

The Thesis Defense

MA Art History, UAB

Overview:

The thesis defense is a formal defense of the thesis. However, it is nothing to be nervous about, especially since you have made it to this point. All students should discuss their defense with their thesis Faculty Advisor/Chair of GSC since each advisor may handle the defense differently.

Budget around 1 ½ - 2 hours for the defense. This includes the defense, suggestions by your committee for revisions, and a meeting with you advisor after the defense to go over the necessary revisions.

Dress professionally, but you do not need to wear a suit or anything too formal.
Arrive at least 15 minutes prior to the defense to get settled.

To bring:

Typically it is not necessary to bring anything to the defense, except:

1. A copy of your thesis (all text and images).
Some advisors may ask you to bring a powerpoint with images.
2. Your approval forms (2 copies)

The defense itself:

Generally, a defense will proceed something like this:

1. Your advisor will convene the defense and ask if all the committee members have read the thesis.
2. Your advisor will give an overview of how the defense will proceed.
3. Your advisor may ask you to present a summary of your thesis and/or may ask you to present the main arguments or original contribution of your thesis. (see the questions you should prepare answers to below)
4. Your advisor may want your committee members to begin asking questions of you about the thesis. Often, since your advisor has worked closely with you during the thesis writing stages, s/he will allow your committee members more opportunity to speak.
5. Typically, the defense becomes a more informal discussion of the various aspects of your thesis, after each member of the committee has addressed his/her main concerns or questions.
6. Once the committee members feel they have asked all that is needed and the discussion is winding down, your advisor will ask you to leave the room.
7. At this point, the committee determines whether you have passed or not (if so, they sign your approval forms), and what specific revisions will be needed before the thesis can be turned in to the Graduate School. This usually lasts roughly 10-15 minutes.
8. You will then be called back in and informed about the committee's decision.
9. The committee will go over the revisions needed with you.
10. The committee members will give you their copies of your thesis with edits and suggestions marked on it, or a separate summary of comments.
11. Following the defense, you will meet with your advisor to review the revisions and to set up a timeline for completing them and obtaining the necessary signatures to meet the Graduate School deadline.

Preparation:

You should be prepared during the course of the thesis defense to answer the following questions or similar ones, yet please be aware that each defense will vary:

- Why did you choose your topic?
- How did you conduct your research?
- What is the main argument of your thesis? Of each chapter?
- How does your thesis make an original contribution to art historical scholarship generally, and more critically, to the topic that you wrote on?
- How does your thesis provide a new or different way to understand the artist, the art object, or the artist's oeuvre? Your thesis may also have more far reaching implications for understanding a period, a movement, or the development of the art object/genre. If so, be able to clearly state how.
- What is your methodology? What is your approach?
- What do you think are the strongest and weakest aspects of your thesis? What was the most difficult thing about writing it?
- If you were going to write it again, what would you do differently?
- If you planned to expand it into an article, how do you think you would go about it?
- Which scholars did you rely upon the most? Why were these valuable? How does your thesis build upon or diverge from prior scholarship?
- What comments/suggestions did your committee members have about your initial thesis proposal? Have you addressed their questions and/or incorporated their suggestions? How?

Go over your thesis and be familiar with it as you will be asked specific questions about the content and arguments of your thesis. You should be able to defend what you have written.

After the defense:

You have *10 business days (2 weeks) from the date of your defense* to turn in your thesis to the Graduate School.

- Meet with your advisor to determine a timeline for your revisions.
- Once your advisor approves the final version of your thesis, s/he will need to sign your approval forms again.
- The Graduate Program Director also will need to sign your approval forms.
- Turn in the approval forms (as hard copies to the Graduate School).
- Submit the final version of your thesis as a .pdf online (to the Graduate School website).