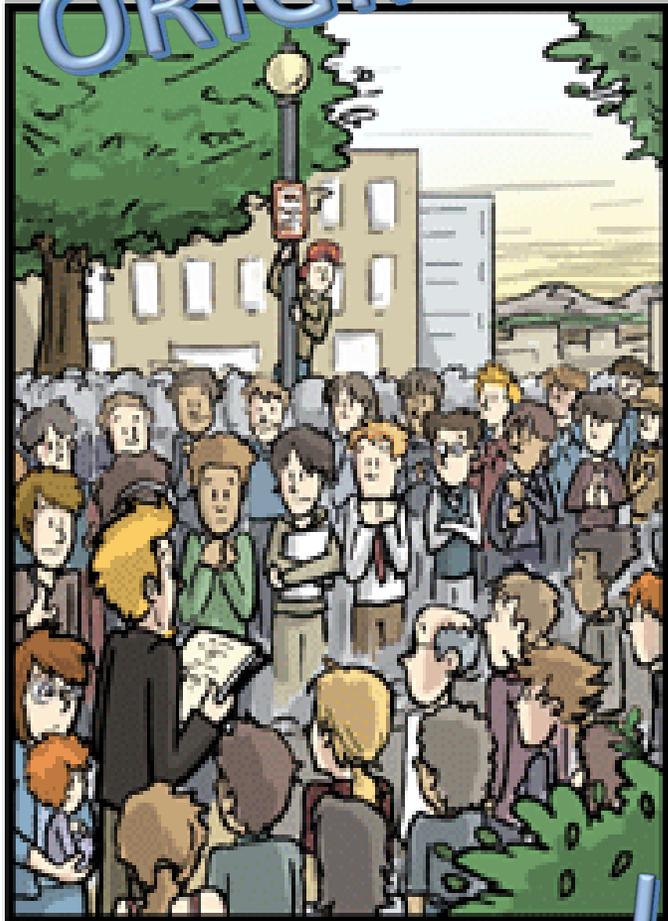


Surviving the Viva Voce

Dahlia Zawawi, Ph.D.

Amer Hamzah Jantan, Ph.D.

ORIGINALITY



IMPACT



LIMITATIONS

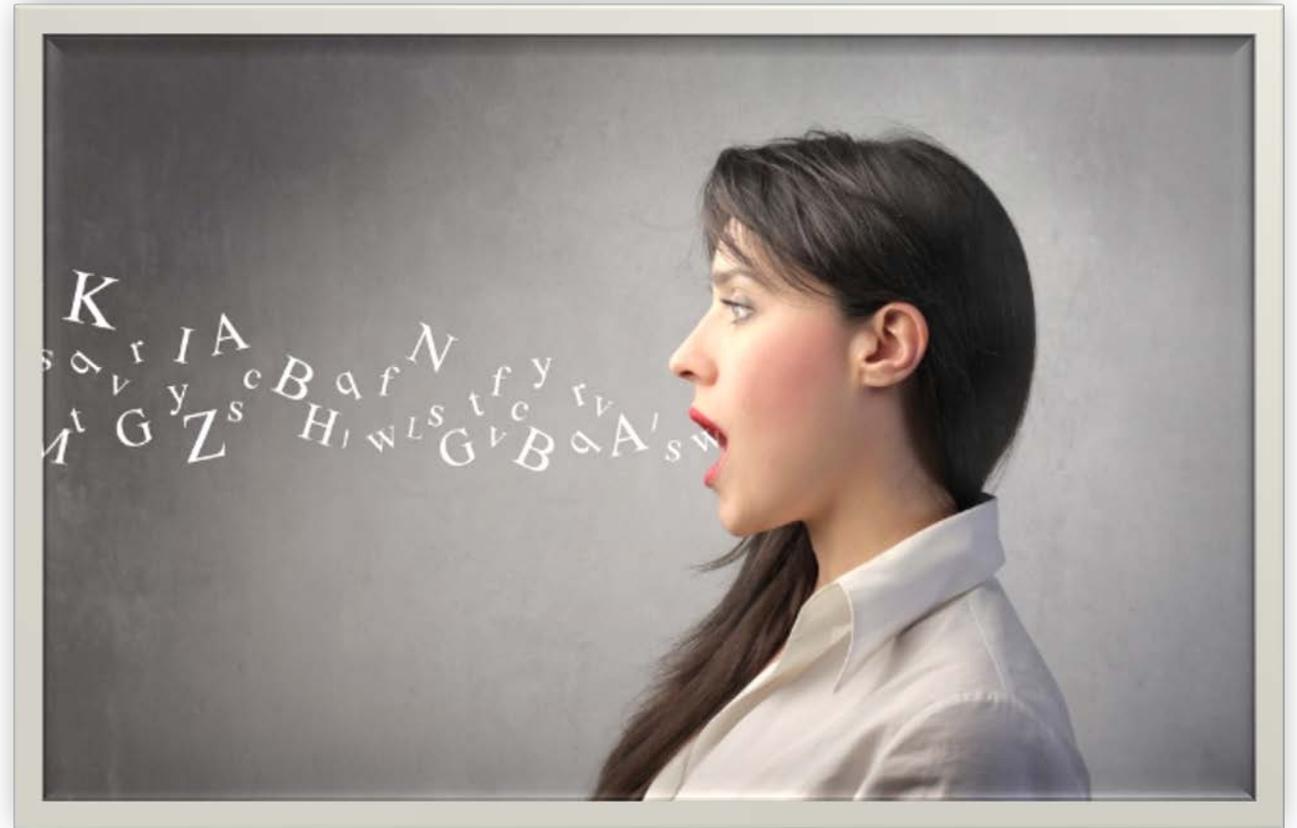
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Viva Voce Examination: Definition



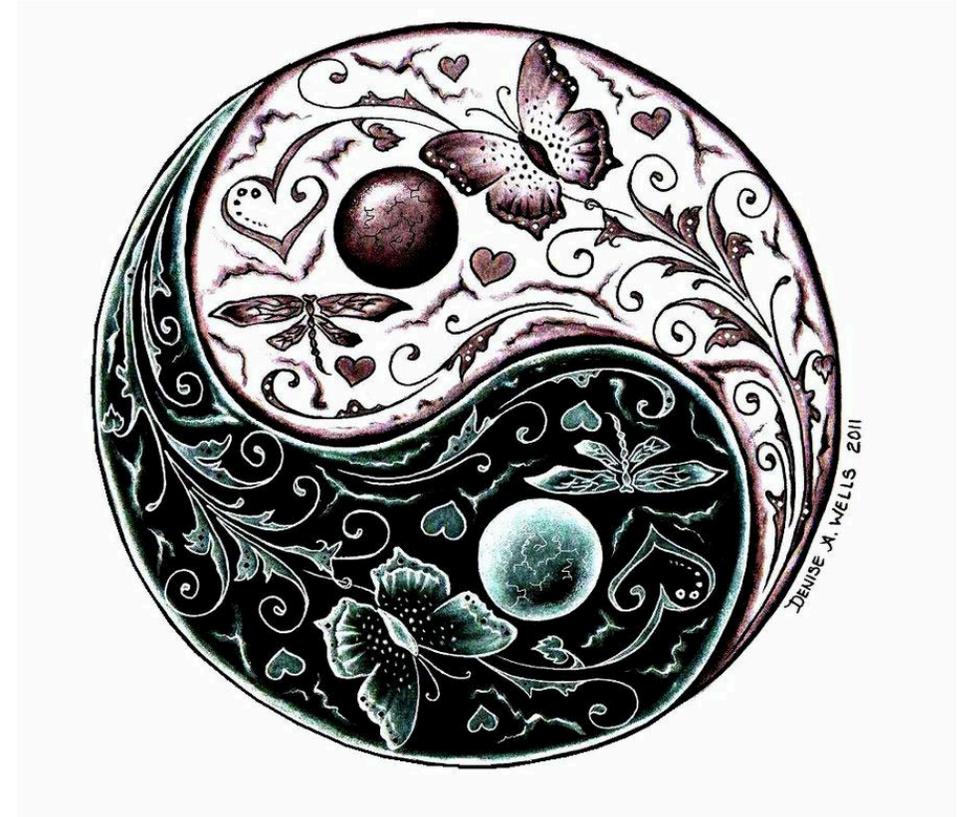
Exam by word of mouth
as opposed to writing

You will give a **verbal
defense** of your thesis



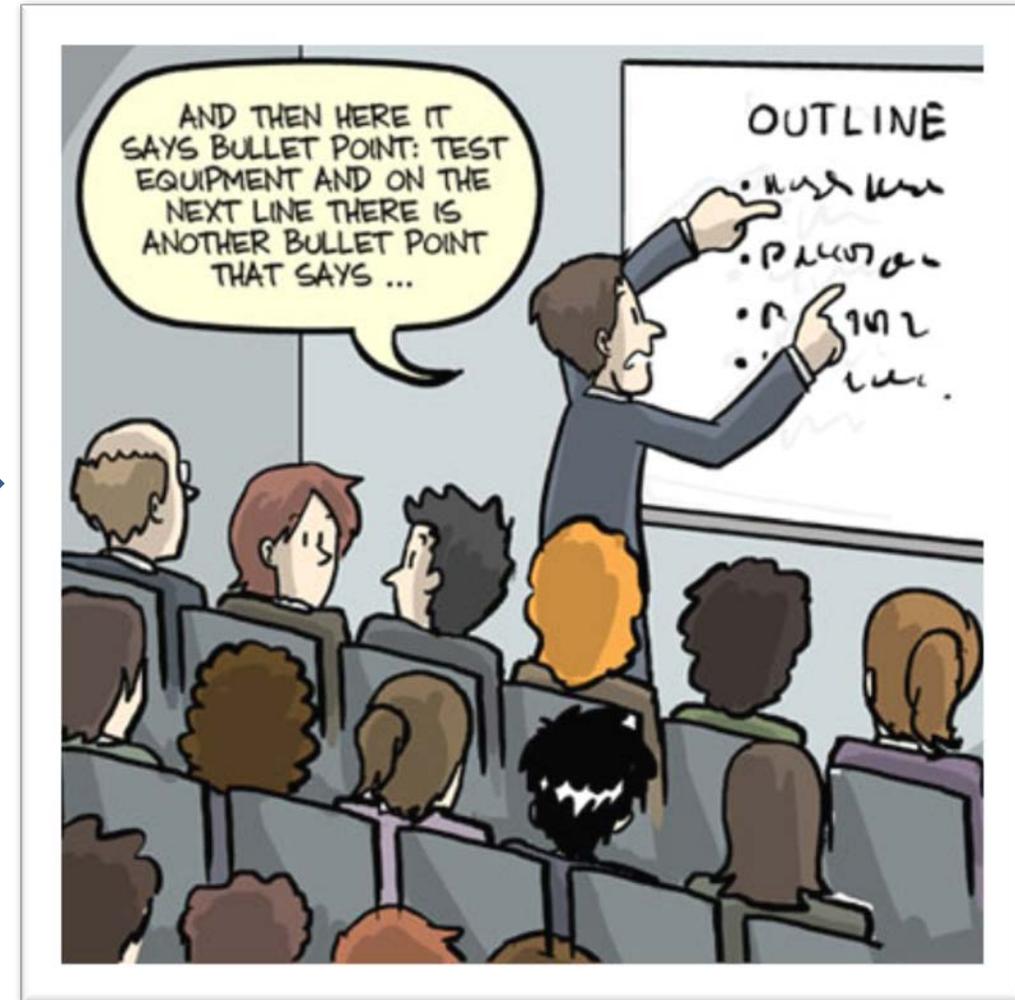
Viva Voce Examination: Definition

- It as a verbal counterpart to your written thesis
- Your thesis demonstrates your skill at presenting your research in writing
- In the viva examination, you will demonstrate your ability to participate in **academic discussion** with research colleagues





THESIS WRITING



THESIS DEFENSE

The Viva: In Reality

- The viva is often described as the **defining moment** in the doctoral experience
- It is the **final assessment** of the thesis, the research and the student
- It is certainly one of the few opportunities you will have to talk in depth about your thesis with people who are knowledgeable and **interested** in it
- A **closure** to your research



Purpose of the Viva Voce Examination

- To confirm that you understand what you have written and can defend it verbally
- To investigate your awareness of where your original work sits in relation to the wider research field
- To establish whether the thesis is of sufficiently high standard to merit the award of the degree for which it is submitted
- To allow you to clarify and develop the written thesis in response to the examiners' questions



The Examiners and Exam Chair

- 2 internal examiners who are members of academic staff of the University, usually from your School/Department but not one of your supervisors
- 1 external examiner who will normally be a member of academic staff of another institution (abroad/overseas) or a professional in another field with expertise in your area of research
- A Chair person for the examination. A Chair is appointed to ensure the examination is conducted in line with University regulations and is not there to examine your thesis. However...



Can you choose your examiners?

- Candidate can but ultimately, your main supervisor can ask and appoint the examiners and chairperson
- When thinking about possible external examiners, it is important to bear in mind that the examiners:
 - i. should have sufficient expertise of the subject area to be able to judge the quality of the thesis.
 - ii. should not be a recent or current collaborator of the supervisor or student.
- The internal examiner should have broad knowledge of the subject area and should not have been involved in supervision of the research
- In practice, the selection will also depend on individual availability and workloads



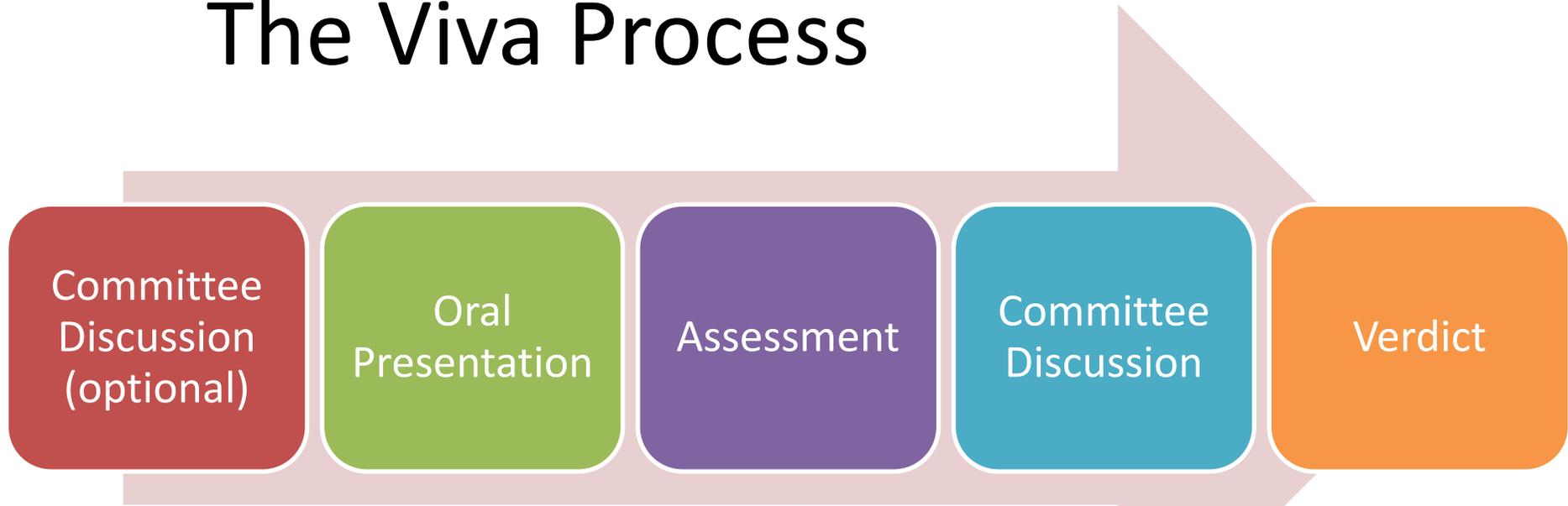
YES!

Tone of the Viva

- The candidate can do a great deal to influence the mood of the examination through dress, body language and general behavior
- The candidate needs to understand that he/she is seeking the acceptance of the examiners
- The candidate needs to exude confidence without arrogance
- It is extremely important that egos are not exposed
- Most vivas take the form of a genuine discussion



The Viva Process



How Will Your Thesis be Assessed?

- the creation and interpretation of **new knowledge**, through **original research** or other advanced scholarship, of a **quality** to satisfy peer review, to extend the forefront of their discipline, and to merit **publication** in an appropriate form
- a **systematic** acquisition and understanding of a substantial body of knowledge which is at the forefront of the discipline or area of professional practice.



How Will Your Thesis be Assessed?

- the general ability to conceptualize, design and implement a project for the generation of new knowledge, applications or understanding at the forefront of the discipline, and the ability to adjust the project design in the light of unforeseen problems
- a comprehensive understanding of **techniques** applicable to their own research or advanced scholarship



Components of Doctorateness

Contribution to knowledge	Stated gap in knowledge	Explicit research questions	Conceptual framework
Conceptual conclusions	 <p>SYNERGY AND THEREFORE</p>		Explicit research design
Research questions answered			Appropriate methodology
Cogent argument throughout	Full engagement with theory	Clear / precise presentation	'Correct' data collection

Should you tailor your thesis to your examiners?

Duh! of course **NOT!**



- Your thesis should be written so that it could be examined by anyone with good knowledge of your field of research
- If you know well in advance who your examiners are going to be, you might want to ensure that any relevant research of theirs is referenced and that you are familiar with it
- You should not feel the need to do more than this

Preparing in Advance

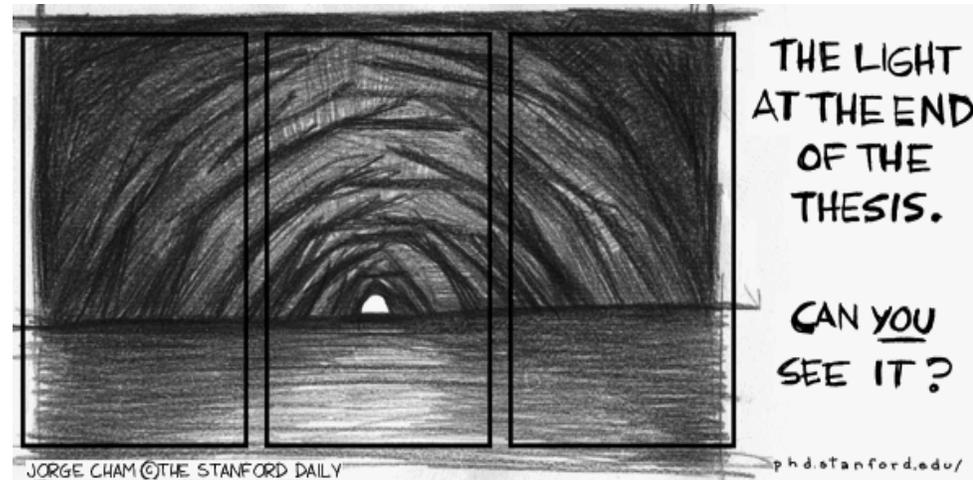
- Get to re-know your thesis.
- Step back from the detail.
- Prepare for a mock viva.
- During the week or two leading up to your viva you should read through your thesis two or three times. You will probably notice some small errors that you have not picked up before. There is no need to worry about this – it is fairly common. Simply make a list that you can take to the viva to show to the examiners, if appropriate.



**Ooh..remember
to bring a spare
copy of your
thesis.**

What else?

RELAX...



- Think about the positive aspects of your thesis and parts of it that you particularly like. Remember, when it comes to your thesis, you are the real expert in the room.



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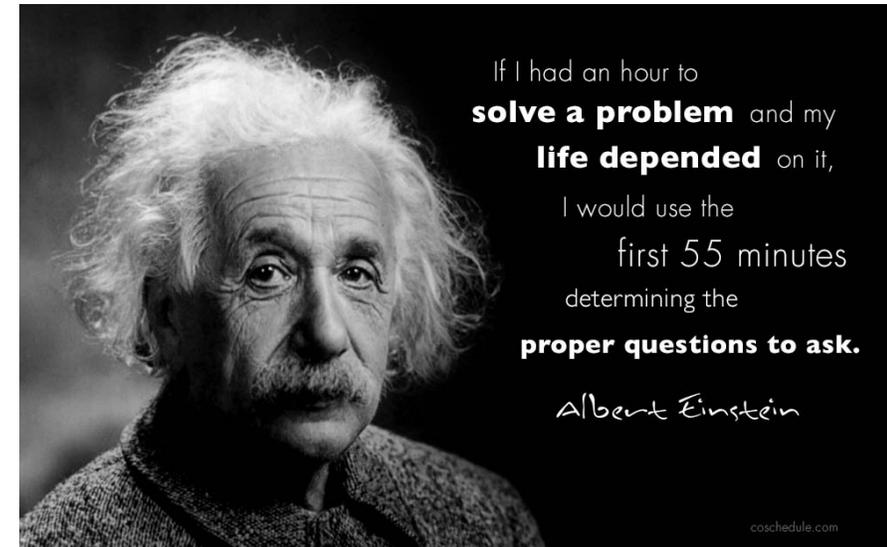
Answering the Viva Questions

Defending
your
thesis
DOES NOT
mean being
defensive.

- You cannot answer a question effectively unless you have really **listened** to it.
- If you are at all uncertain about what it is you are being asked, or what the examiners are really getting at, then ask them to **clarify**.
- There is **no need to jump in** with an answer as soon as the examiner stops speaking. A good maxim is 'Think first – Speak second'.
- You should try to give comprehensive answers but try to ensure that you **'stick to the point'**.
- Occasionally a question may strike you as rather strange, not that relevant, overly simplistic, or having been answered in your thesis. However, it is not for you to **judge the questions**, your task is to respond as best you can.
- Other questions may highlight, or focus on, what might be seen to be a particular weakness in the thesis. Don't let such questions **'throw you off balance'**.
- It is not useful, therefore, to try to **hide any limitations or potential weaknesses**, or dismiss them as being irrelevant or unimportant. Instead, you should reflect on why they might have occurred and suggest what you might do to strengthen that specific aspect of your work in the future.

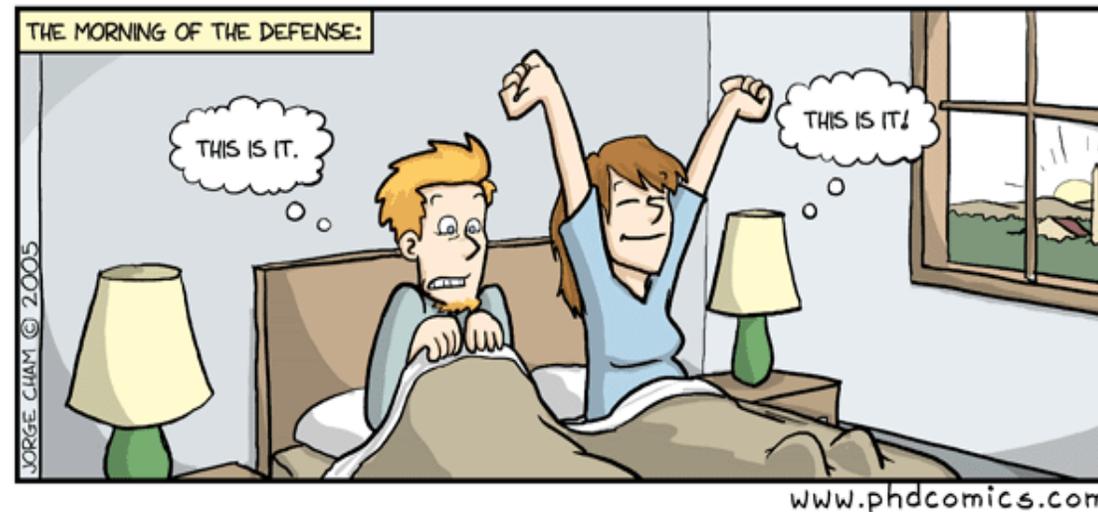
Central Issues Commonly Raised at the Viva

- Is the problem **worth** addressing?
- Is it being addressed in an **appropriate** way?
- Is the literature review comprehensive and up to date, and does it show understanding of the theoretical context? Is the compilation **critical** enough?
- Does the candidate make **explicit links** between the review and his or her research question(s) and study design?
- If there is empirical work, are the right **methods** being used, is the sample large enough, are the data presented clearly and analyzed and interpreted appropriately, does the discussion illuminate the results, and do the stated conclusions follow from the results?



Central Issues Commonly Raised at the Viva (*cont..*)

- If the work is theoretical, is the line of argument coherent, well expressed and does it develop **logically**?
- Is the work **ethical**?
- Is the work substantively that of the candidate (i.e. not **plagiarized**)?
- Can the candidates be able to **demonstrate an understanding** of how the research informs professional practice and knowledge?



Possible Detailed Viva Questions – First Set of Questions

- Relates to confirming the degree of candidate's understanding on the doctoral degree objectives and how the degree can affect the life and the career of the candidate.
- Often for warming up.
 - ❖ Why did you undertake a doctorate?
 - ❖ Who are the main stakeholders in this research?
 - ❖ In which way will they be able to benefit from the results of your research?



Possible Detailed Viva Questions – Second Set of Questions

- Relates to the degree process and concerns whether this process had the effect on the candidate that is normally intended.
- Focusing on the personal development of the candidate.



- ❖ What do we know now that we did not know before you started your doctorate studies?
- ❖ What would you say were the most important things that you learnt from your research both in terms of personal development and from a contribution to the body-of-knowledge point of view?

Possible Detailed Viva Questions – Third Set of Questions

- Relates to issues concerning the research questions.
- This is significant because if a poor research question was originally chosen, it can adversely affect the rest of the work.



- ❖ What was the original problem/research question?
- ❖ How was the research question modified as a result of the literature search?
- ❖ Who are the other researchers in your field whose work influenced your thinking about your research question?
- ❖ In what way does your research question seek to establish a new theory, refute an old theory or develop an extension of an old theory?

Possible Detailed Viva Questions – Fourth Set of Questions

- Relates to issues concerning research methodology.
- The candidate is expected to demonstrate their understanding of the philosophical underpinning of the research and to show the different views which could have been adopted.



- ❖ What influenced you to choose this approach to your research?
- ❖ What would you say were the central methodological difficulties you experienced while doing your research and how did you overcome these challenges?
- ❖ What are the philosophical assumptions underlying your methodology?

Possible Detailed Viva Questions – Fifth Set of Questions

- Relates to issues concerning fieldwork.
- The candidate is expected to demonstrate their understanding of the different approaches to evidence collection and the management thereof.
 - ❖ How did you acquire an appropriate measuring instrument?
 - ❖ Did you undertake the pilot study and if so how would you describe its outcome?
 - ❖ How do you know the sample that you used is representative? If it is not, how do you defend its use?
 - ❖ What sort of research protocol did you use?
 - ❖ How did you decide when you had enough evidence to proceed with your analysis?

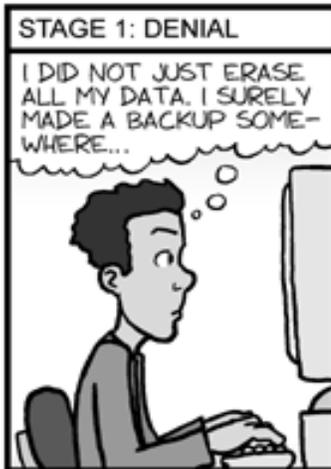
DATA: BY THE NUMBERS



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THE FOUR STAGES OF DATA LOSS

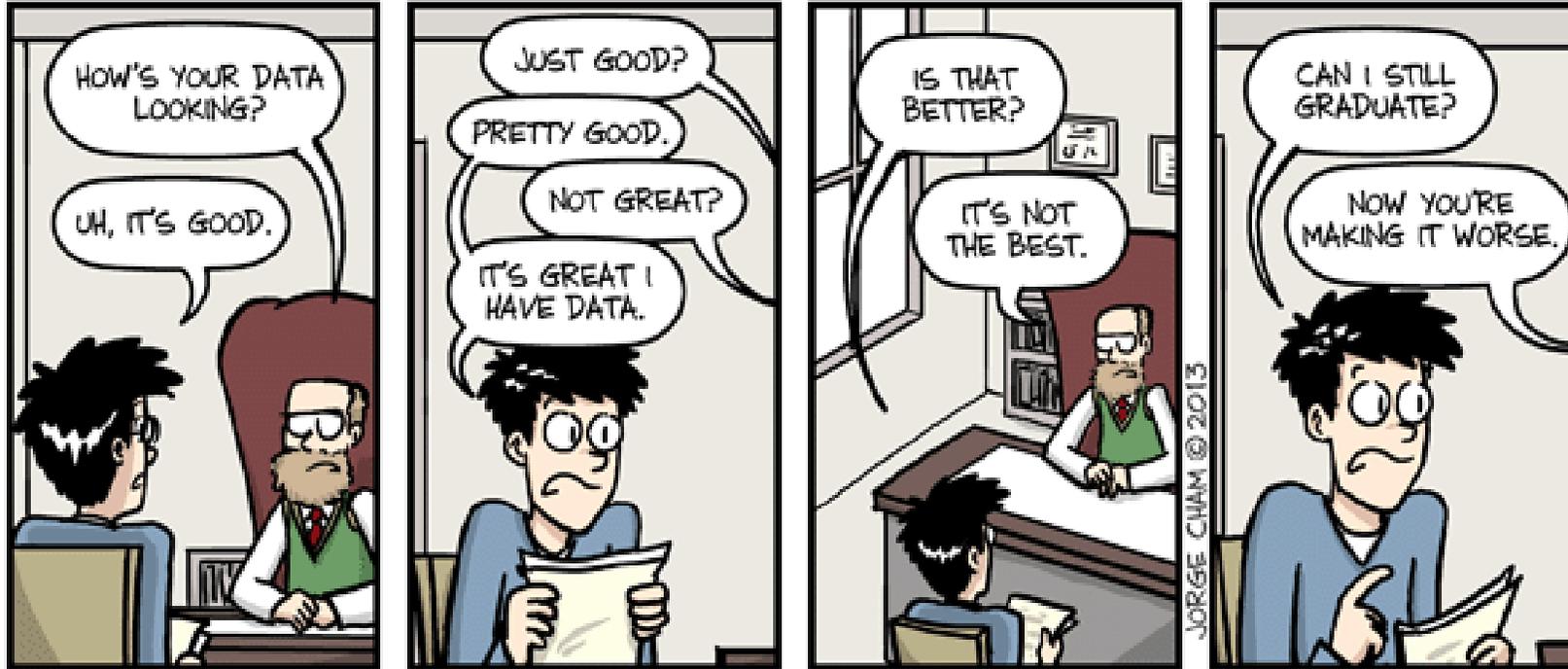
DEALING WITH ACCIDENTAL DELETION OF MONTHS OF HARD-EARNED DATA



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Possible Detailed Viva Questions – Sixth Set of Questions

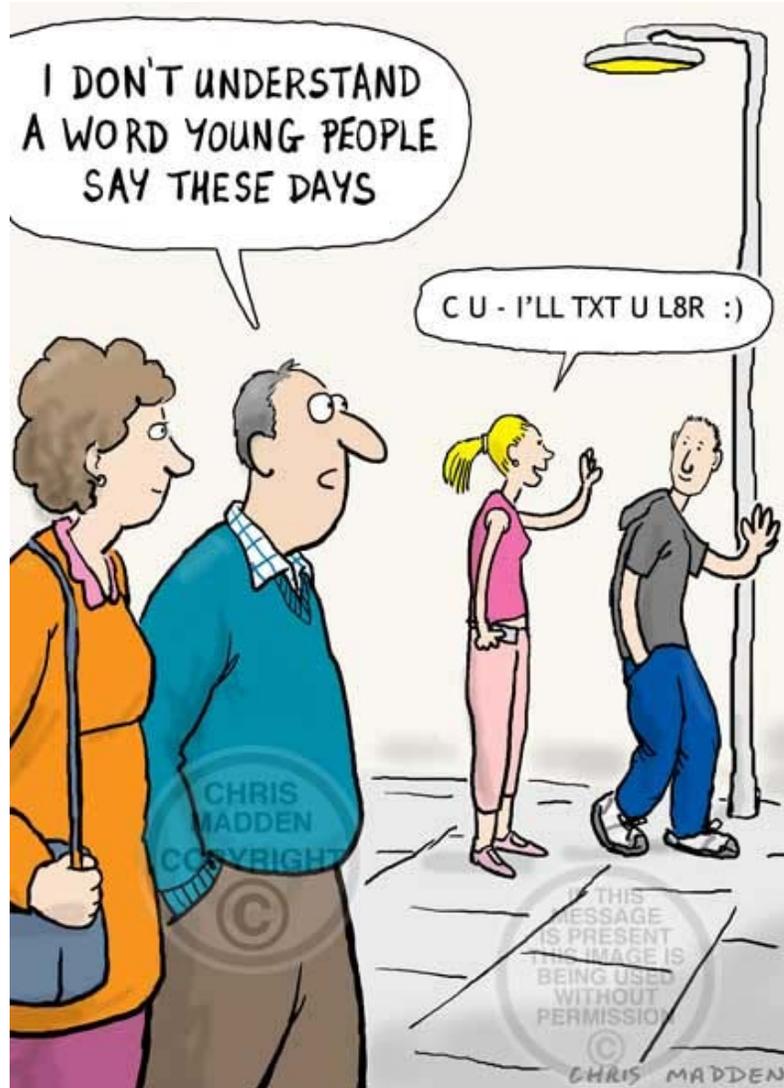
- Relates to analysis of the evidence.
- The candidate is expected to demonstrate their understanding of the decisions that were taken with regard to the selection and use of the quantitative or qualitative tools utilized.
 - ❖ What analytical techniques did you use to help you understand the evidence you collected?
 - ❖ Why did you choose these specific tools?
 - ❖ Did your analysis of the evidence support your theoretical conjectures and if not how did this influence your theory development?



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Possible Detailed Viva Questions – Seventh Set of Questions

- Relates to the results of the research.
- Even with good results, the candidate needs to apply considerable creativity to come up with something new and interesting to add to the body of theoretical knowledge.
- Important for all candidates to have some explanation as to how their theory generation and its validation proceeded.
 - ❖ In what way does your thesis contribute to the body of theoretical knowledge?
 - ❖ How do you regard your work from the point of view of the validity and reliability of the findings?
 - ❖ How do you regard your work from the point of view of generalizability?



A GOOD THESIS HAS A MESSAGE

Possible Detailed Viva Questions – Eighth Set of Questions

- Relates to the value of the results.

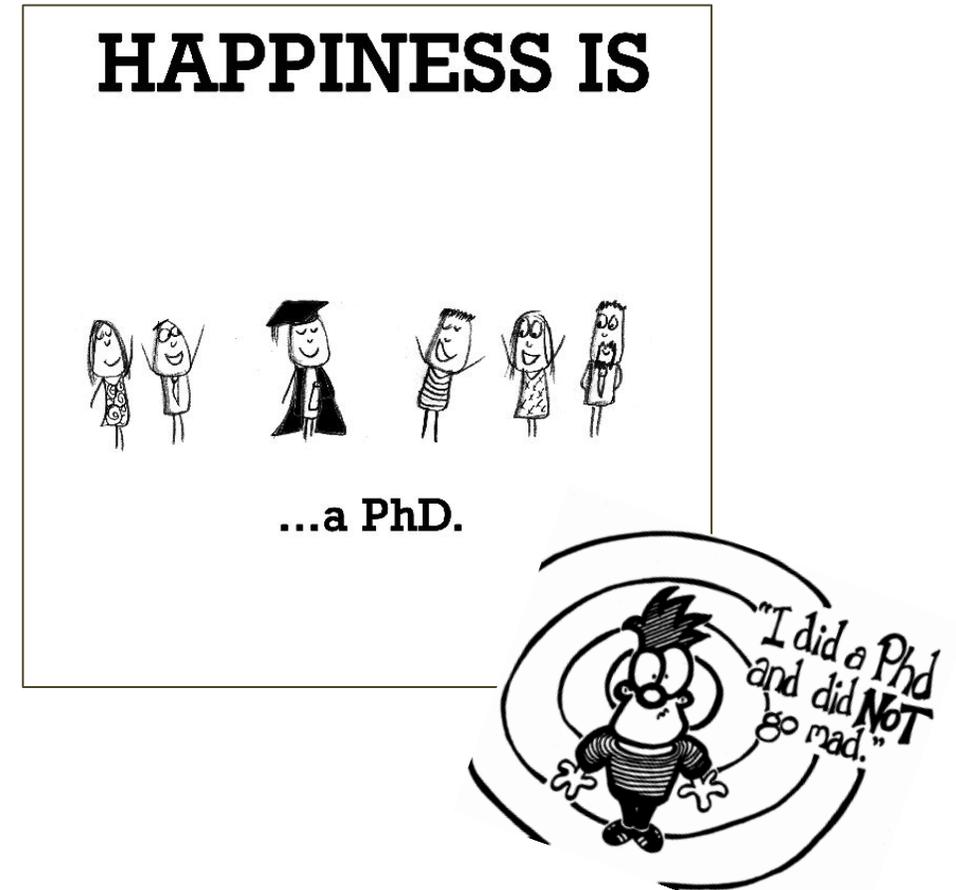
- ❖ How have you demonstrated that the new theoretical knowledge you have contributed has practical management validity and utility?
- ❖ What are the major weakness of your research?
- ❖ What questions have you discovered in your research that still need addressing?
- ❖ Where might the research go from here?



Viva Voce Outcomes - UPM



- Accepted with distinction (15 days)
- Accepted with minor modifications (30 days)
- Accepted with major modifications (60 days)
- Oral re-examination (Re-viva voce) (60 days)
- Re-submission of thesis (no more than 2 semesters / 1 year)
- Re-submission of a PhD thesis as a Masters' (60 days)
- Rejection of thesis (Fail)



Post Viva



Don't let your viva create a hole in your life.

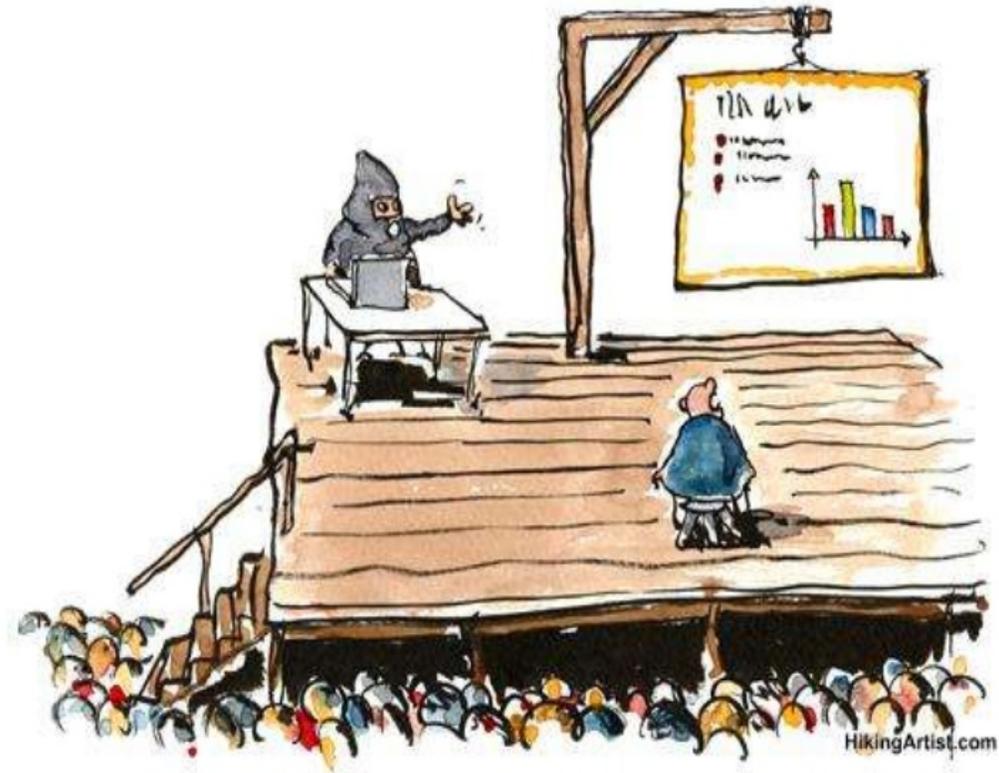
Students often feel a range of emotions after their vivas and/or after their revised thesis has been approved. Some feel positively charged and highly motivated, whereas others feel exhausted or a sense of anti-climax.

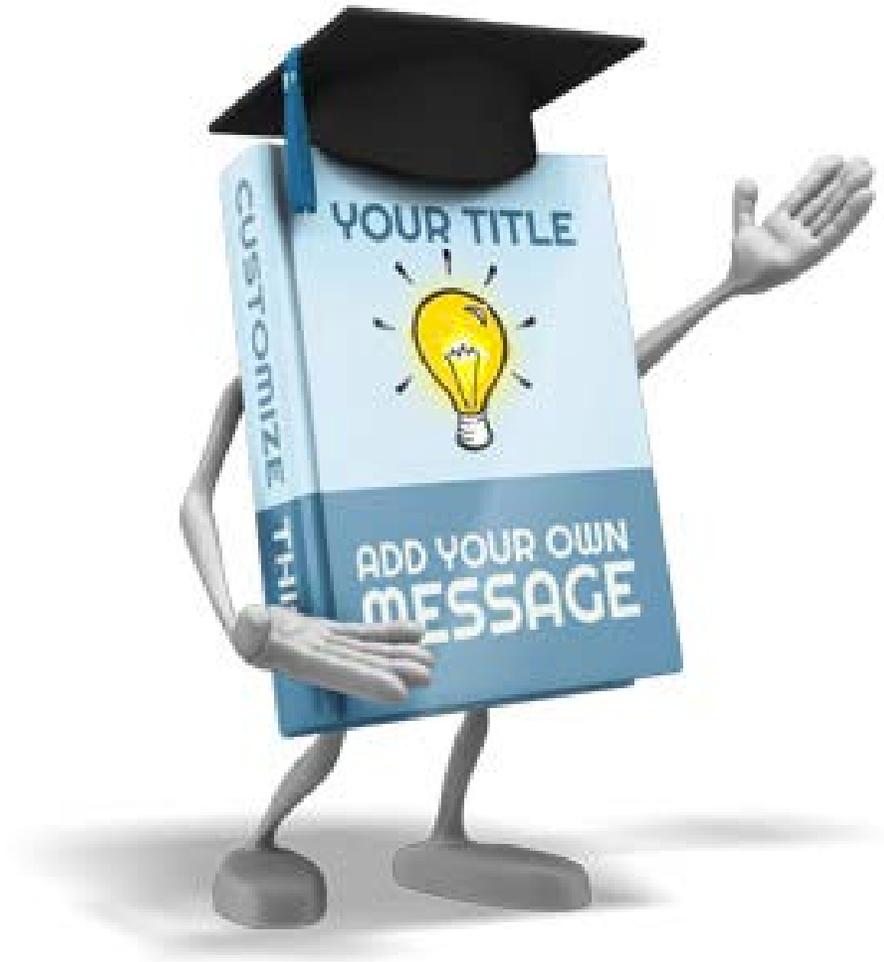
“For a few students like Leia, the euphoric moment did not even come when both her examiners congratulated her on the completion of her PhD. Instead she felt numb. She had been incapable of feeling any wonderful emotions for a few months actually. When people talked to her or complimented on her success, she was only able to smile. But inside, nothing was stirred. All she could think was that, ‘That’s it? Had it really ended?’ However, she did feel blessed and lucky for being able to finish the challenging journey. It was only over time that she began to feel comfortable enough in acknowledging her success in getting her PhD.” – PhD Anyone, 2015

Embrace the
journey, learn,
and move on.

Final Note

Try not to **JUDGE** the process of the viva by the **HOURS SPENT** with both the examiners. A good thesis can either have a short or long discussion depending on who your examiners are.

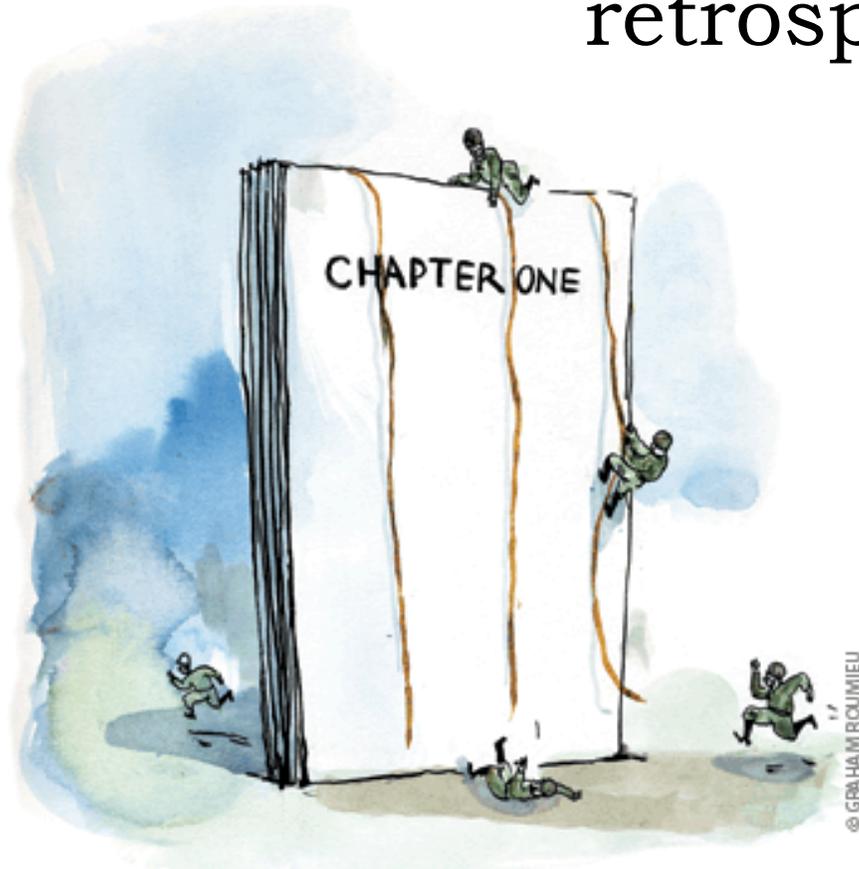




No matter your discipline or topic, **you have achieved something great** that takes determination and ability. You have done the majority of the work by writing your thesis – now show your examiners that you can discuss it competently.

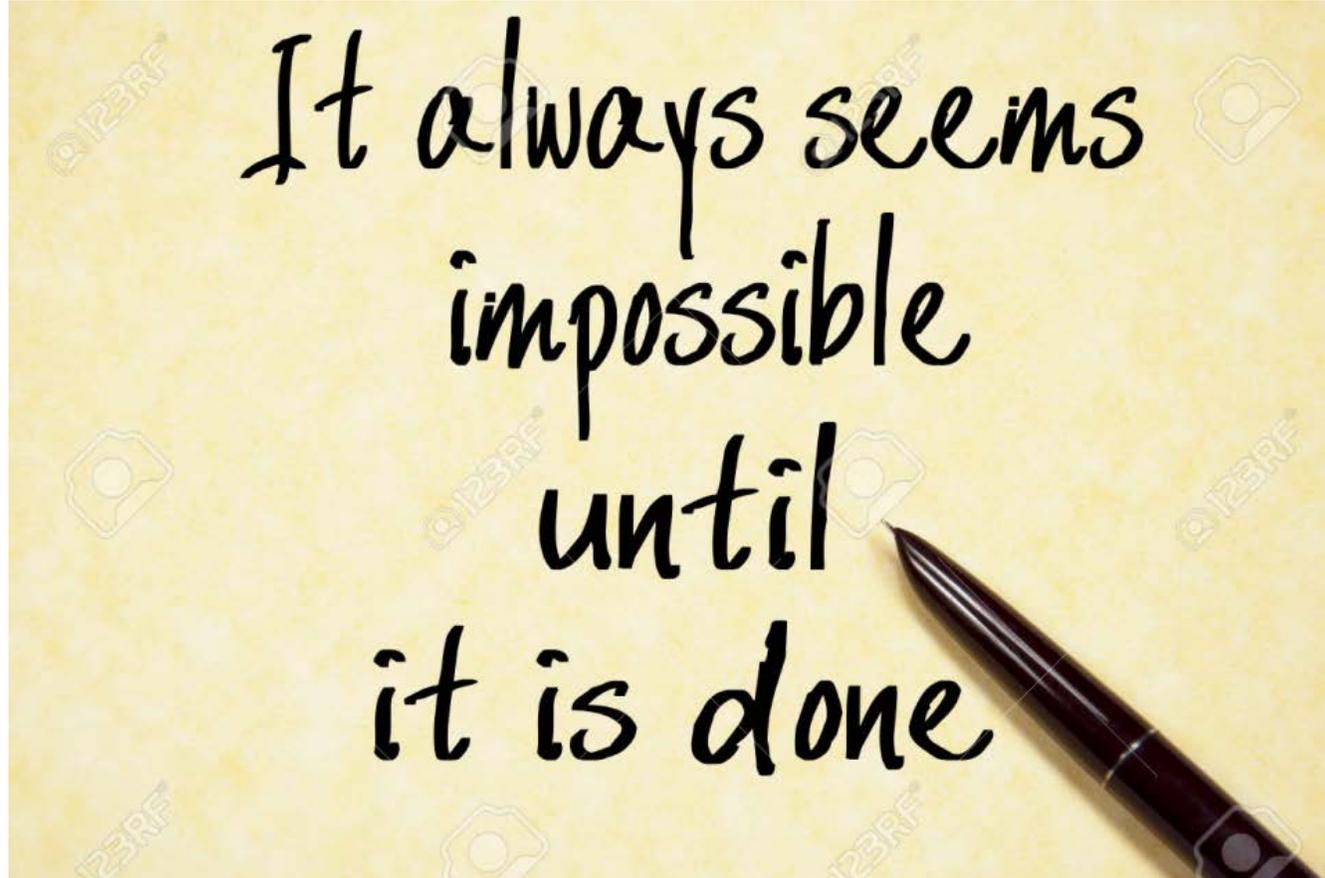
You know what?

“This oral examination is, therefore, a retrospective discussion of a piece of work that is complete.”



- Don't assume that your thesis can 'speak for itself' –find ways of talking about its strengths.

No point just talking about it...first things first...



“WHEN IN DOUBT, DON’T.”

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN



All the Best!

THE ROAD NOT TAKEN

*Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;*

*Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,*

*'And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.*

*I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.*

References

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- Trafford, V., & Leshem, S. (2009). Doctorateness as a threshold concept. *Innovations in education and teaching international*, 46(3), 305-316.
- University of Reading, Surviving the Viva at http://www.reading.ac.uk/web/files/graduateschool/gsg_survivingtheviva.pdf

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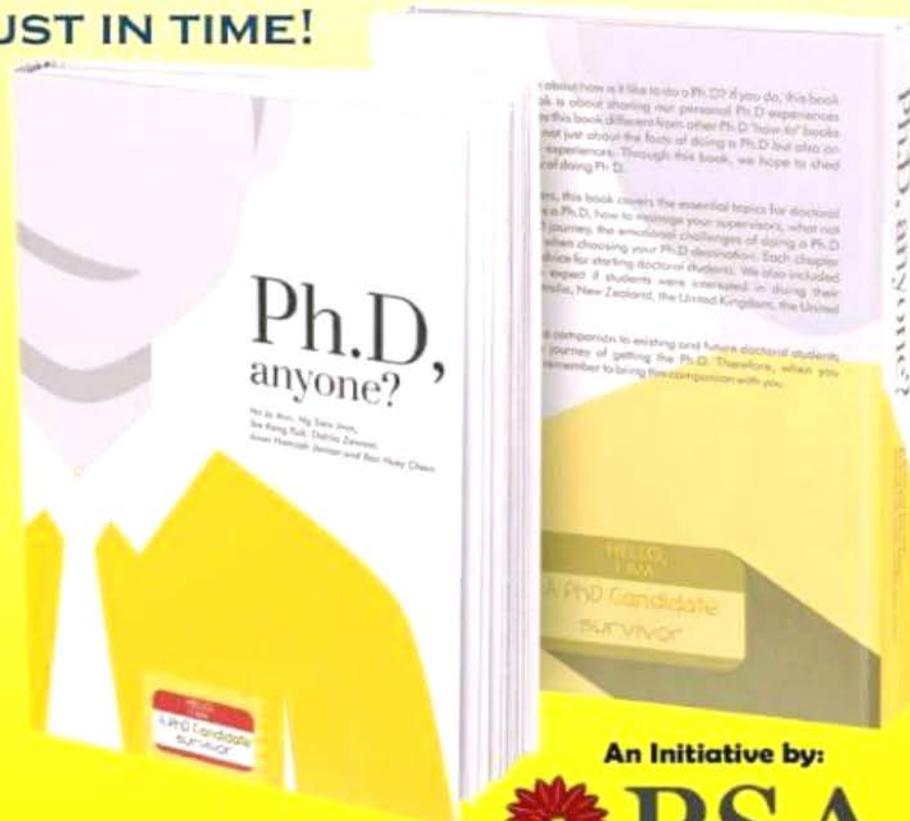
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