

# RSM MSc Thesis Oral Exam

## Student Preparation Guide



# Table of Contents

1	Purpose of the oral exam	2
2	What will be assessed	2
3	What the oral exam is not	3
4	What to expect before and during the exam	3
5	How to prepare	4
6	Sample questions	5
8	Post-exam reflection	6

# 1 Purpose of the oral exam

The oral exam gives you the opportunity to discuss your thesis and show your understanding, reasoning, and scholarly judgment in real time. It complements the written thesis by allowing you to explain, justify, and reflect on the choices you made during the thesis process.

The oral exam is not mainly about memorising your thesis. It is about showing that you understand your work, can explain your decisions, and can engage in an academic conversation about what you did and why it matters.

In the context of generative AI, the oral exam also helps make your authorship and intellectual ownership visible. This does not mean that the oral exam is an AI-detection interview. Rather, it is a structured academic dialogue in which you demonstrate that the final thesis reflects your own understanding, decisions, and judgment.

The oral exam may ask you to:

- explain the main purpose and contribution of your thesis in your own words;
- justify important theoretical, methodological, analytical, or practical choices;
- connect your research question, method, findings, conclusions, and limitations;
- respond to questions or challenges in real time;
- reflect on what you learned and what you would do differently.

# 2 What will be assessed

The oral exam focuses on two broad assessment criteria. These criteria are used by examiners to make a holistic judgment of your performance.

Criterion	What this means for you	What strong performance looks like
1. Intellectual Ownership (Analytical Mastery in Real Time)	You can show that you understand and own your thesis as the author of the work. You can explain what you did, why you did it, and how your choices shaped your findings and conclusions.	You explain the thesis in your own words, justify key choices, link decisions to outcomes, reflect on limitations, and reason through follow-up questions rather than only repeating prepared answers.
2. Dialogue & Communication of Results	You can communicate your thesis clearly and take part in an academic conversation about it. You listen, respond to questions, clarify your reasoning, and help create shared understanding.	You answer questions relevantly, explain complex ideas understandably, use examples where helpful, respond to prompts, and build on the discussion.

The first criterion carries more weight because the core purpose of the oral exam is to assess intellectual ownership, analytical reasoning, and scholarly judgment in real time. The second criterion is also important, but it should not be interpreted as assessing personality, charisma, or native-like fluency.

### What examiners are looking for

Examiners are interested in your thinking. They want to see how you understand your own work, how you explain your choices, and how you respond when asked to clarify, justify, or reflect.

## 3 What the oral exam is not

Understanding what the oral exam is not can help you prepare in a calmer and more productive way.

The oral exam is not...	Instead, it is...
A memory test	A conversation about how well you understand and can reason about your thesis.
A test of perfect English	An assessment of clarity, meaning-making, and academic dialogue.
A performance of confidence or charisma	A chance to show understanding, ownership, and reflection, even if you feel nervous.
A repetition of the written thesis	An opportunity to explain, justify, connect, and reflect on the work.
An AI-policing interview	A way to make your authorship, process, and decision-making visible through academic dialogue.
A search for one perfect answer	A space where you can reason aloud, consider trade-offs, and show scholarly judgment.

You do not need to sound rehearsed or perfect. In fact, overly memorised answers can make it harder to show real-time reasoning. It is better to understand your thesis deeply and practise explaining it flexibly.

## 4 What to expect before and during the exam

The exact format may differ by programme. Always check your programme thesis manual and any instructions from your thesis coordinator or supervisor. The following overview gives a general picture of what to expect.

Stage	What usually happens	How you can approach it
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Before the exam	You receive information about timing, format, assessment criteria, and practical arrangements.	Read the rubric and instructions carefully. Note anything unclear and ask in advance.
Opening	The examiners briefly explain the structure and purpose of the oral exam.	Listen carefully. You may ask for clarification if something is unclear.
Initial explanation	You may be invited to briefly explain your thesis in your own words.	Give a concise overview: problem, approach, key findings, contribution.
Questioning and dialogue	Examiners ask questions about your choices, findings, limitations, and implications.	Think before answering, reason aloud, and connect your answers back to your thesis.
Follow-up questions	Examiners may ask you to clarify, justify, or extend your answer.	Treat follow-ups as opportunities to show deeper understanding, not as signs that your first answer was wrong.
Closing	You may be given a final opportunity to add or reflect on something.	Use this to highlight learning, contribution, or an important point not yet discussed.

### Reminder

It is acceptable to pause before answering. You can say: "Let me think for a moment," or "Could you repeat or clarify the question?" This is part of academic dialogue.

## 5 How to prepare

Good preparation is not about memorising the thesis. It is about being able to explain the logic of your work and discuss it from different angles.

### Re-read your thesis as a critical reader

- What is the central problem or question?
- How does each chapter contribute to answering the research question?
- Which decisions shaped the final thesis most strongly?
- Where are the strongest and weakest parts of the argument?
- What would a critical examiner be likely to ask?

### Practise explaining the thesis in different lengths

- One-sentence version: What is your thesis about?
- Two-minute version: What problem did you study, how, and what did you find?
- Five-minute version: What is the full logic of your research design and contribution?

- Non-expert version: How would you explain your thesis to someone outside your field?

### Prepare for justification and reflection

- Why did you choose this theory, method, sample, data, or analytical approach?
- What alternatives did you consider?
- What trade-offs did you accept?
- What are the limitations, and how do they affect your conclusions?
- What would you do differently if you had more time or resources?

### Practice tip

Ask a peer to question you for 15 minutes. Do not only practise your opening summary. Practise follow-up questions, especially "why," "how," "what if," and "so what" questions.

## 6 Sample questions

These are sample questions to give you an idea of the kinds of questions examiners may formulate. You do not need to prepare scripted answers to all of them. Use them to practise explaining, justifying, and reflecting on your work.

### Opening and ownership questions

- Can you briefly explain what your thesis is about and why it matters?
- What is the central problem or question your thesis addresses?
- What do you see as the main contribution of your thesis?
- Which part of the thesis best represents your own thinking or decision-making?
- If you had to explain your thesis to someone outside your field, what would you say?

### Research design and methodology questions

- Why did you choose this research design?
- How did your method help you answer your research question?
- What alternatives did you consider, and why did you not choose them?
- What were the main trade-offs in your methodological approach?
- How did your sample, case, data, or data collection process shape your findings?
- What would have changed if you had used a different method?

### Theory and literature questions

- Which theoretical concepts were most important for your thesis, and why?
- How did the literature shape your research question or analytical approach?
- Where does your thesis confirm, extend, question, or complicate existing literature?
- Were there tensions or contradictions in the literature? How did you handle them?
- Looking back, is there any literature you would engage with differently?

### Analysis, findings, and interpretation questions

- What is your most important finding, and how did you arrive at it?
- How do your findings answer your research question?
- Can you explain how you moved from data or evidence to interpretation?
- Which finding surprised you most, and why?
- Were there findings that did not fit your expectations or theoretical framework?
- How strong is the evidence for your main conclusion?

### Limitations and implications questions

- What are the most important limitations of your thesis?
- Which limitation matters most for interpreting your findings?
- What should readers be cautious about when interpreting your results?
- What are the theoretical, practical, managerial, policy, or societal implications of your thesis?
- Who could use your findings, and how?
- What should not be concluded from your thesis?

### Reflection, process, and authorship questions

- What did you learn from conducting this research?
- How did your thinking change during the thesis process?
- Which feedback had the greatest influence on the final thesis?
- Which parts of the thesis process required the most independent judgment from you?
- How did you ensure that the final argument reflects your own understanding and judgment?
- Where did you exercise the most authorship in the thesis?

also means the findings should be interpreted in relation to this specific context."

## 7 Post-exam reflection

After the oral exam, it can be useful to write a short reflection for yourself, even if this is not formally required. This helps you consolidate what you learned from the thesis process.

Reflection prompt	Your notes
What answer was I most satisfied with?	
Which question challenged me most?	
What did I learn about my own research process?	

What would I take forward into  
future academic or professional  
work?