

Description

Breathed a sigh of relief after submitting the PhD thesis you've burnt the midnight oil for? Not so soon! While submitting your thesis is a massive achievement, defending it decides whether you will receive the doctoral degree or not. Although every PhD viva examination is different, there are similarities in the types of questions asked at each. In this article, we shall discuss the most common and potential PhD viva questions and how to answer them.

Types of PhD Viva Questions

Generally, examiners prepare a series of questions for you to answer at the PhD viva voce examination. These questions are primarily based on your thesis. However, the questions asked in PhD viva examinations can be broadly grouped under four basic headings:

1. General Questions
2. Research Context and Methods
3. Analysis and Findings
4. Discussions and Conclusion/Implications

Therefore, while preparing for your PhD viva and defending your thesis, you must consider the types of questions you're likely to be asked. This helps in practicing your answers in advance and not being baffled during the viva. Practicing how you would answer questions based on these four basic categories will take you a long way in your preparations.

Commonly Asked PhD Viva Questions and How to Answer Them

While sticking to answering the most commonly asked questions might sound simple, it is equally important to be prepared for counter questions. Furthermore, it's easy to go off on a tangent due to nervousness. This leads to opening up other lines of enquiry from the examiners in areas you hadn't probably expected to be questioned about.

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Ideally, you aren't expected to dictate your thesis as it is. Examiners are interested in knowing your understanding of the research, its methods, analysis and findings, conclusion and implications, etc.

Despite the differences in every PhD viva, you must be prepared to answer these common questions logically. Below are some popular PhD viva questions to prepare:

1. Tell me about yourself.

Introduce yourself and talk about your areas of interest related to research. More importantly, focus on the areas you are extremely positive about. Briefly speak about your past achievements without overwhelming the examiners and sounding boastful. Keep the introduction professional.

2. What is the reason for selecting this research question?

The response to this question is often generalized by saying that you are interested in the topic. However, examiners want to hear the specifications of your interest in the topic. You must plan your answer stating the most interesting aspect of your research and why did you choose the research question over another topic from the same or allied domain. Furthermore, cite certain instances that helped you in selecting the research topic and the particular field for your project.

3. What is the key focus of your research?

Remember that the answer to this question is not about summarizing your research. It involves talking about the area of primary focus of research. Most importantly, in order to demonstrate the viability of your research, it is essential to identify some of the key questions it addresses.

4. Did the research process go as per your plan or were there any unexpected circumstances that you had to deal with?

The purpose of this question is not only to see whether you can work as per your structured plan, but also to understand your readiness with backup plans in case of unforeseen situations. An ideal way to answer this is by clearly stating if the project went as per your predefined plan. Furthermore, be honest in mentioning if you were assisted by others in dealing with it, as it may lead to a new set of questioning from the examiners.

5. After completion of your research, which part of the process did you enjoy the most and why?

Remember that the examiners know about a PhD student's stressful journey. Therefore, do not elaborate on the hardships that you went through during your research, unless asked otherwise. Emphasize on the aspects of the research project that you enjoyed and looked forward to every time you stepped in your laboratory. Describe how you developed interest in newer approaches to conduct

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research.

6. As a researcher, what change has this research brought in you?

This question demands a strong, progressive, and positive response. Remember your first day in the research laboratory and compare it to today. Identify the differences in your traits as a researcher. Mention how following, reading, and analyzing other researchers' works have brought a positive change in you. Furthermore, address how you overcame your shortcomings as a researcher and upskilled yourself.

7. Summarize your thesis.

Be well versed with the entire project. Start by explaining why you selected the topic of your thesis and close your explanation by providing an optimum solution to the problem. You must prepare for 3 types of answers for this question. Prepare a 1-minute, 3-5 minutes, and 10-minute summary and use the correct one based on your audience at the viva.

8. What developments have you witnessed in this field since you began your doctorate? How did these developments change your research context?

Familiarize yourself with the advances in your field throughout your PhD. Mention works of researchers you have referred to while working on your project. Additionally, elaborate on how other researchers' work influenced your research and directed you to finding results.

9. What original contribution has your thesis made to this field of study?

Answer this question by keeping in mind what was known before in published literature and what you have added as part of being awarded your PhD. Firstly, you must present a major piece of new information during your research project. Secondly, elaborate on how your research expands the existing literature. Thirdly, mention how your work is different from other researchers' works that you referred. Finally, discuss how you developed a new product or improved an existing one.

10. How well did the study design work?

While answering this question, you must focus on how your planned methods and methodologies were executed. Furthermore, mention how you tackled difficulties in study design and concluded your research.

11. Elaborate on your main findings and how do they relate to literature

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in your field?

While answering this question, elaborate on how you evaluated the key findings in your research. Mention the key factors involved and the reason for choosing a particular process of evaluation. Furthermore, explain how your findings are related with the literature review of your project. Mention its significant contributions in your field of research. In addition, discuss how your research findings connect with your hypothesis as well as the conclusion of your research.

12. What is the strength and weakness of your research?

While you may want to impress the examiner by emphasizing on the strengths of your research, being aware of the weaknesses and planning a directional move to overcome them is also equally important. Hence, mention the strengths first and elaborate on how they connect with the key findings. Additionally, underline the limitations and the factors that could be transformed into strengths in future research.

How nervous were you while preparing for your PhD viva voce? Did you follow any specific tips to ace your PhD viva voce? How important is it to prepare for these common PhD viva questions beforehand? Let us know how you prepared for your PhD viva voce in the comments section below! You can also visit our Q&A forum for frequently asked questions related to different aspects of research writing and publishing answered by our team that comprises subject-matter experts, eminent researchers, and publication experts.

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