

An Introduction

I love helping people prepare for the viva. That's why I produce my **Viva Survivors** site and run workshops on viva preparation.

I also love things that are small and perfectly formed. This tiny book is my attempt to capture practical viva prep ideas. The goal is to focus on actions; look elsewhere for pre-submission or on-the-day advice. This is all about the time leading up to the viva. You don't need to do everything; pick a smorgasbord of ideas that resonate, invest some time and you'll be fine.

Start Reading

Take at least a two week break from your thesis. Then read it carefully. Don't skim or skip. Take it line by line until you have read everything. Make notes as you read.

When you come back to re-read sections of your thesis, don't cherry pick the good stuff. If you know something well, move on. If something seems unfamiliar or difficult, don't leave it behind. Interrogate it.

Amazing Annotation

Annotating your thesis serves two purposes. First, it is a purposeful activity for engaging with your thesis. You cannot do it passively: you have to think about your work while you add a layer of useful information. Second, you have a powerful artefact you can refer to in the viva. As an activity it can be broken up into manageable chunks.

Mark chapters with Post It notes. Do the same for important sections.

Keep annotation simple and consistent. Don't switch between formats and tools. Use red pen only for mistakes, say, and pencil for short notes and so on.

Expand on jargon when you find it. Even if you know a term, it helps to unpick it.

Highlight key references. This will make your research base stand out when you re-read your thesis.

Make it useful. There is an audience of one for your annotation. Satisfy your needs. Create a useful resource.

Practical Preparations

Viva preparation is not all about reading your thesis and adding notes. There are other activities that you can do which will add to your preparation.

Practice answering questions. You have to do it in the viva, so get practice now.

Check recent publications. See if any new papers have a bearing on your thesis.

Check examiners' publication history. Explore their interests and see what you know about their area of research.

Talk to your supervisors. Discuss your work and ask for feedback. Explore whether or not a mock viva would be helpful.

Ask about viva experiences. Talk to recent PhD graduates from your department to establish some expectations for your viva.

List questions you've been asked at conferences. Think about what people have wanted to know about your research.

Super Summaries

You can build on the purposeful work of annotating your thesis by creating powerful summaries of your research. Making these helps you to continue to think about your work and create something, as well as providing useful notes to refer to later.

Ask "What's important?" Take a sheet of paper for each chapter and write this at the top. Use the page to answer the question.

Write a Non-Abstract. Rewrite your abstract to remove ambiguity, leave only clear description.

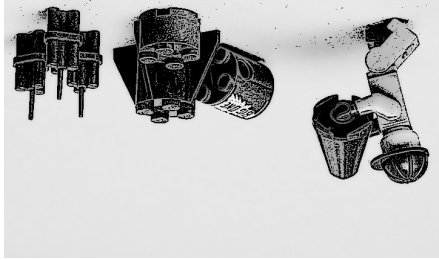
Create a mind map. Make a visual overview of your thesis on a sheet of A3.

Make an edited bibliography. Find the most important papers referenced in your thesis, list them and add why they are so valuable.

Summarise pages in 10 words or less. You could add this to each page. This can help you to extract the story of your thesis.

A Week Of Questions
Ideal question practice means answering relevant questions from other people. But your command, and the confidence you have in your abilities. Confidence can be developed so that you feel able to present the best part of yourself in the viva. Confidence is not about hoping you're not too nervous: you can influence it.
Clothes. Wear clothes that help you to feel awesome and confident.
Start your day well. Listen to music that builds you up. Get caffeinated. Have a good breakfast. Smile.
When are you at your most confident? Visualise when you're in flow and at your best. What are you doing? Can you replicate some of that state?
You've not got this far by accident. You are talented. You must be. Think about all of your achievements during the PhD.
What would you like to ask your examiners?
Sunday
What do you not want to be asked?
Saturday
What's been most difficult in your research?
Friday
What are your most important results?
Thursday
What have you learned?
Wednesday
Why are you interested in your research?
Tuesday
What is your research about?
Monday
You can find it at www.viva-survivors.com, along with more ideas, help, practical preparation tools and links to my viva-related books and ebooks.
If this tiny book has been helpful, share it with someone! Thank you.
Email me: nathan@nathanryder.co.uk
Tweet me: @DrRyder and @VivaSurvivors

Want More Help?
Check out **Viva Survivors**, my daily blog and irregular podcast about viva preparation and the PhD viva. Blog posts every day and an archive of interviews about viva experiences and researcher life.
You can find it at www.viva-survivors.com, along with more ideas, help, practical preparation tools and links to my viva-related books and ebooks.
If this tiny book has been helpful, share it with someone! Thank you.
Email me: nathan@nathanryder.co.uk
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