

Master's Thesis Oral Examination for International Social Welfare & Health Policy: A guide for the candidate

Master's students starting in year 2021 and on and who deliver a written master's thesis will be expected to participate in an oral examination to present and discuss the thesis. This is a brief guide on how the oral exam is set up, as well as how you can prepare for your oral presentation of the master's thesis.

Structure of the oral examination

Where and when is the examination?

The oral exam will be digital since many MIS students travel abroad in their last semester. It will be held via Zoom.

Who will I meet at the exam?

You meet your examination committee, which consists of an external examiner (from outside OsloMet) and an internal examiner (from OsloMet). Your supervisor does not participate in the commission. It is the internal examiner who is responsible for managing the commission's work and who begins by welcoming and introducing you and the commission.

How is the oral exam carried out?

The examination itself takes place in four stages: 1) The examiner's meeting, where a grade for the written thesis is set (which the commission has held in advance); 2) the day itself for the oral examination where you present the thesis orally (if you have co-written a master's thesis you will do this part together with your co-author); 3) then followed by an individual oral exam. After that, 4) the commission has a short meeting where they discuss and determine the final grade. It is the final grade you will see on your diploma.

1. Examiner's meeting: the written thesis

Before the oral exam the commission will meet to discuss the written work (master's thesis) and assign a grade to it (A - F). They then prepare the oral

examination. Note that only those students who have received a passing grade (A-E) will have an oral exam.

Students will not typically receive a grade for the written thesis before the oral exam. It is therefore possible that the commission selects a date for the oral exam completing their evaluation of the written thesis, and that a student receives a “fail” (F) grade even if they have previously received a scheduled time for the examination. If you receive a grade of F, you will, however, be notified by the study administration no later than two days before the scheduled date.

2. Oral Examination, part 1: Presentation of the master's thesis

The first part of the oral exam is your presentation of the master's thesis. This is a 30-minute lecture in which the thesis topic, thesis question, findings, discussion of findings, as well as a summary and reflections on the thesis are presented. If you have co-written with another student, you will present together, and you will then have 45 minutes at your disposal.

When you first log into Zoom you will be placed in a “waiting room” before entering. The internal examiner will then invite you into the Zoom room. The oral exam starts with the internal examiner welcoming you and presenting themselves.

If you wish, the commission can tell you what grade they have assigned to the written work before the presentation starts. Or, you can choose to wait until you get both grades at the end of the exam.

Most candidates choose to use a power point in their presentation via the “share screen” option in Zoom. However, this is not a requirement.

3. Oral examination, part 2

After the presentation it is time for the individual oral examination. As this is an individual exam you are required to be alone in the room, so if you are sitting

with your co-author, they will have to leave the room. The examiners may ask you to move your camera around to ensure that you are alone.

The examiners will now discuss your assignment with you, they may want to say something about how they read and understand the thesis, perhaps point out some strengths and weaknesses - and then they will have questions about the thesis that they will discuss with you.

This part should take approximately 45 minutes. Note that students writing a master's thesis with a co-author must nonetheless each have their own individual exam (part 2).

After the examination, you are sent back into the Zoom waiting room for a while.

4. Determination of final grade

The last part of the exam is a discussion between the examiners only, where they evaluate the oral exam and determine what will be the final grade. You will then be brought back in by the internal examiner.

The committee members will briefly summarize how they experienced and assessed the thesis and oral examination, and then inform you of the final grade, or grades if you chose to wait until the end for the grade on the written thesis itself.

Some tips for the oral presentation of the thesis

What should the oral presentation of the thesis contain? A presentation can basically follow the same structure as your master's thesis. After all, you must present it in a short format, within a specified time frame. The listeners are curious to know what you have written about, why, what we already know about the topic, and what kind of problem you have explored.

Say something about the theoretical perspectives that have been used, but do not get bogged down in a long analysis. The listeners are very interested in hearing about *your* specific project and what it has resulted in, in terms of knowledge and insights.

The main emphasis in the presentation should then be on what you have done, what you have found and discussed. It involves describing the type of method used, how data were chosen (sampling, selection criteria, etc), the type of data that were generated and analysed, and any ethical considerations.

Then, the concrete findings are presented and how these have been interpreted, both by applying a specific theoretical perspective(s) and using a specific analysis strategy(ies). Feel free to say something about how the thesis may have significance for field of research it belongs to, how it may add to this field, and show that you can also reflect critically about the thesis' strengths and weaknesses.

A simple proposal for structure can therefore be

- Introduction (describe the topic, what do you already know about the topic and its coverage in the field, why you became interested in it)
- Thesis questions – the main research questions
- Theoretical perspectives used
- Method, data collection and analysis of data
- Discoveries/findings
- Discussion of findings
- Summary/implications for the topic and field of interest and/or further research
- What did you learn from this; any "weaknesses"/limitations of the thesis

Most people present with a Powerpoint, but it is not a "must"

You should keep in mind...

The time it takes

Remember that having to deal with a specified time frame for the oral presentation of the thesis is itself an exercise. When you get 30 (or 45 if there are two of you) minutes, do not spend more than that. It is a good idea to practice in advance. Some people like to write the script in full when they are not so used to presenting. Practice - how long do you spend reading aloud a page in your script? Note the time used! If the presentation is too long, work on cutting it down. You should not have so much to say that you must speak very quickly - then the audience will not get the substance.

If you make a Powerpoint

Do not create too many slides / do not fill them with too much text. The audience can then get caught up in the text and look at it more than they listen to you! Instead, use keywords to rest the eyes and keep the mind in place. If there are two of you who present together, think about the distribution of what you will say. Be well prepared - it reduces the risk of messing up.

Remember to have page numbers in the script

A very specific tip is to avoid clutter: Put page numbers in your script - then you can navigate easier. If you have the script printed out in a word file and you are also showing slides/ppt: mark in the script the places where you will change the slide. This will prevent you from forgetting to click on the slides (it's easy to forget that and just focus on the script if you're a little nervous!)

Do not stress

Don't be "embarrassed" or apologetic if you stick to the script - it's better than having to break away and speak completely freely - at least if it results in you veering off topic so that time is lost.

Show that you can prepare and present within a given time frame is itself a skill. This exam form is a great opportunity to try it out! Take time to breathe, drink a sip of water and find peace in the situation. If you get out of it, do not stress. It is not dangerous if there is a short pause where you must look up a sheet of paper

or find where you were. Remember: No one expects you to be a TED-talk champion, but the commission expects you to be prepared and that also an audience without previous knowledge of your thesis should after 30 minutes have gained an understanding of what you wrote about and what you discovered!

Good luck 😊