

The Proposal Defense and Public Speaking

or

Final Defense Practice

Our complete guide on defense and speaking tips is available on the TAMIU ARC website:

<https://www.tamtu.edu/cees/arc/documents/defense.tips>

Definition: Defenses are conference-style presentations of your proposal or final thesis/dissertation.

During the Proposal and Final defenses, you will present your proposal or final thesis respectively to your committee members and public audience members. Final defenses are conducted in public forums and are advertised to members of the community—anyone is allowed to go. A proposal can only get to the defense stage if it is approved by the committee and is at least 10 pages in length. A final manuscript can only reach the defense stage if it is approved by the committee and is at least 30 pages in length.

Committee: You must provide your committee with the latest, most complete copy of your manuscript at least seven working days before the defense day. It is usually the case that committee chairs will only set your defense day when they are confident that you are ready to succeed. If the committee decides that you are not ready for defense because the work is incomplete or otherwise requires rewrites, they may push your day back further.

Questioning: After you give your defense, your committee will have the opportunity to question you. See **Questioning** section below.

Voting: From the TAMIU Thesis Manual: “After questioning of the candidate is complete, the candidate is asked to leave the room. General discussion of the examination and the candidate’s performance should be allowed and encouraged before balloting. Committee members may discuss any topics concerning the candidate’s performance and qualification. However, committee members must cast their votes independently. A vote to pass, fail, or adjourn the examination to a later date may be cast. A candidate will pass the examination if all votes but one are to pass. A candidate will fail if there are two or more votes to fail, and the examination will be adjourned if there are two or more votes to adjourn. Two votes of fail override two votes to adjourn. One vote to fail and one vote to adjourn are not acceptable and an additional ballot or ballots must be cast. If the vote is to adjourn, the examination must reconvene within 3 weeks.”

Defense FAQs:

How long do I have? - There is no set time limit for defenses. However, most defenses go for about an hour (although sometimes two or three hours are blocked off). It depends on how much you have to say.

What do I need to bring to defense day? – You are not obligated to bring anything. Your committee should be emailed digital copies of your manuscript ahead of time. Likewise, your committee chair is usually the one who brings Thesis Forms to the defense (although, it is wise to check with your chair). However, many defending students bring notes, note-taking materials, or sometimes handouts for the committee and audience, depending on their work. Some students bring a copy of their work.

How do I decide on a date? - Generally, your defense day is decided by your committee chair and is *usually* about four to six weeks before the end of the semester. This is in order to give you to have time to incorporate your committee’s comments, the College of Arts and Sciences’s technical revisions, and the Graduate School’s final edit notes.

Do all the members of my committee have to attend? – Yes, unless they are unable, in which case, they have their own process to appoint a replacement. If a full committee is unavailable, your defense will be cancelled and rescheduled.

What happens after I pass? – Congratulations! After your defense, you need to add any revisions that your committee may have prescribed during and after the questioning stage, fill out any missing forms (<https://www.tamtu.edu/gradschool/ThesisForms.shtml>), and work with your committee chair to send your manuscript to the College of Arts and Sciences. Proposals are handled only by COAS. Final manuscripts have revisions recommended by COAS, which may take up to two weeks to complete, and after those revisions are completed, the Graduate School checks for final publication edits.

What happens if I do not pass? – Generally this is treated the same way as an “incomplete” assignment grade; with your committee’s comments, you would need to implement rewrites or complete your work and make another attempt at the defense. If you do not complete your final revisions before the end of the allotted time in the semester, you will need to register for the class for the next available semester and work with your committee to make another attempt.

Why do thesis proposals not get approved? - There may be several reasons why a thesis does not get approved past a defense stage. Irene Clark offers some suggestions (15):

- It does not have a main point or position. It reviews and summarizes texts and other works, but it does not state a direction, position, strategy, or try to answer a question.
- It is too broad or unfocused. It lacks organization or clarity.
- It does not define its key terms or misses a specific key term related to the research field.

As previously stated, most defenses occur with the assent of the committee chair. These suggestions are merely some common problems that committees may comment on before approving the defense.

Questioning from Committee:

The committee may ask any question related to the defense performance, your manuscript as a whole, or other background information. What they ask depends heavily on their preference. However, this a (very incomplete) list of questions that they might ask (Fisher and Thompson, 216).

- Why did you use this particular theoretical approach?
- What caused you to develop these particular strategies?
- What research question inspired you to begin this project?
- How did you determine the scope of the study?
- How did you carry out your experiment/research/analysis?
- Explain [aspect of your research or key term] in more detail.
- What historical or background research in the field led to the development of your work?
- What similar projects to yours are you familiar with, and how is your application different?
- How would other academics as well as people in the field be able to apply your work practically?
- What mistakes do you think you made?
- What limitations did you encounter, or things you might have done differently?
- What implications does your completed research have for the field at large, for related fields, or future research?
- What will *you* do with this research in the future?

Good luck! Have confidence! Now's the time to practice!