

# Examiner Guidelines: PhD in Creative Practice and PhD in Practice-Based Research

The Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) at UNSW requires completion of a piece of research that demonstrates a significant and original contribution to knowledge in the candidate's field of study. Candidates acquire advanced specialist research training and produce a thesis that provides evidence for independent thought, critical analysis, and expert knowledge of the discipline in an international context.

PhD programs at UNSW are offered in a broad range of academic, professional, and creative fields. In some disciplines, creative work may form part of the thesis. Such programs are referred to as PhD in creative practice, or practice-based PhDs and may have different disciplinary approaches to how the creative project or practice-based project is undertaken.

These guidelines are intended to assist examiners with PhD theses that have both a creative or practice-based project ("the *Project*") and a dissertation ("the *Dissertation*"). These guidelines should be read in conjunction with the following documents:

- Notes for Examiners for Doctor of Philosophy Theses
- Conditions for Award of Doctor of Philosophy Policy

## 1. Creative practice and practice-based PhD programs

- a. The primary aim of creative practice and practice-based PhD programs is to make a significant contribution to knowledge through systematic investigation. It is expected that the candidate will generate a new body of practice-based/creative work (the *Project*) and a written work (the *Dissertation*) that together will make a contribution to knowledge within the artistic and scholarly field. These two components constitute the thesis and have equal weighting in the assessment. Whatever the nature of the relationship between these two components, they should be assessed as one coherent body of work.
- b. The PhD in creative practice at UNSW is available across all disciplines represented in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and the Faculty of Art and Design. The creative project may take one of a number of different forms, or combine a number of forms. These may include acting and performing, animation, creative writing, dance choreography, design, digital art, film-making, fine art, media art, multimedia artefacts, music composition, music performance, performance-making, photography, and sonic arts.
- c. In practice-based PhD programs such as those in the Faculty of Built Environment, the practice-based project may also take one of several different forms, for example: architectural design, urban design and planning, construction methods and technologies, industrial design, interior design and landscape design. The chosen medium can also vary, for example, it might take the form of objects, drawings, plans, prototypes, models, creative text, digital fabrication, film, virtual reality or a combination of these.

- d. The *Dissertation* is a substantial research-based academic essay that bears a relationship to the *Project* that is to be articulated by the candidate. Some theses may take the form of a single piece of writing, such as ficto-criticism (which mobilises both literary and critical methodologies), or a biography or memoir in which critical reflection is an integral part of the work.
- e. While the *Dissertation* in isolation need not make the same level of contribution to knowledge expected of a traditional PhD submission, the *Dissertation* and *Project* should achieve this as a coherent whole. The possible relationships between the two components of the thesis are explained in Section 4.

## 2. The *Project*

- a. The *Project* must represent an original and significant contribution to knowledge of the research topic as with all PhDs. It comprises a new body of work that relates to the research questions formulated in the *Dissertation* and/or objectives of the overall thesis. The *Project* may consist of a single work or a series of works.
- b. Depending on the form and nature of the *Project*, examiners may consider the extent to which it:
  - Effectively contributes to, reworks or advances one or more of the following: existing conventions, artistic and/or critical traditions, a genre, movement or body of work, theoretical positions, methodologies and approaches, or techniques and forms of practice;
  - Engages effectively with one or more of the following: theoretical concepts, techniques of production, thematic concerns, philosophical, social and political issues, and/or public discourse;
  - Demonstrates professional standards of technical competence and communication appropriate to the discipline;
  - Offers an original contribution to a significant area of practice;
  - Opens up and/or articulates insights into an existing practice, and/or opens up an area of practice to new interpretations, methods or techniques;
  - Is timely in relation to current research and/or practice in the specific area.
- c. It is expected that the *Project* should satisfy a professional standard of presentation. “Professional standard” is taken here to mean a high level of competence in the medium/media, elements and techniques employed; and the capacity to make considered decisions within the relevant media and/or genre. The work would be expected to display a level of complexity, depth, innovation and originality that lends itself to sustained and productive analysis.
- d. What constitutes professional standard will vary across forms and disciplines. For example, in the case of:
  - **a creative writing project**, the work should also be edited to, and presented at, a standard expected by publishers.
  - **a music performance**, the work should be edited to, and presented at a standard expected by professional performance organisations.

- **a creative project in the disciplines of Art and Design**, the work should be edited, curated and presented at a standard expected in the professional contexts of the relevant practice (exhibition, installation, performance, festival, screening, etc).
  - **a practice-based project in the disciplines of the Built Environment**, this should be presented at a standard expected by a professional working in the relevant practice (architecture, landscape, urban design, industrial design, planning, etc).
- e. The *Project* must be fully documented in digital form for the purposes of examination. For examination of theses involving exhibition, installation and/or live performance, examiners should be aware that the creative project may be presented for examination after the *Dissertation*. This will usually take place within six weeks of the thesis submission. Examiners need to be available to examine the entirety of the thesis.
  - f. Where an examiner is unable to attend the exhibition, installation and/or performance, the examiner will make use of documentation (provided in digital formats) as a substitute. Examiners will submit their report on the *Project* component at the same time as they submit their report for the *Dissertation*. With regard to work done conjointly with other persons, this must be fully acknowledged, and the candidate must include a statement of their contribution to the conjoint aspect of the thesis.
  - g. For theses in the Built Environment, the two components of the thesis (*Dissertation* and *Project*) will be presented at the same time in electronic format for examination and NOT as two separate works. The *Project* (part two) is indeed supported by the *Dissertation* (part one).

### 3. The *Dissertation*

- a. The same scholarly standards as regards to research, argument and presentation of findings in a traditional PhD submission apply to the *Dissertation* component of the creative practice or practice-based PhD.
- b. *Dissertations* of this type typically range from 40,000 to 50,000 words, depending on disciplinary requirements.
- c. In the case of candidates submitting a creative writing project, the two written components together should not exceed 110,000 words.
- d. As in the case of traditional academic theses, it would be helpful if examiners of Creative or Practice-Based theses could comment on the publishable content of both the *Dissertation* and the *Project*.
- e. Any editorial assistance in the preparation of the content of the thesis must also be acknowledged.

### 4. The relationship between the *Project* and the *Dissertation*

- a. UNSW allows for a range of connections between the two components of a creative practice or practice-based thesis. Broadly speaking, the relationship between the *Project* and the *Dissertation* may be dialogic or complementary. The nature of the relationship between the two parts must be stated explicitly by the candidate in the abstract to the thesis that is provided in the *Dissertation*.
- b. While there may be a range of connections between the two components, the *Dissertation* should demonstrate a critical awareness of the context, or field of study, within which the

*Project* has been produced. This context could be that of a theoretical and/or practical framework or method, a philosophical, historical, biographical or aesthetic issue, or a socio-political discourse. Candidates should demonstrate the ability to understand their practice in the context of a broader and recognised field of study.

- c. The *Project* and the *Dissertation* component should be read as complementary in ways suggested above; and be accorded an equal weighting in the examiner's assessment of the overall standard of the combined PhD, i.e., "the thesis".
- d. In cases where the creative practice thesis takes the form of a single piece of writing, there will not be a *Dissertation*. Rather, there will be an introductory essay elaborating on the form chosen which includes analysis and critical reflection. The thesis will still be expected to display substantial scholarly research and sustained original engagement with a theoretical or critical field of study, as well as including a full and properly referenced bibliography.