Your PhD viva in Archaeology

These guidelines aim to help you prepare for your viva and offer useful information on the process of submission and examination.

What is a viva (viva voce)?
The viva is the verbal counterpart to your written thesis and it is an oral examination of your research that demonstrates your ability to participate in academic discussion with other scholars. Your thesis examiners need to establish that you know the area in which your study is located, that you are the author of the work that you have presented and that you have made an original contribution to knowledge.

Although the viva will appear a challenging stage in the completion of your PhD, you have already done quite a bit of preparation for it, even though you may not realise it. You have done a formal mock viva at the beginning of your second year in the confirmation review, you will have presented twice at the Postgraduate Research Conference in front of academic staff and fellow students, and you probably also will have presented some work at conferences and workshops.

Preparing for your viva
In conjunction with your supervisors, you should aim to establish the date for your viva in advance once you know when you are likely to submit your thesis. You should also discuss in advance with your supervisors who your examiners might be. Usually there will be one internal and one external examiner. Your supervisors do not usually participate in the viva.

The viva is normally scheduled to take place between 8 and 10 weeks after submission of your thesis. However, you should be aware that a viva occasionally is held later because of difficulties in finding a date that both examiners can meet with sufficient time for them to read your work in depth.

Your aim is to know your thesis very well and to be calm and confident during your viva. There may be some time between the submission of your thesis and the viva, so make sure you re-read your thesis carefully and are prepared to answer questions and engage in debate. Your examiners will have read your thesis and met before your viva begins in order to discuss your thesis. They will probably have decided the sort of questions that they wish to put and who will lead each element of the questioning.

You might want to create a list of viva questions and practise answering them. It is a good idea to produce a summary of what your thesis is about. Examiners are likely to ask you to comment on the wider implications of your work, so take time to think more broadly about your research before the viva.

During the viva
The examiners will want to discuss both strengths and weaknesses in your research, and you should think of the viva as an opportunity to demonstrate your skill at critical
appraisal and enjoy the opportunity to talk about your research. The key areas to think about are:

- What is your thesis about?
- What did you do in your research?
- What did you find and what are your main results?
- Why does your research matter and what are the implications of your work?

A viva typically lasts around two hours but it may take less time, and sometimes takes more time.

**The outcome of the viva**

Most people who reach the stage of the PhD viva will gain their PhD. However, it is very rare that a thesis will be passed without any changes being required. Almost everybody is asked to make minor or major amendments, so you should not be disappointed if you are asked to do so.

At the University of Sheffield, the outcome of the viva will be one of these recommendations:

- That the degree be awarded without any changes being made to the dissertation. Although this is possible, it is extremely rare. No further work, in this case, would be required.
- That the degree be awarded once specified minor amendments have been completed to the satisfaction of the examiners. This is a common result, and amendments are to be made and submitted to the internal examiner within three months from the date the candidate receives notification of the required amendments from the examiners.
- That the degree be awarded once major amendments have been completed to the satisfaction of the examiners. This can happen occasionally, and amendments are to be made and submitted to one or both examiners within one year from the date the candidate receives notification of the required amendments from the examiners. It may involve another oral examination.
- That that the degree of PhD be not awarded but that the degree of Master of Philosophy (MPhil) be awarded, with or without necessary modification. This happens rarely. Amendments need to be made as required.
- That the degree of PhD not be awarded. This is extremely rare.

After the oral examination, the examiners complete a report that has to be sent to the Faculty within two weeks of the viva.