**Guidelines for Chairing a Master’s Thesis Defence**

Given that most defences are held with a possible combination of hybrid delivery via on-line and in-person, being “present” is based on participating in the defence. See Notes below regarding use of technology and Chair’s responsibility.

For the defence to proceed, the following people constitute the examining committee:

* Supervisor and co-supervisor (if applicable)
* Supervisory committee members
* External Examiner
* A neutral chair (non-voting)

If the External Examiner is unable to be present, they must submit written comments and questions in advance of the defence to the program coordinator. If a supervisory committee member is unable to be present, the defence can continue as long as at least one supervisory committee member is present.

Only theses of registered students will be examined. The defence is open to the university community and is announced campus wide. The candidate and the examining committee should plan to be available for two hours, which is the maximum duration of the Master’s defence.

If the defence has been approved to be closed (no audience present), the same procedures outlined below should be followed and that no one else present except for the examining committee and the candidate. The Chair opens the thesis defence reiterating that the presentation, questions & answers, and results are not to be disclosed to the public.

**Start of Defence**

The Chair opens the thesis defense at the appointed time with a territorial acknowledgement:

Thompson Rivers University campuses are on the ancestral and unceded lands of the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc (Kamloops campus) and the T’exelc (Williams Lake campus) within Secwepemcúl’ecw, the traditional and unceded territory of the Secwépemc. Our region also extends into the territories of the St’át’imc, Nlaka’pamux, Nuxalk, Tŝilhqot'in, Dakelh, and Syilx peoples.

The Chair introduces themselves and their role as well as outlines the process for the defence. After the process has been described, the Chair will ask for the Supervisor to introduce the members of the examining committee. After the introductions, the candidate will be introduced by the Supervisor.

**Candidate’s Presentation and Questions Period (open to the public)**

* The Chair invites the candidate to make a 15 to 20-minute presentation of their work
* The Chair invites questions from the examining committee following the presentation. Allow for Candidate to settle into the question period.
* The order of questioning is normally:
  + external examiner – up to 30 minutes
  + supervisory committee members – up to 10 minutes each member
  + supervisor(s) – up to 10 minutes each
* Questions must be related directly to the thesis or the candidate’s understanding of the general subject matter of the thesis.
* There is only one round of questions. The Chair inquires whether there are any other questions from the examining committee. If there are none, the Chair may ask a question. The Chair then opens the floor to questions from others attending the defence.
* When there are no more questions (or after no more than 90 minutes since the start of the exam), thank everyone for coming, then invite the audience and the candidate to leave the room until the committee has reached a decision on the thesis and its defence.

During the defence, the chair may be required to refocus the discussion on the examination of the candidate under one or more of the following situations:

* The examining committee members start debating among themselves:
  + politely remind the committee of the purpose of the defence.
* The supervisor answers for the candidate:
  + remind them that it is the candidate who is being examined.
* An inappropriate question is asked:
  + suggest that this might be a discussion that they may have at another time and remind the group of the purpose of the defence.
* The candidate is having great difficulty in the defence situation:
  + suggest a short break (suggest everyone take a bit of a stretch, use the washroom, etc.).
* The session seems to be going too long:
  + As 90 minutes are approaching, providing the candidate kept their presentation to 15 minutes, point out that time is getting on and suggest that they ask only the most pertinent questions related to the defence.

**Private Deliberations of the Examining Committee (closed to the public)**

To open the deliberations, it’s a best practice for the Chair to explain the definitions and implications of each option available to the committee - minor, moderate, major, and unacceptable. In the case of minor, moderate or major revisions:

* a majority decision of the committee is binding;
* the committee must take the time to communicate all suggested revisions to the Supervisor, who should take detailed notes.
* The committee should be clear about which recommendations are mandatory, and which are not.

For the thesis to be judged unacceptable,

* a unanimous vote is required
* the committee will be asked to prepare a written report to be included in the Defence Report.

**Inform the Candidate and Complete Thesis Defence Report**

The Chair ensures that the Thesis Defence Report form is completed accurately and signed by all members of the examining committee present~~.~~

The candidate alone is invited back into the room by the chair who informs the candidate of the decision of the examining committee.

Ensure that the candidate and supervisor are given copies of the Thesis Defence Report and understand the procedures for revisions that will follow.

**Note:** For hybrid defences, the neutral chair has these additional responsibilities:

* The chair has the authority to discontinue a hybrid defence at any time if they judge that remote participation is interfering with the proper conduct of a rigorous and fair defence.
* If one or more participants is dropped from the connection, or if audio is lost, the defence must be paused until the connection is restored. If the connection cannot be restored, the chair must suspend the defence until it can be rescheduled.
* The chair will coordinate questions from the audience (if time allows).