The Semester Before Your Final Defense

- Many programs require a prospectus or initial proposal presentation at least one semester prior to the final defense (Note that the initial proposal is very different from the final defense).
  - The initial proposal assumes that you have completed (or very nearly completed) the first three chapters of your thesis or dissertation.
  - Develop between 15-20 power point slides to summarize what you intend to do, why, and how.
  - Doing an oral proposal presentation allows you to practice how the first part of your study flows and allows you to anticipate questions your committee may have later.

- Attend a final defense of another student in your same degree program. Final defenses are typically scheduled just prior to or around the graduate school deadline date to submit the draft, and are typically public events.

- Most programs require that the thesis or dissertation is completely written (including all findings and discussion) before the final oral defense is scheduled.

Once your Final defense is scheduled...... 2-4 weeks Prior to Your Final Defense

- Develop between 20-30 power point slides to summarize the main parts of your study.

- Provide the power point slides to your committee chair and ask him/her to critique. This will enable your chair to strategize with you by identifying what is truly important.

- Refrain from including too much information on each slide. This reduces the font size making it more difficult for your audience to read.

- Refrain from merely reading off each power point slide, as the audience can read what you have. Emphasize the main points on the slide itself, using the “notes” section (the blank area beneath each slide) to include details for yourself so you remember to mention other important points during your talk. Print out both the slide and the notes page.
• Agree in advance with your chair that you will be allowed to present first, and then take questions. This allows everyone to hear everything, regardless of whether or not they have read your study.

• Practice your presentation in front of supportive friends or family members and ensure that they are able to understand your study. The more you are prepared, the less anxious you will feel at the defense.

• Time your presentation in advance to ensure your talk is between 20-35 minutes in length. Length will of course vary by topic or by program.

During the Final Defense

• Dress professionally. Arrive early and ensure that the technology works. Bring back-up solutions (e.g., your presentation on both a flashdrive and CD) to alleviate your anxiety.

• The final defense still includes some of the introduction, literature, and methods (that were presented in the prospectus), but the bulk of the presentation is spent on the findings and discussion.

• You are the expert. With rare exception, you know more about your subject than anyone else in the room.

• Consider tape recording your defense to ensure that you remember all the suggestions that others make for those last minute revisions.

• The committee functions primarily to bring in different perspectives/ideas, ensure that you understand why you took the steps you did, what you found, and that you can identify any limitations to your particular study. The committee is on your side and not there to intentionally trick or embarrass you.

• Try not to take criticism personally. When someone has a suggestion or criticism, thank them, respond to it, or say that you’ll look into it. Ask for clarification if you do not understand what is being asked. If you do not know the answer to a question, admitting you do not know is better than providing a potentially insufficient response.

• After all the questions have been asked, you will be asked to leave the room while your committee discusses the merits of your research. You will then be called back in to hear their final decision.

The Special Cotton Paper

• Visit the graduate school website for deadlines for submitting the two final copies. Print using 100% cotton paper (plain white, acid free, weight of 20# or 24#) and hand deliver to MS. 4.01.50 or certified mail to: The University of Texas at San Antonio, The Graduate School, One UTSA Circle, San Antonio, TX 78249.

• Finally, a word of advice about that “special paper:”
  • Do not print your entire thesis or dissertation on that special paper until after your final defense. You will likely have some changes to make before the end product, and that paper is expensive.
Do print and bring to your defense: 3 copies of your abstract and your committee signature page printed on the “special paper.” This allows the option for your committee members to sign if they feel comfortable doing so at the defense. Many times, the revisions are so small that committee members will still sign off at the defense, and this alleviates you having to find them all again later.

KEEP THINKING POSITIVE—A wise friend once commented, “This too shall pass.”