



Preparing for 1st Year Review

Informatics Graduate School



What is the 1st Year Review?

- A written research proposal and an oral defence of it
- Aim is to demonstrate:
 - Student is capable
 - Feasible project topic, appropriate approach
 - Research plan is in place
 - Supervisory team and resources are adequate



Why the 1st Year Review?

- Evidence for decision to confirm candidacy for PhD
- Demonstrate your training is proceeding well
- Benefits:
 - Practise oral and written presentation of research
 - Receive feedback
 - Identify issues
 - Significant milestone passed
- Key engagement marker for international students
- Hopefully a positive, individual, experience



The written thesis proposal

- Define research topic:
 - What is the problem; why is it interesting; what has already been done (give references); why are those solutions inadequate?
- Explain your approach to the topic:
 - What new approach will you pursue; why does it seem promising; what have you achieved so far? Your claim?
- Present your research plan:
 - What are the sub-goals; in what order will you attack them; how will you evaluate your solution; how long will the work take (n.b. timetable=3 years); what are the risks and how will you address them; resources required?



Submitting the thesis proposal

- Typically 15-25 pages
- Submit to review panel members several weeks before review
- Submit to IGS repository after panel approval



First year review meeting

- Meeting with panel : at least 3 members, including supervisors and at least one independent person
 - Should occur at
 - Oral presentation of thesis proposal (this part may be to a wider audience, e.g. your institute)
 - Questions and discussion based on report which panel members will have read
 - Private discussion among panel members
- Usually given some immediate indication of the outcome, official confirmation and feedback may take longer.



Review meeting outcomes

1. Confirm on PhD programme, with feedback:
 - Is the topic clearly defined and appropriate?
 - Is the research plan appropriate?
 - Is research on track?
 - Alternative approaches, related work
2. Extend probation (typically by 3 months), have second review
 - Explicit feedback on weaknesses that must be addressed
 - Possible recommended change of supervisor
3. Recommend change to MPhil or MRes
4. Recommend withdraw



First year annual report

Euclid form – 8 month email with link

- Student completes and submits section 1
- Principal supervisor completes and submits section 2 (or sends back to student for alterations)
- Assistant supervisor signs off on sections 1 & 2 (or sends back)
- Student reviews both sections and submits (or sends back)
- Deputy HoGS signs off

Reminders sent monthly until completed.



What is the problem?
Why is it interesting?
How will you tackle it?
How to prove you did it?



Getting the Most out of the 1st Year Review

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What makes a good thesis proposal I?

- Clear definition of topic and rationale
- A testable hypothesis or claim
- Convincing overview of proposed approach
- Good survey of previous work, appropriate references to the literature, identification of open question(s)



What makes a good thesis proposal II?

- Appropriate methodology, related to stated aims
- Clear research plan with plausible schedule and contingency plans
- Evaluation plan: how you will show the research is an achievement
- Summary of work done so far



What makes a good oral presentation I?

- Clear (but brief) presentation of progression from the big picture to your particular contribution
- Summarise stages of research plan
- Explain work already in progress
- End by highlighting originality of the planned contribution relative to the state of the art in the field



What makes a good oral presentation?

- All the usual features of good presentations:
 - Slides: uncluttered, eye-catching, pictures not words
 - Clear structure
 - Delivery: enthusiastic, audible, well-paced, eye contact with audience, link between talk and slides
 - Positive attitude to questions



Common mistakes to avoid I

- Only engaged with project at functional, detailed level; lack of appreciation of what it is for, context
- Not "owning" the topic
- Taking for granted that your audience understands your topic and its significance
- Too much detail and jargon



Common mistakes to avoid II

- Too much coverage of literature only loosely related to your project
- Feeling that you need to show lots of results
- Insufficient attention to research plan
- Not proof-reading / reviewing your proposal – show pride in your work



Tips on dealing with questions

- Answer the question
- If you don't know the answer, admit it
- Take your time before answering and ask for clarification of the question if needed
- Perhaps repeat or summarise the question before answering – this makes it clear what you understood from the question, and allows you to control what you are responding to
- Accept feedback as a gift, don't be defensive
- The panel is there to help you