

8. Thesis

8.1 Preparation for research and thesis writing

The main output of an RPg student is the thesis or a portfolio. In fact, the eligibility of a student for award of a degree is assessed by the Thesis Assessment Committee on the basis of:

- (a) The thesis or portfolio;
- (b) An oral examination; and
- (c) A written examination, if required.

In an attempt to collect and distribute to RPg students key learning and research materials, the Graduate School has published a document titled *Research and Thesis Writing*, which focuses on the structure of a thesis and provides advice on the areas of research and thesis writing techniques. The publication comprises six chapters:

- Chapter 1: Beginning research – advises how to select a research topic and work with a Supervisor
- Chapter 2: Effective use of information – guides students through searching for information online and helps them develop skills and techniques for using library resources
- Chapter 3: Structuring a thesis – outlines the main components of the structure of an academic thesis
- Chapter 4: Writing a thesis – focuses on the actual writing of a thesis
- Chapter 5: Proofreading – focuses on proofreading and suggests a number of ways of checking for inconsistency in thesis content and structure at micro and macro levels
- Chapter 6: Guide to thesis formatting – contains information about the requirements for formatting a thesis, based on the regulations of the Graduate School

The publication is the output of a concerted effort of various CUHK departments. RPg students are advised to read the document carefully before they formulate their research plan. It is accessible from the GS Platform (Students) on the Graduate School website.

8.2 Research ethics

The University has an established policy on research ethics which applies to all researchers including students. Please refer to the Research Office and the Knowledge Transfer Office website (<https://www.orkts.cuhk.edu.hk/en/about/policies-guidelines>) website for the *Policy on Research* and the *Policy on Intellectual Property* (see also section 6.8 above on Research Ethics Training).

8.3 Procedures

The procedure relating to the submission of theses/portfolios is summarised in the following table, with more elaborations available in the ensuing sections.

Event/Time	Tasks of Students	Tasks of Graduate Divisions
Declaration of intention to submit thesis/portfolio – submit to Graduate School four months before actual submission	Complete and submit Form TAS-1 with 1-2 pages summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Supervisor and Head of the Graduate Division to approve proposed date for thesis/portfolio submission and proposed thesis/portfolio title; - Graduate Division to forward signed Form TAS-1 to GSO, with nominations of Thesis Assessment Committee members on Form TAD-1A (for master's) or Form TAD-1C (for doctoral).
Appointment of examiners – after approval of nomination		Head of the Graduate Division to inform Internal Examiners (IE) of their appointment.
Change of thesis/portfolio title (if applicable) – after approval of thesis/ portfolio title	Complete and submit Form TAS-2 to Graduate Division for approval	Supervisor and Head of the Graduate Division to approve and forward signed Form TAS-2 to GSO.
Change of Thesis Assessment Committee		Complete Form TAD-2A/TAD/S-1 and forward to GSO.
Deferment of thesis/portfolio submission beyond the original proposed date	Complete and submit Form TAS-3 to Graduate Division for approval	Supervisor and Head of the Graduate Division to approve the application and forward signed Form TAS-3 to GSO.

Event/Time	Tasks of Students	Tasks of Graduate Divisions
<p>Submission of thesis/ portfolio – according to the proposed date of thesis/ portfolio submission</p>	<p>Check the applicable submission method at GS Platform (Student). <i>The online arrangement is applicable to students whose External Examiners' nominations have been approved after the system launch date, i.e. 14 December 2020.</i></p> <p><i>Conventional Procedure:</i></p> <p>(i) Upload the first draft of thesis to VeriGuide http://veriguide1.cse.cuhk.edu.hk/portal/plagiarism_detection/index.jsp);</p> <p>(ii) Complete the “Academic Honesty Declaration Statement”, which will be sent from VeriGuide to student via email after uploading;</p> <p>(iii) Submit the required documents to GSO:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - *Copies of thesis for dispatch to External Examiner(s); - An abstract of thesis/portfolio in both Chinese and English; - Completed Forms TAS-4, TAS-5, TAS-6 and the “Academic Honesty Declaration Statement”; - Receipts of examination fee and publication fee (for doctoral students); and 	<p>Graduate Division to distribute thesis/portfolio and Form TAD-3 (Thesis Assessment Report) to IEs.</p>

Event/Time	Tasks of Students	Tasks of Graduate Divisions
	<p>(iv) Submit *copies of thesis (for IEs) to Graduate Division.</p> <p><i>New Online Procedure:</i>(i) Upload the following documents to CUSIS (the thesis will be transferred to VeriGuide via CUSIS):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - First draft of thesis/portfolio; - An abstract of thesis/portfolio in both Chinese and English; - Thesis title page; - Separate page on composition of Thesis Assessment Committee (if applicable – please check with Graduate Division); - Completed Form TAS-5 with endorsement from the Supervisor and Head of Graduate Division; - Receipt of examination fee - Receipt of publication fee (for doctoral students only); and <p>(ii) Submit *copies of thesis (for IEs) to Graduate Division.</p> <p>(*Number of copies depends on the number of examiners)</p>	
<p>Oral examination – after submission of first draft of thesis/portfolio to GSO</p>	<p>Attend an oral examination</p>	<p>Upon receipt of the first draft of the thesis/portfolio by GSO, Graduate Division to arrange oral examination <u>within two months</u>.</p>
<p>Assessment reports – immediately after oral examination</p>		<p>Head of the Graduate Division to collect IEs' reports and complete Form TAD-5.</p>
<p>Assessment results – available upon completion of assessment process</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Check progress on GS Platform (Students); - Act according to instruction of Graduate Division/GSO. <p>(For follow-up actions on different final grades, please refer to the relevant sections below.)</p>	<p><u>Head of the Graduate Division to:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Complete and return to GSO Forms TAD-5, TAD-6, TAD-7 with a copy of IE's report; - Copy the above Forms to Supervisor, with a copy of all Examiners' reports; - Copy Form TAD-6 (with Part A of examiners' assessment report) to student for information and follow up action; - Provide justification to GS for case of Grade IV. <p><u>Supervisor</u> to give advice to student, if applicable.</p>

8.4 Declaration of intention to submit thesis/portfolio

Students have to declare their intention to submit the thesis/portfolio by completing and returning the “Declaration Form on Intention to Submit Thesis/Portfolio” (Form TAS-1) to the Graduate Division and the Graduate School four months before actual submission. Form TAS-1 includes the proposed date of submission and the thesis/portfolio title (with 1-2 pages of summary/abstract of thesis/portfolio) for approval by the Supervisor and Head of the Graduate Division.

If the intended date of submission is more than three months ahead of the end of the original normative study period, permission of the Graduate Council is required. Since the normative study period will end three months after the intended date of submission, permission to shorten the normative study period will be handled at the same time. A separate application for shortening the normative study period is not needed.

A Ph.D. student (pre-candidacy) cannot submit a thesis/portfolio. He/She must first proceed to Ph.D. (post-candidacy) before he/she can do so. Students are not allowed to submit theses/portfolios during leave of absence or if the External Examiner(s) has/have not yet accepted the invitation to serve on the Thesis Assessment Committee.

8.5 Thesis Assessment Committee

Upon approval of the thesis/portfolio title and the proposed date for submission, the Graduate Division will nominate members of the Thesis Assessment Committee to evaluate the student’s thesis/portfolio for award of the degree sought and provide the student with an opportunity to defend the thesis/portfolio. The composition of the Thesis Assessment Committee is as follows:

- (a) Chairperson – the Head of the Graduate Division or his/her representative with an academic title of Associate Professor or above at CUHK. The Supervisor/Co-supervisor should NOT serve as the Chairperson of the Committee.
- (b) At least three Internal Examiners –
 - (i) the Head of the Graduate Division or his/her nominee as the Chairperson;
 - (ii) the student’s Supervisor; and
 - (iii) a third Internal Examiner from within or outside the Graduate Division.

The Internal Examiners must be academic staff of the University. An academic staff who left the University may continue to serve as Supervisor/Co-supervisor/Internal Examiner of the student in the said capacity up to three months after his/her retirement/resignation.

- (c) External Examiner – One for doctoral students and optional for master’s students.

An External Examiner must not be an academic staff of the University. Anyone who has been a teaching staff of the University or who has taken part in the teaching of the candidate, even in a visiting capacity, within the last three years of the assessment or anyone who is expected to join the University before the assessment is completed is not eligible for appointment as External

Examiner. In addition, an External Examiner must be at least Senior Lecturer in the Commonwealth system or Associate Professor in the American system. In special circumstances, External Examiners without university affiliation but have the rank of Associate Professor (or equivalent) or above are appointed on the basis of relevant professional experience. Two External Examiners will be appointed to assess the thesis/portfolio of a part-time doctoral student who is a current full-time staff member of the University at the rank of Assistant Professor or above. All nominations of External Examiners must be approved by the Senate and University Council.

With effect from the 2020-21 academic year, the requirement of appointing External Examiners for assessing theses leading to M.Phil. becomes optional. Graduate Divisions have the discretion to decide if appointing External Examiners as members of the Thesis Assessment Committees for M.Phil. theses is needed. The arrangement also applies to M.F.A. and M. Mus programmes. If an External Examiner will be appointed, the Graduate Division concerned should ensure that the appropriate policy and procedures are properly implemented.

8.6 Thesis proposal and defence of proposal

The thesis proposal and its oral defence can take different forms according to the traditions of different disciplines. In the areas of humanities and social sciences, it may consist of the submission of a written thesis proposal (which will include a description of the research methodology, possibly with pilot data), a presentation followed by an opportunity to be orally examined by a panel. In the area of science, it may take the form of an oral presentation of the research planned and undertaken. Graduate Divisions may also decide on whether the submission of the thesis for acceptance of a journal paper, conference paper or even preprint will satisfy this requirement.

8.7 Submission of thesis/portfolio

Students are not allowed to submit theses for examination unless the External Examiners have accepted the invitation. Students should not contact the External Examiners on matters related to the thesis.

Students should submit their theses/portfolios to the Graduate School according to the proposed schedule, unless permission for deferment has been obtained.

For details, please refer to the *General Information for Thesis Preparation and Submission – A Guide for Research Postgraduate and Taught Doctoral Students*. It is important to note that with effect from January 2025, completion of the exit survey for research postgraduate and taught doctoral students is mandatory as part of the final thesis/portfolio submission process. The submission pathway will be available in the Thesis Submission Procedures.

Upon reviewing the student's thesis and the originality report generated by VeriGuide, the Chairperson of the Thesis Assessment Committee notifies the Graduate School and Graduate Division if the thesis can be sent to the External Examiner for assessment. If the Supervisor finds that the thesis is not suitable for submission, he/she will forward the thesis to the Internal Examiners for a decision. If there

is any disagreement among the Internal Examiners, the case will be referred to the Head of the Graduate Division.

It is advisable to note the following before a student submits his/her thesis/portfolio:

(a) Timing

With effect from the 2021-22 academic year, the University will have three degree conferment dates in each year, i.e. 31 March, 31 July, and 15 October.

Students are required to submit the final thesis before the deadline as stipulated below in order to have their graduation included in the degree conferment date concerned. Students who submit the final version of their thesis before 31 August will normally have the degree conferred in the same year.

Degree Conferment Date	31 March	31 July	15 October
Deadline for final thesis submission to GSO	28 February	30 June	31 August

(b) Formatting

There are specific requirements for thesis formatting such as order of contents, margins, paper size, citation styles, etc. For details, please refer to *Guide to Thesis Formatting of the Research and Thesis Writing* available on the GS Platform (Students) for illustrations and samples.

(c) Number of copies

The number of copies to be submitted depends on the number of members serving on the Thesis Assessment Committee. Students should check with their Graduate Division the number of copies required. Except for the copy for External Examiner(s) which should be submitted electronically to the Graduate School, student must submit all other copies directly to the Graduate Division. The Graduate School will send the thesis to the External Examiner(s) for assessment.

(d) Required documents and fees

The thesis must be submitted together with the completed forms and required fees. Please study the *General Information for Thesis Preparation and Submission – A Guide for Research Postgraduate and Taught Doctoral Students* carefully well in advance to familiarize with the requirements.

8.8 Oral examination

Upon receipt of the first draft of thesis/portfolio by GSO, Graduate Division to arrange oral examination within two months. Requests for delay should be submitted by the Graduate Division to the Dean of the Graduate School for approval.

The presence of an External Examiner at the oral examination is compulsory for doctoral programmes. It is, however, not compulsory for students of taught doctoral programmes. Where the External Examiner is unable to be present at the oral examination, a second External Examiner will be appointed to attend the oral examination and undertake the same responsibilities as the first External Examiner.

The Graduate Division will inform the student of the details of the oral examination at least one week in advance. The oral examination covers not only the subject matter of the student's thesis/portfolio but also knowledge in related fields deemed essential to the field of specialisation. The Chairperson of the Thesis Assessment Committee chairs the oral examination and ensures that questions are fair and that the student is given adequate opportunity to answer them.

Even if the Examiners consider that a student's thesis/portfolio is not of the standard for the award of the degree sought, a student may, at the discretion of the Thesis Assessment Committee, be given an oral examination to defend his/her thesis/portfolio.

8.9 Written examination

Any written examination, if required, will be arranged by the Graduate Division. The Graduate Division should keep a record of the written examination and provide the record if circumstances require.

8.10 Thesis/Portfolio grades and follow-up actions

Examiners are normally given a period of five weeks for assessment of the thesis/portfolio. Students may check the progress of this assessment process on the GS Platform (Students). Upon receipt of all Examiners' reports, the Chairperson of the Thesis Assessment Committee will decide on a final grade within four weeks and through the "Notification to Student on Results of Thesis/Portfolio Assessment" (Form TAD-6) inform the student of the final assessment result and the required follow-up actions, if any. If revisions are required, the Supervisor must ensure that corrections are made satisfactorily within a specified period of time not later than three months.

The grading system of the final grades for the thesis/portfolio and follow-up actions on different thesis/portfolio grades are shown in the following table:

Grade	Status	Follow-up Action
I	Pass	<p>(a) If revision is not required, the student will be recommended for award of degree.</p> <p>(b) If revision is required, the revised thesis should be inspected by Supervisor(s) before the student is recommended for award of degree.</p> <p>Documents to be submitted to GSO:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - final version of thesis; - completed Form TAS-7; and - completed 'ProQuest Publishing Agreement" (for doctoral students).
II	Thesis submission NOT passed. Re-submission allowed and/or re-examination required.	<p>Students should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - revise and re-submit the thesis/portfolio to the Thesis Assessment Committee (repeat submission process mentioned in earlier sections); and - pay the re-submission fee and continuation fee (if applicable).

Grade	Status	Follow-up Action
III	Failure – no re-submission allowed	Graduate Division to submit recommendation to discontinue the student from studies for consideration by GCEExCo.
IV	Recommended for award of research master's degree (for research doctoral programme)	Graduate Division to provide justification for the recommendation (award of master's degree) for consideration of GCEExCo.

8.11 Grade II (Thesis submission NOT passed. Re-submission allowed and re-examination required)

A student whose thesis/portfolio is not passed but re-submission is allowed and re-examination is required must re-write and re-submit the thesis/portfolio to the satisfaction of the Thesis Assessment Committee before being recommended for the award of degree. The re-submission must be made within 12 months from the date of the official notification of the result of the first examination and within the student's prescribed maximum period of study. If the students will have exceeded the maximum period of study, they should submit an application to extend the maximum study end date for the approval of the GCEExCo. A research postgraduate student or a taught doctoral student who fails to submit the final version of a thesis within one year from the date as specified by the Thesis Assessment Committee shall be required to discontinue his/her studies at the University, unless special approval is granted by the Graduate Council.

Apart from ruling in regard to thesis re-submission, the Thesis Assessment Committee may decide whether or not the student should be re-assessed by oral examination.

Only one re-submission of thesis/portfolio is allowed unless exceptional approval is granted by GCEExCo on extension of the re-submission deadline and/or further re-submission of the thesis/portfolio.

8.12 Grade IV (Research Doctoral student recommended for award of research master's degree)

Upon approval from GCEExCo, the student should be informed to submit the revised version of the M.Phil. thesis/portfolio, with corrections made satisfactorily and confirmed by the Supervisor, to the Graduate School no later than six months from the date the GCEExCo approves the recommendation of a final grade of IV and within the student's maximum period of study. The Graduate School will notify the student of the aforementioned deadline.

If the students will have exceeded the maximum period of study, they should submit an application to extend the maximum study end date for the approval of the GCEExCo.

Failure to submit the final version of the M.Phil. thesis/portfolio within one year from above deadline will result in discontinuation of studies at the University, unless special approval is granted by the Graduate Council.

8.13 Deferment of submission of thesis/portfolio

To apply for deferment of submission of a thesis/portfolio beyond the originally proposed date, the form

for “Application for Deferment of Submission of Thesis/Portfolio” (Form TAS-3) should be completed and forwarded to the Supervisor and Head of the Graduate Division for approval and then to the Graduate School for record. Deferment must NOT exceed the maximum study period. The deferment of the thesis/portfolio submission may result in a delay of the graduation.

8.14 Submission of final version of thesis/portfolio

Students are required to submit an electronic copy of the final version of their theses/portfolios. The arrangement is applicable to both research master’s and doctoral students, including M.D., D.Sc., and other who are required to submit theses in order to fulfil the graduation requirements. For details, please refer to the *General Information for Thesis Preparation and Submission – A Guide for Research Postgraduate and Taught Doctoral Students*.

A research postgraduate student or a taught doctoral student who fails to submit the final version of a thesis within one year from the date as specified by the Thesis Assessment Committee shall be required to discontinue his/her studies at the University, unless special approval is granted by the Graduate Council.

It is important to note that with effect from 2 January 2025, completion of the exit survey for research postgraduate and taught doctoral students is mandatory as part of the final thesis/portfolio submission process. The submission pathway will be available in the Thesis Submission Procedures.

8.15 Copyright of thesis/portfolio

The University decided that with effect from 2007-08 students should hold the copyright ownership of their theses/portfolios. However, to make theses accessible for wider scholarly and academic purposes, students are requested to sign an agreement to grant the University a worldwide irrevocable, non-exclusive right in respect of the copyright to the theses/portfolios for the purpose of making copies, abstracts, reproducing or otherwise dealing with the theses/portfolios by whatever means, including but not limited to, digitising, storing, reproducing, and distributing the theses/portfolios in any media and in any format, provided that any and all such acts are only for scholarly and academic purposes and with proper acknowledgment of authorship.

For theses/portfolios submitted before the effective year, the University retains the copyright of each of the theses/portfolios submitted. A request may be made to the Dean of the Graduate School to grant permission to release this copyright to anyone intending to use a part or whole of the materials in any thesis/portfolio in a proposed publication. Students/graduates are expected to give due acknowledgement of their Supervisors’ guidance (in case of a translation, students should seek the approval of the original author). Photocopying of theses/portfolios may be made for “fair use” for the purposes of research or private study, without the express permission of the Dean of the Graduate School, in accordance with the prevailing guidelines for copyrighted works.

8.16 Confidentiality of thesis/portfolio

Normally, requests for keeping theses confidential will not be approved. Students and Supervisors who wish to protect potential patent rights (which will belong to the University if the work is done as part

of normal duties) should exercise care to exclude sensitive material from the theses/portfolio.

With effect from December 2014, a one-year “restricted access” is granted automatically to the final version of thesis submitted by a postgraduate student. The said period is extended to two years and made applicable to students who submit the final version of their theses after the change comes into effect on 22 April 2022. Access to the table of contents and full text of the thesis will be blocked during this period after which the thesis will be open for public access unless approval from GCExCo is granted. Students may opt out of the “restricted access” if they wish to release their theses immediately for open access.

Approval for confidentiality for theses for reasons other than patent application may be granted only in exceptional circumstances, normally up to three years (including the “restricted access” period). Each case will have to be submitted to GCExCo for consideration.

Students (including graduates) are advised to make requests for extending and modifying the restricted access period in writing at least one month prior to the date the restriction shall lapse. The completed request form, duly signed by the Thesis Supervisor and the Division Head, must reach GSO by the stated deadline. Retroactive requests for extending the restricted access period received after the said deadline will not be approved.