



Master of Science Defense (Oral Examination)

The Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (G+PS) sets the [thesis basics, formatting and final thesis submission requirements](#) for Master's students in all UBC graduate programs. The Women+ and Children's Health Sciences (WACH) program sets program-specific guidelines for the scope of the thesis and defense (oral examination) procedures.

Purpose

The purpose of the MSc defense (oral examination) is to evaluate the student's knowledge in:

- 1) The methods and results of their research project
- 2) The area of specialization in their research

The student will be assessed on:

- critical thinking abilities
- breadth of knowledge of the relevant discipline
- ability to reason and to integrate knowledge of the discipline to their thesis project
- ability to explain methodology, analysis and/or statistical tests used, as well as the strengths and limitations of these
- ability to effectively communicate results of their research project

Format/Length of Thesis

Students should carefully review the [G+PS requirements for thesis structure and formatting](#).

The general length of theses in the WACH program is: 90-130 pages, including figures. Theses of a different length should be approved by the Program Co-Directors, upon recommendation from the student's supervisory committee.

Scope

The MSc thesis must adequately demonstrate the student's ability to produce significant scholarly work with original contribution, their understanding of the background and principal works of their research area, and their ability to interpret and communicate their research and results.

Questions to Consider when Preparing for the Examination

- 1) Introduction
 - a) What is known (published literature)?
 - b) Why is this research question worth asking?
- 2) Methods
 - a) Description of approach and experiment protocols
- 3) Results
 - a) Data tables and figures
 - b) How do you interpret these data?
 - c) How do your results address the research question?



4) Discussion

- a) How do the results integrate into the published literature and contribute to knowledge in the field?

Permission to Write

Prior to writing their thesis, the MSc student should schedule a meeting with their supervisory committee. The supervisory committee should determine whether the student's thesis content will be sufficient, and give formal approval for the student to write their thesis.

Approval of Thesis for Examination

The student's supervisor is to read the complete thesis in draft form prior to sending to the supervisory committee. The appropriate revisions should be made before the rest of the supervisory committee reads the thesis. The suggested changes must be made to the thesis, after which the **MSc Thesis Approval for Examination** form is completed. This form requires the signatures of three content experts who have reviewed the thesis (supervisor, and two supervisory committee members), and includes the nomination for the External Examiner.

Following receipt of the MSc Thesis Approval for Examination form, the defense can be scheduled, and the thesis sent to the External Examiner. The student should make the Program Manager aware of any delays in thesis preparation accordingly.

WACH Program Requirements for the MSc Defense

1. The WACH Program Manager will assist with scheduling the student's thesis defense. Students should refer to the MSc Defense Planning Tool, and discuss their proposed timeline with their supervisor before contacting the Program Manager.
2. MSc students are required to hold an exit seminar, which can be scheduled at any UBC or research institute seminar, or as part of WACH 502. The exit seminar should be scheduled prior to the oral exam, so that the student can practice their presentation and receive feedback from their peers.
3. The MSc oral exam will be 2 hours in length, and proceed according to the Conduct of the Master of Science Defense instructions below.
4. The examining committee must consist of the following members:
 - a. Research supervisor
 - b. At least one member of the supervisory committee (two or more may attend)
 - c. MSc External Examiner: A UBC faculty member with appropriate expertise, who is not a member of the supervisory committee. This examiner should be recommended by the supervisor, and approved by the Program Co-Directors via the MSc Thesis Approval for Examination form. This examiner does not need to be a G+PS or WACH member, but should have significant experience in research and hold a UBC faculty appointment (assistant professor or higher).



- i. Please note that if you would like to nominate a faculty member external to UBC for an MSc defense, this may disqualify this individual from serving as an External Examiner for a doctoral defense for students you supervise or serve on the supervisory committee for in the next 5 years.
 - ii. Current students, postdoctoral fellows, and research associates are not eligible to serve as MSc defense examiners.
- d. Chair (normally the supervisory committee Chair, if available)
 - i. If the supervisory committee Chair is not available to chair the defense, it is the responsibility of the student's supervisor to identify an alternate Chair.



Conduct of the Master of Science Defense

The instructions below are directed to Chair of the examining committee.

1. Provide the statement of purpose: "The student's supervisory committee has agreed that this thesis is appropriate for final oral examination for the degree of Master of Science."
2. State the title of the thesis and introduce the student, supervisor and examining committee.
3. Ask the student to present an oral presentation of the thesis in 20-30 minutes. The student should not read from a script, but speaker notes/memory aids are acceptable.
4. Ask for questions from the examining committee, starting with the external examiner, then supervisory committee member(s). The supervisor may ask questions as well.
5. Ask for questions from faculty members and/or graduate students present.
6. As Chair, you may also ask questions.
7. Ask student and the audience to leave the room.
8. Lead the examining committee's discussion of the thesis and examination, addressing the following:
 - a. Is the written thesis of the standard expected for an MSc student in Women+ and Children's Health Sciences?
 - b. Did the student present their work and respond to questions adequately?
 - c. The supervisor may be asked to briefly describe the student's progress while in the program.
9. The examining committee can decide to:
 - a. Accept
 - b. Ask for minor revisions
 - c. Ask for major revisions
 - d. Reject
10. The examining committee will also assign a grade as a percentage.

A+	90-100
A	85-89
A-	80-84
B+	76-79
B	72-75
B-	68-71

11. The Chair will help the examining committee reach a final decision, and may cast a deciding vote, in the case of disagreement.
12. Ask the student to return to the room to receive the outcome of the examination. At this time, the student will be informed by the examining committee of any revisions required before the final thesis is submitted.
13. In the case of a failure, the Chair must clearly outline any remediation required in the Chair's report. The student may be required to complete a second defense, or make significant revisions to their written thesis. Remediation should be completed within 3 months.
14. Submit the Chair's Report to the WACH Program Manager.