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 that students usually find it most difficult. The publication comprises six chapters:

Chapter 1: Beginning research – particularly how to select a research topic and work with a Supervisor
Chapter 2: Effective use of information – guides students through searching for research 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 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 Graduate School (GS) Platform (Students) at 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 Policy on Research, Intellectual Property and Knowledge Transfer at http://www.orkts.cuhk.edu.hk/images/Research_Funding/The_Policy_Paper_1b.pdf (see also section 6.8 above on Research Ethics Training).

8.3 Procedures

The procedure relating to the submission of theses/portfolios are summarised in the following table, with more elaborations available in the ensuing sections.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event/Time</th>
<th>Tasks of students</th>
<th>Tasks of Graduate Divisions</th>
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</table>
| **Declaration of intention to submit thesis/portfolio** – submit to Graduate School (GS) four months before actual submission | Complete and submit Form TAS-1 with 1-2 pages summary/abstract of thesis/portfolio | - Supervisor and Head of Graduate Division to approve proposed date of submission and the thesis/portfolio title;  
- Graduate Division to forward signed Form TAS-1 to GS, with nominations of Thesis Assessment Committee members on Forms TAD-1A/TAD -1B (Master’s) or Form TAD-1C/TAD-1D (doctoral). |
| **Appointment of examiners** – after approval of nomination    |                                                                                  | Head of Graduate Division to inform Internal Examiners (IE) of their appointment.             |
| **Change of thesis/portfolio title** – after approval of thesis/portfolio title | Complete and submit Form TAS-2 to Graduate Division for approval                   | Supervisor and Head of Graduate Division to approve and forward signed Form TAS-2 to GS.      |
| **Change of Thesis Assessment Committee**                    |                                                                                  | Complete Form TAD-2A / TAD/S-1 and forward to GS.                                             |
| **Deferment of thesis/portfolio submission** – delay in submission of thesis/portfolio beyond the original proposed date | Complete and submit Form TAS-3 to Graduate Division for approval                   | Supervisor and Head of Graduate Division to approve the application and forward signed Form TAS-3 to GS. |
| **Submission of thesis/portfolio** – according to the proposed date of thesis/portfolio submission | (i) Submit to VeriGuide:  
- Upload the thesis to VeriGuide at [http://veriguide1.cse.cuhk.edu.hk/port al/plagiarism_detection/index.jsp](http://veriguide1.cse.cuhk.edu.hk/portal/plagiarism_detection/index.jsp); and  
- Complete the “Academic Honesty Declaration Statement”, which will be sent to student via email after submission.  
(ii) Submit the following to GS:  
- 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”; and  
- receipt of microfilming fee (doctoral)  
(ii) Submit copies of thesis (for IEs) to Graduate Division. | Graduate Division to distribute thesis/portfolio and Form TAD-3 (Thesis Assessment Report) to IEs. |
### Event/Time | Tasks of students | Tasks of Graduate Divisions
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**Oral examination** – after submission of thesis/portfolio to Graduate Division & GS | Attend an oral examination | Graduate Division to arrange oral examination within two months for both doctoral and master’s after thesis submission.

**Assessment reports** – immediately after oral examination | | Head of Graduate Division to collect IEs’ reports and complete Form TAD-5.

**Assessment results** – available upon completion of assessment process | - may check progress on GS Platform (Students);
- act according to instruction of Graduate Division/GS. (For follow-up actions on different final grades, please refer to the relevant sections below.) | Head of Graduate Division to:
- complete and return Forms TAD-5, TAD-6, TAD-7 to GS with a copy of IE’s reports;
- copy the above forms to Supervisor, with a copy of all examiner’s 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.

**Supervisor** to give advice to student, if applicable.

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### 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 concerned 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 the Head of Graduate Division.

If the intended date of submission is more than three months ahead of the end of the original normative period, permission of the Graduate Council is required. Since the normative period will end three months after the intended date of submission, permission to shorten the normative period will be handled at the same time. There will be no separate channel for applying to shorten the normative period.

A PhD student (pre-candidacy) cannot submit a thesis/portfolio. S/he must first proceed to PhD (post-candidacy) before s/he can do so. Students are not allowed to submit theses/portfolios during leave of absence or if the External Examiner(s) has/have not 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 proceed to 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) Chairman – the Head of Graduate Division or his/her representative (The Supervisor/Co-supervisor should NOT serve as the Chairman of the Committee).

(b) At least three Internal Examiners –
   (i) the Head of Graduate Division or his/her nominee as the Chairman;
   (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 within three months from retirement/resignation.

(c) External Examiner – 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 unless no other suitable academic of an appropriate rank is available, taking into consideration the language used in the thesis/portfolio. 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.

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 would satisfy this requirement.

8.7 Submission of thesis/portfolio

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

All RPg students are required to submit their theses/portfolios through VeriGuide. Students should submit a hardcopy of their theses/portfolios (bound in a temporary form) together with a signed “Academic Honesty Declaration Statement” downloadable from VeriGuide to the Chairman of the Thesis Assessment Committee, the Supervisor and the Graduate School according to the proposed
Upon reviewing the student's thesis and the originality report generated by VeriGuide, the Chairman of the Thesis Assessment Committee notifies the Graduate School and the 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, s/he 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 Graduate Division.

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

(a) **Timing**
Since the Congregation for conferment of higher degrees is usually held in November/December, submission of theses/portfolios by the end of May (for doctoral students) or the end of June (for Master's students) would normally have the degree conferred in the same year. If revision/re-writing is required, students who submit the final version of their thesis before August 31 would normally have the degree conferred in the same year as well.

(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 at 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 for the number of copies required. Except for the copy for External Examiner(s) which should be submitted to the Graduate School, student must submit all other copies directly to the Graduate Division. The Graduate School will send the hardcopy of the thesis to the External Examiner(s) for assessment.

(d) **Required documents and fees**
The thesis must be submitted together with 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 avoid any problems.

### 8.8 Oral examination
After dispatch of the thesis/portfolio to the Examiners, an oral examination will be held by the Thesis Assessment Committee. Normally, such an examination will be held within two months after the submission of the thesis/portfolio by doctoral or Master's students. 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. 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 Chairman of Thesis Assessment Committee presides over the conduct of the oral examination to ensure that questions are put fairly 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 concerned. The Graduate Division should keep record of the written examination and will be requested to 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 for the progress of this assessment process on the GS Platform (Students). Upon receipt of all Examiners’ reports, the Chairman of 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 follow-up actions required. 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Follow-up Action</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| I     | Pass   | (a) If revision is not required, the student will be recommended for award of degree.  
(b) If revision is required, the revised thesis should be inspected by Supervisor(s) before the student is recommended for award of degree.  
Documents to be submitted to GS:  
- final version of thesis;  
- completed form TAS-7; and  
- completed Agreement Form for microfilming of thesis/portfolio (doctoral students). |
| II    | This submission NOT passed. Re-submission allowed and re-examination required. | Students should:  
- revise and re-submit thesis/portfolio to the Thesis Assessment Committee (repeat submission process mentioned in earlier sections); and  
- pay re-submission fee and continuation fee (if applicable). |
<p>| III   | Failure – no re-submission allowed | Graduate Division to submit recommendation to discontinue the student from studies for consideration by the GCExCo. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Follow-up Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>Recommended for award of research Master's degree (for research doctoral programme)</td>
<td>Graduate Division to provide justification for the recommendation (award of Master's degree) for consideration of the GCExCo.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8.11 Re-submission

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.

A student who fails to re-submit the final version of thesis within one year from the date as specified by the Thesis Assessment Committee will be required to discontinue studies.

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 the GCExCo.

8.12 Deferment of submission of thesis/portfolio

To delay submission of 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 the Head of Graduate Division for approval then to the Graduate School for record. Deferment must NOT exceed the maximum study period. Please also note that the deferment of the thesis/portfolio submission may result in a delay of the graduation.

8.13 Submission of final version of thesis/portfolio

Students are required to submit 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. and D.Sc., 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.

8.14 Copyright of RPg theses

The University decided in 2007-08 that students should hold the copyright ownership of their theses/portfolio. However, to provide a wider accessibility of theses/portfolios for 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/portfolio for the purpose of making copies, abstracts, reproducing or otherwise dealing with the theses/portfolios by whatever means, including but not limited to, digitizing, 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 2007-08, 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.