

Research Committee
Department of Speech & Hearing Sciences
Elson S. Floyd College of Medicine
Washington State University

RE: Notes on Master's of Science defense of intensive case review

31 March 2022

This document is for students. We want to maximize your chance of success and work with you to graduate. Your success is our success! See also the supplemental document *Final Oral Examination for SHS Graduate Students Non-Thesis Track/Intensive Case Reviews*.

There are several actions that must precede the actual defense. It is good practice that you plan to defend sooner than the Graduate School's last-day-to-defend deadline to guarantee that you graduate on time. If you plan to thread the scheduling needle and something interrupts that (such as illness or travel delay), there is no grace from the graduate school. [Here](#) are more scheduling details (scroll down to the "Master's" section). It is ultimately the responsibility of the student to do the hard work and prepare accordingly to pass the defense. Your Committee Chair will answer any questions you have.

We advise that you plan to defend not later than mid-March, although the Graduate School officially will allow scheduling into April. This is an intentionally conservative suggestion to assure that you complete this work obligatory for timely graduation. Working backwards, that means you need to get the scheduling paperwork in at least two weeks before (and earlier is better), and your presentation should be finalized before your Committee will agree to schedule the defense date. If the student is not ready, the Chair will not sign off on the scheduling paperwork. For example, one path that might be worked out between a student and her Chair could be that you have your first case mostly done by mid-January and your second case mostly done by mid-February. There is, however, no fixed schedule, and there is some variability among individuals. Your Chair will look at drafts and offer criticism as needed, and the Chair may suggest additional criticism from other Committee members. The defense is an *oral presentation* so no one can review a slide deck and say definitively "this is sufficient to pass." The oral presentation may use visual support, but we strongly advise against having extensively prepared text or reading your presentation from a prepared manuscript. If you choose to use a slide deck, be stingy with overall word counts, bulleted lists, and dense text. This is a professional presentation and serious, formal academic meeting. Part of your preparation should also include you reviewing the case studies made available by the Department. Several case studies were recorded and presented via online video. You should watch those. There are links to those videos and other resources such as links to scheduling via the Graduate School [here](#).

Preparation for your defense must include a comprehensive description of the case, including the personal and diagnostic details, disorder characteristics, therapeutic plan, execution of plan, outcome of therapy, plan for the future, reflection of intervention, and so on. The obligatory incorporation of research into your presentation should include (formal) citations to the evidential literature. It is likely that the contents of the evidence in those citations will be discussed in the Q&A portion of the defense. Normally this oral presentation is supplemented by visual aids such as a slide deck. Although your Chair

may do some form of practice with you, it is the obligation of the student to prepare the comprehensive defense. A comprehensive template (of a slide deck) is not provided because details vary from case to case, and it is good practice for students to continue their education by preparing the presentation in its entirety—of course additionally critically guided by the Chair.

The defense itself is a 75-minute professional meeting: present Case-1 for ~15-20 minutes, 10 minutes of questions, present Case-2 for ~15-20 minutes, 20 minutes of questions, a few minutes of paperwork/valedictions. It is fundamentally an *oral defense*, and there will be an oral Q&A. The cases provide a platform for the Q&A which covers your entire training, not just the cases you present. Questions range from detail (“you mentioned the patient was a senior, but how old was she and what were her circumstances?”) to practical (“why did you choose AY-Therapy over AZ-therapy and what are the consequences?”), “how do the studies you cite apply to the client in this particular case?”) to theoretical (“what assumptions and theoretical predictions of your model are included and how do you justify those?”, “you cited Jones (2019) and Smith et al. (2022)—can you discuss the quality and levels of evidence those studies provide for this person’s treatment?”) to hypothetical (“what if the patient were also presenting with Disorder-Y/school-age/male/etc.?”) to methodological (“was there anything about the specific task/statistics/operationalization/etc. in the studies you cite that warrants concern or attention?”). You will be asked to cite and describe/interpret the evidence as it pertains to the Evidence Based Practice approach, explaining where the supporting research falls in terms of levels of evidence when describing the intervention studies used to support treatment decisions. In particular, there are two areas that students often need to bolster. One area is being knowledgeable and inclusive of comprehensive evidence. Evidence is understood within the evidence-based practice model, and should be centered on the best available, modern, empirical, scientific, archival literature. Student knowledge of evidence should be thorough, comprehensive, and deep. The second area is fielding questions. The committee will certainly ask questions, and students must give a measured, evidenced-based, sensible discussion on that topic. The questions are rarely to state some fact, but instead focus on comprehension, complex service delivery, interdisciplinary approaches, theoretical background, implementation of therapeutic interventions, and so on. If a question covers a topic outside of the student’s explicit preparation, a sensible answer would nevertheless demonstrate good knowledge pertaining to the question’s topic and possibly a principled discussion of what would likely be

It is University policy with support from the Department that all defenses are public events. In practice, this typically means that interested students from the Department at all levels and interested faculty will attend the defense (although not the committee discussion described below). The usual process is for an interested person to make their intent to attend the defense known in advance, typically to the candidate and to the committee chair. The guest is advised to be timely, respectful, and follow normal conventions of the defense. For example, guests are not invited to ask questions during the Q&A period.

After your oral presentation, the committee members conduct a cloistered discussion, then must cast a “pass” or a “fail” vote. A committee of three must have at least two passing votes for the candidate to advance. If the student passes the exam, some brief paperwork is completed, and the student goes on to graduation. If the exam is failed, there is a process to retake the exam up to one time as soon as the following term. After the vote is cast, we will ask you to comment on your perception of the program as a whole. We will ask you to opine on what went well, what could be improved, what were specific challenges, and your critical view of the entire training. We anonymize your comments and use them to improve our program.