

THESIS DEFENSE RUBRIC

Student Name _____

Defense Date _____

Thesis Title (can be abbreviated) _____

Committee Member Name _____

The purpose of this rubric is to provide consistency and reliability of thesis assessment over time. It provides criteria for thesis evaluation, which should serve as guidelines for both the thesis committee and the student.

Instructions for Thesis Committee Members: Each committee member should complete the thesis section of the rubric *before* the defense and the oral defense section immediately *after* the defense. On the rubric, complete both sections below by writing a *score* in the appropriate box for each line on the rubric. The committee chair will lead a discussion to make an overall grade determination by consensus. The chair will fill out the **Evaluation of Thesis Defense** form. A summary of the recommendations of the committee should be attached to the evaluation form and given to the student, but the completed rubrics *should not* be given to the student.

Please note that the rubric items do not represent an exhaustive list of all evaluation criteria, nor are they intended to be equally weighted. *Numerical and letter grades should not be calculated directly from rubric scores.*

Oral Defense:

	Score	Exceptional (4)	Strong (3)	Marginal (2)	Unacceptable (1)
Organization		Very logical, coherent, complete	Generally logical, mostly coherent, generally complete	A bit scattered but acceptable, somewhat coherent, occasionally scrambled, some noticeable omissions but still understandable	Rather hard to follow, significant omissions and/or substitutions
Presentation		Clear, precise, convincing, articulate, good audience connection	Mostly clear, good grasp of material, only occasional stumbles, minor uncertainty on some facts or details	Occasional confusion or lack of clarity, occasional gaps in theory or important details, somewhat nervous or jittery	A lot of confusion, not in control of facts and key details, very nervous and stiff, frequently at a loss for words
Interaction with material		Clearly understood both research findings and underlying theory, when appropriate may have suggested how theory might be extended based on research results	Adequate understanding of research findings, generally understood underlying theory, perhaps a bit reluctant to attempt to extend theory or explain contradictory findings	Weak but acceptable understanding of theory, could present research findings but not always clear on implications, occasionally confused details or important findings	Lacked adequate understanding of theory, research findings not always understood, confused or uncertain about the implications of findings, contradictions or confusion evident in how material handled
Response to questions		Quickly grasped questions, clear and apt responses, good control of both theory and findings	Occasionally misunderstood a question, responses usually good though occasionally vague, generally apt grasp of question and how to answer	Some misunderstanding of questions, responses may be vague or inaccurate, did not always give a full response, may answer a different question	Frequently misunderstood a question, incorrect or inadequate responses, lack of confidence in response, argumentative



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Thesis:

	Score	Exceptional (4)	Strong (3)	Marginal (2)	Unacceptable (1)
Research Statement		Well-grounded, properly contextualized, clearly and convincingly presented	Theoretical motivation visible, context provided, reasonable presentation	Theoretical motivation could be stronger, presentation okay but could be better, research question(s) could be stronger	Theoretical grounding weak, missing, or confused, not clear what the research question is, presentation and argumentation hard to follow
Literature Review		Broad-ranging, well-organized, provides a strong foundation for the research being presented	Very adequate, used effectively to introduce the research question at hand	Major sources included but some visible gaps, utilization of sources could be stronger but acceptable, organization is okay	Significant gaps in the literature review, not effectively used in support of research question, organizing principles unclear
Methodology		Clearly explained, very appropriate, properly applied	Explained, mostly appropriate, generally proper application, overall—only a few shaky areas	Explained but not always clearly, generally appropriate though there are some weaknesses, application could be improved	Inadequate explanation, some choices suspect or inappropriate, methodology not always applied as described
Research Results		Consistent with methodology, well organized and presented, gaps or problems acknowledged	Mostly consistent with methodology, adequately organized and presented, gaps or problems may be glossed over	Generally consistent with methodology, some problems in presentation of findings, gaps or problems may not have been acknowledged	Data may not be consistent with methodology, presentation is adequate or confusing, gaps or problems ignored or covered up
Analysis		Optimal analytic strategies applied, analytic results well-presented and explained, proper interpretation of analytic results	Good analytic strategies applied, results adequately presented, interpretation mostly consistent with approach to analysis	Analytic strategies acceptable though not optimal, presentation of results okay but with obvious gaps, interpretation acceptable but weak at points	Analytic strategies marginal or inappropriate, presentation of findings inadequate, confused or misleading, interpretation of findings too often misguided or misleading
Organization		Clear, logical, convincing, strong	Generally clear, logical, convincing	Okay though there is room for improvement, some sections may be misplaced, possible gaps in lists of tables and figures	Too much redundancy, sections misplaced or missing, inadequate notational system for showing structure and number of tables and figures
Writing Style		Clear, easy to follow, proper use of technical terms, sentence structure not overly adorned, good paragraphing, not dense or cryptic	Very readable though sentence and paragraph structures may be longer and more complex than necessary, technical terms mostly used correctly	Generally readable but occasionally hard to follow, occasional misuse of technical terms, some redundancy, some tendency to include sentence and paragraph structures which are dense, confusing, and overly-adorned, some non-academic jargon may be present	Misuse of technical terms is common, writing is dense, confusing or misleading, too much redundancy, non-academic style (use of contractions, inclusion of folksy vocabulary, tortured sentence structure, poor paragraphing, etc.)
Content		Coherent, original, creative, well-presented, valuable contribution to the field, valuable academic contribution	Content consistent with theory and methodology, well-done but nothing out of the ordinary, consistent with expectations for a master's thesis	Content okay, suitable organization, acceptable master's-level work	Not master's-level work, amateurish in tone and manner of presentation, adds little or nothing to the field