

PhD Defence Process

Student initiates PhD Defence in Mosaic, verifies accuracy of Supervisory Committee members who will become the Examining Committee Members

Grad Admin emails gthesis@mcmaster.ca with any required changes to Supervisory Committee

Supervisor chooses between the **Standard Stream** or **Accelerated Stream**

Standard

Supervisor inputs 3 External Examiner nominees to be approached by the SGS Thesis Coordinator

Department Chair/Approver approves the External Examiners to ensure they are at arm's length and appropriate

Accelerated

Supervisor agrees to:

1. Personally invite the External Examiner who **must participate in the defence**
2. Select the **date and time** of the defence
3. Find a **Chair** for the defence

Supervisor inputs External Examiner nominee(s) information so the **Supervisory Committee members** and **department Chair** can approve

Grad Admins can watch for approvals in Admin Tools to help ensure a defence stays on track



Standard

Student proposes date and time, and uploads thesis to be approved by Supervisory Committee members while Thesis Coordinator recruits External Examiner and Chair for the defence

External Examiner receives a link to fill in the online report including a due date, a link to the thesis, and upload link for PDF with additional comments (optional).

Report from the External Examiner is due at least 1 week prior to the defence date

Thesis Coordinator emails student and Examining Committee, including the External and Chair, to confirm details of the defence and send the Chair package with forms

Chair and Supervisor will decide the "host" of the defence and send the Zoom or WebEx invite (a practice with the student is recommended)

Accelerated

Supervisor selects External Examiner, inputs date, time and location, and uploads student's thesis

External Examiner receives a link to fill in the online report including a due date, a link to the thesis, and upload link for PDF with additional comments (optional).

Report from the External Examiner is due at least 1 week prior to the defence date

Thesis Coordinator emails student and Examining Committee, including the External and Chair, to confirm details of the defence and send the Chair package with forms

Chair and Supervisor will decide the "host" of the defence and send the Zoom or WebEx invite (a practice with the student is recommended)

"Host" responsible for meeting logistics and audience management (if applicable),
Chair manages defence proceedings in accordance with SGS policy

PhD Defence Day

1

Chair ensures the arrival of all participants and conducts the defence based on the guidelines provided

2

Upon completion, Chair emails gthesis@mcmaster.ca, CC Examining Committee, with results of the defence (e.g. Student has PASSED their Oral Defence and the result is VERY GOOD)

3

Examining Committee members, including External Examiner, reply to Chairs email with their confirmation to serve as their vote which is kept on file

4

Supervisor sends student the required forms including 2 Licence forms and the Final Thesis Submission Sheet

Post-Defence

- Supervisor signs Final Thesis Submission Sheet confirming completion of any required changes
- Student and Supervisor must answer "Delay of Publication" for final thesis to confirm embargo
- Student uploads **final** thesis to MacSphere
- Licence forms and Final Thesis Submission Sheet sent to Grad Admin
- Forms submitted via Service Request under FTTHS - Final Thesis Submission Sheet

PhD Defence Process

FAQ

How long is the PhD defence process?

A **Standard** defence is **7-8 weeks**:

- 2-3 weeks for initiating the PhD defence, entering External information and getting approvals
- 3-4 weeks for External to read thesis and complete report
- Report is due 1 week before defence date to confirm it can proceed

An **Accelerated** defence is approximately **4-5 weeks**:

- 1-2 weeks for initiating the PhD defence, entering External information and getting approvals
- 2 weeks for External to read thesis and complete report
- Report is due 1 week before defence date to determine it can proceed

Who can be an External Examiner for a PhD defence?

An External Examiner should:

- possess an earned doctorate or equivalent relevant credential. If that is not the case, they should have achieved a record of accomplishment that can be seen to be equivalent to a doctoral degree;
- be a recognized expert in a relevant area of study; and
- be at arm's length from all members of the Supervisory Committee and the student.

What does “arm’s length” mean?

An External Examiner should not:

- have been a research Supervisor or student of the Supervisor or the student within the last 6 years;
- have collaborated with the Supervisor or the student within the past 6 years or have made plans to collaborate with these individuals in the immediate future;
- have other potential conflicts of interest (e.g. personal or financial); and
- have been employed by or affiliated with the student's or Supervisor's department within the past 6 years or expect to become employed in the department soon.



PhD Defence Process

FAQ

Who can Chair a PhD defence?

An eligible Examining Committee Chair is a tenured faculty member (or Professor Emeritus) who has supervised a doctoral student to completion, and who has also participated previously in the McMaster PhD defence process.

What happens if the External Examiner cannot attend the defence?

If an External Examiner cannot attend, the Supervisor can work with the Thesis Coordinator and student to find a new date with no penalty to the student. If this is not a feasible option, the Supervisor will be asked to find an Internal Examiner to represent the External and if possible, ask questions supplied by the External.

What happens if the External Examiner's report is late?

The School of Graduate Studies (SGS) regulation is that the External Examiner Report must be received a week before the PhD defence. If it will be less than 1 week, the Thesis Coordinator will email the student to confirm in writing that they want to proceed with the defence. If the report is not received 48 hours before the defence, the Thesis Coordinator will notify the Supervisor and Student that the defence will be postponed with no penalty to the student.

Can I share the External Examiner's report with the student?

Yes, Supervisors are expected to share the External Examiner report with their student to coach and prep them for the defence.

What happens if an Examining Committee member doesn't arrive?

As part of the Chair Package, the Chair and Supervisor will receive a set of scenarios that indicate what next steps must be taken should someone not arrive and these scenarios have been approved by the Associate Deans.

Who do I contact if I have more questions?

SGS Thesis Coordinators are available via email at gthesis@mcmaster.ca.