSE TIPS

Format and Length (based on 20 minutes max):

- Introduction and background, including highlights (if any) from lit review (1-2 min.)
- Research question (1 min.)
- Research design and methods (5 min. max)
- Data sources and selection
- Findings (10 min.) [this should be your main focus]
- Recommendations/implications (2-5 min.)
- Summary and conclusion (1-2 min.)

Content Issues

- Concise and clear information
- Focus on findings
- Limit details (hit the high points, avoid a lot of names and numbers)

Preparing the oral presentation

- Rehearse the presentation – use an audience (colleague or a recent grad)
- Get feedback from audience
- Adjust the presentation to fit time available – better to be less than 20 minutes in rehearsal

The defense

- Stand up is usual – sitting down is acceptable
- Maintain eye contact with examining committee while presenting
- Try to read as little as possible – very important! Do not read from your thesis and read as little as possible from your overheads/power point
- Speak clearly with sufficient volume
- Answer questions honestly and succinctly – it is OK to say you aren't sure
- OK to ask for clarification on a question
- For some people, it is helpful to write down the question as it is being asked
- If you are using technology (such as powerpoint or overhead) triple check that you can manage the technology easily, that it will be available and that it will work
- Always have a back up plan in case the technology fails – for example, if you have planned on using power point, bring overhead transparencies as well

Additional Considerations

- Always keep to time (be aware that if you are over time, you are likely to be cut off by the chair)
- Welcome further discussion/questions
- Remember, you are only providing a brief overview of your research, not reading your entire thesis
- Remember, the committee is on your side – they want to see you do well
- Bring all necessary papers to be signed to the defense – have additional copies in case they are needed

Summary

- Be prepared (rehearse, rehearse, rehearse!)
- Arrive early to ensure all is well with room, technology, etc.
- Keep within time limit
- Keep it simple
- Focus on findings
- Speak clearly with volume – do not read