PhD Thesis Defence Process

January 2025

McMaster University

Agenda

What to Expect:

- Before You Initiate

- Initiating the Defence

- Thesis Defence Timeline
  - Standard (Traditional)
  - Accelerated

- Preparing for the Defence

- Online Defence

- The Day of the Defence

- Becoming Cleared to Graduate

McMaster University

Are You Ready?

Before You Initiate

- Does your Supervisory Committee agree that you are ready to defend?

  - Circulate dissertation

- Has your Supervisor run your thesis through iThenticate?

  - Required effective December 1, 2023.

- Work backward from a proposed defence date to target your initiation date

  - Decide if you are targeting a particular convocation

  - Sessional dates: https://academiccalendars.romcmaster.ca/content.php?catoid=48&navoid=9532

- Attend other defences

- Check your committee early!

McMaster University

Initiating the Thesis Defense Process

Process is initiated online in the Mosaic. Log into Student Centre and under 'Academics' select 'other academics':

Initiating the Thesis Defense Process

Select Thesis Intent -> Defend my Thesis:

Initiating the Thesis Defense Process

Select Degree and Program before selecting "Next" button:

Initiating the Thesis Defense Process

Review your Supervisory Committee (names, roles, emails). If incorrect or incomplete, please contact your program Graduate Administrator. You may see inactive supervisors listed. Confirm these with your admin! If correct, select "Next". You may see inactive supervisors listed

Initiating the Thesis Defense Process

Enter the intended date for submission of your pre-defence thesis to SGS. You must select a date no less than 2 weeks away from the date of initiation. Enter your thesis title as well abstract (optional) before selecting "Submit". If you make a mistake on your intended submission date, don't worry about it; just carry on and submit when you are able.

Initiating the Thesis Defense Process

Mosaic will prompt you to review your entered details to ensure accuracy before selecting "Submit" one final time. The cancel button will "disappear" and nothing will seem to happen. You probably did it correctly. Wait a day and if you don't receive email confirmation then email gthesis@mcmaster.ca with your name, program, student ID and thesis title.

Initiating the Thesis Defense Process

Once you have initiated the defence online:

- 3 Emails are sent:
  - One to you to confirm the initiation
  - One to your Supervisor for their input
  - One to your Grad Admin to check your committee in Mosaic

- Your Supervisor will have to select either:
  - Standard (Traditional) Stream
  - Accelerated Stream

McMaster University

Thesis Defence Timelines

Standard Stream

- After initiation, Supervisor nominates Externals, to be approved by Committee and Dept. Chair

- SGS reaches out to approved Externals (randomly selected)

- Student proposes date and time as well as uploads thesis

- Committee approves date

- SGS selects External, sends thesis with corresponding report

- SGS finds a Chair for the defence

Accelerated Stream

- After initiation, Supervisor nominates External, to be approved by Committee and Dept. Chair

- Once approved, Supervisor selects External, identifies the date, time, location, Chair for the defence and uploads thesis

- Committee approves date

- External is sent thesis with corresponding report

McMaster University

There isn't an accelerated timeline because it's up to your supervisor. Therefore, use THIS timeline to plan your defence no matter which stream you are in until your supervisor gives you more details. Your thesis coordinator can't speak to an accelerated timeline in general; for that, speak to your supervisor as they are your coordinator.

WEEK 1
COMMITTEE MEMBERS
APPROVAL / EXTERNAL LISTING

WEEK 7
FINAL REPORT RECEIVED
FROM EXTERNAL

INITIATE THESIS
DEFENCE PROCESS

WEEK 3 - WEEK 7
EXTERNAL EXAMINER READS THESIS

SUBMIT FINAL THESIS

WEEK 2
CANDIDATE SUBMITS
PRE-DEFENCE THESIS
& SUBMITS SUGGESTED DATE

WEEK 8
THESIS DEFENCE
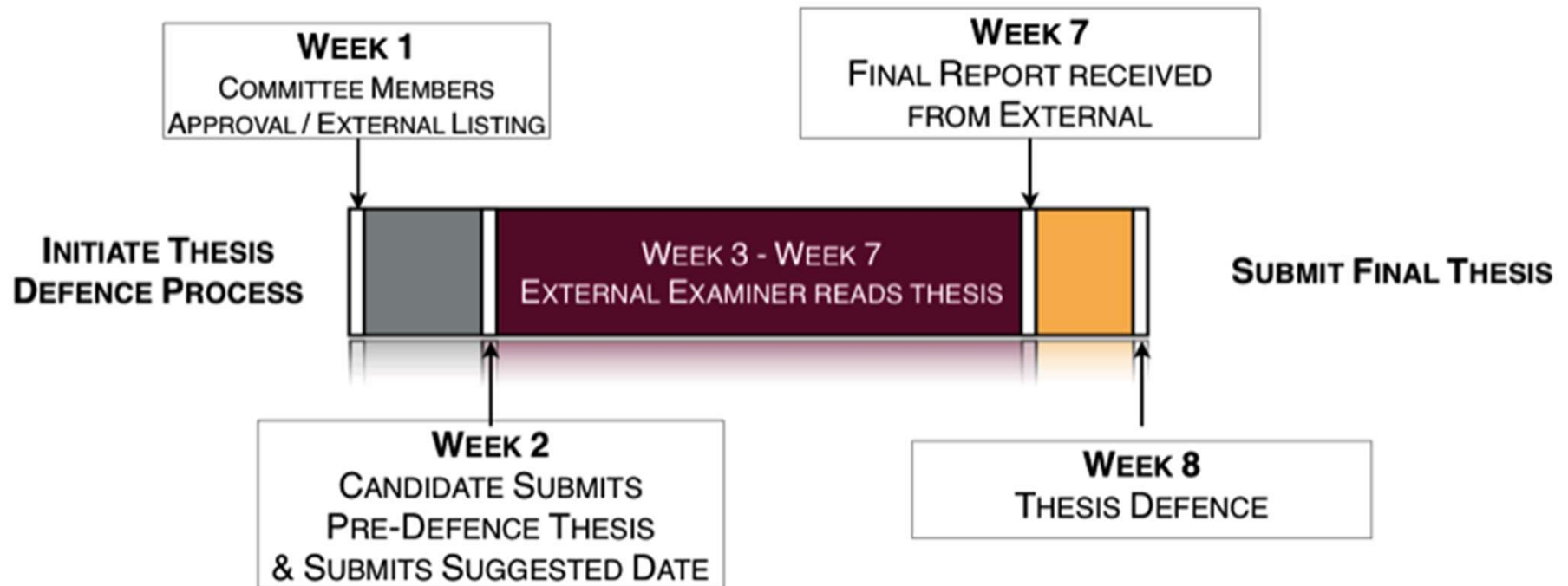
Standard Thesis Defence Timeline

In an accelerated defence you won't see this screen; your supervisor will enter the details on your behalf instead.

- Selecting the date:

Preparing for the Defence

For the defence to proceed, it needs to have the following:

- A positive report from the External one week in advance

- A Chair for the defence
  - A faculty member who has supervised a student to completion

- A minimum of 3 members from the Supervisory Committee
  - Supervisor and 2 Committee Members

- The External Examiner
  - Can be represented by an Internal Examiner if they are unable to attend

Defence Format

SGS has adapted the existing process to accommodate online, hybrid and in-person defences:

- Online or hybrid defences are usually conducted through either Zoom or MSTeams

- The Chair and Supervisor will receive a package including instructions and forms, and they will decide who will serve as "host" of the online or hybrid defence.

- As part of the scheduling process, the "host" will need to know if attendees will be invited and will send the invitation accordingly

- Attendees should be cautioned to avoid interfering with the process
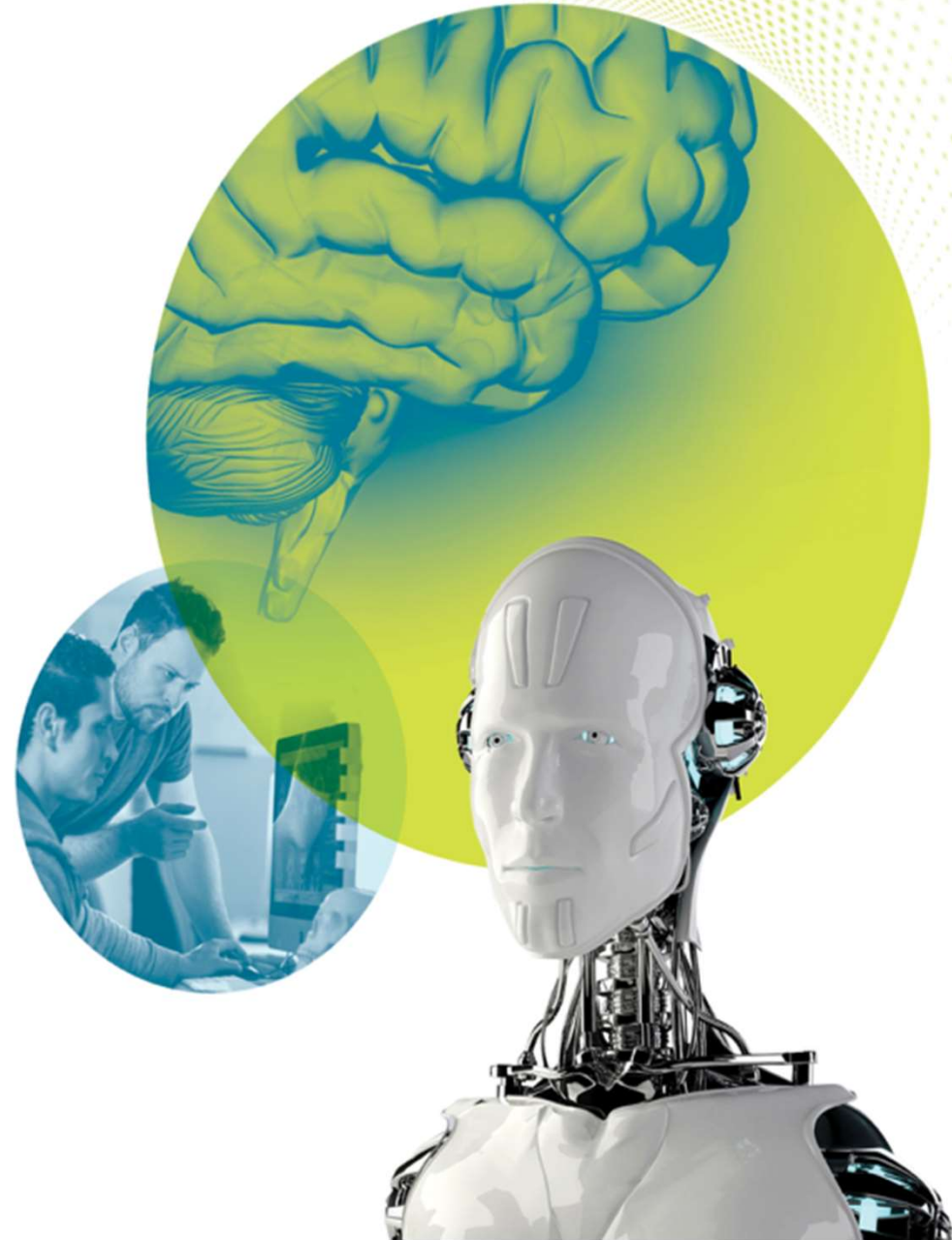
The Day of the Defence

It has finally come!

- You will receive a set of instructions from SGS to set expectations for the defence

- The Chair will ensure all participants join the web meeting and have a set of contingencies should anyone not arrive

- You will be moved to the "waiting room" so the Chair can discuss the proceedings with the Examining Committee

- Once you are invited back, you will begin with a brief statement, typically 15-20 mins
  - Stress the main points of your contribution and any difficulties you overcame

- This will be followed by rounds of questions by the Committee and External
  - The Chair will moderate the discussion

- You will be moved to the "waiting room" (and attendees removed) so that they can discuss your results

- You will be brought back to hear the results

- Either the Chair or your Supervisor should provide you with the necessary forms

Becoming Cleared to Graduate

The final steps to be completed:

- Complete your Final Thesis Submission Sheet
  - Decide whether or not you need to Embargo your thesis
  - Get sign off from Supervisor that your thesis has been run through iThenticate
  - Get sign off on the completion of changes (if required)
  - Hand it in to your Grad Admin so they can submit a Service Request
- Upload your thesis to MacSphere https://macsphere.mcmaster.ca/
  - You cannot make changes after it has been uploaded
  - The date of your upload will be used as your cleared to graduate date
- Verify that all your program's milestones have been met by running your advisement report
 - Your final thesis will be added as a milestone

McMaster University

Resources

To help with your preparations:

- School of Graduate Studies website
  https://gs.mcmaster.ca/doctoral-degree

- Guide for the Preparation of Master's and Doctoral Theses
  https://gs.mcmaster.ca/app/uploads/2019/10/Prep_Guide_Masters_and_Doctoral_Theses_August-2021.pdf

- Graduate Calendar - Section 3.2 Thesis
  https://academiccalendars.romcmaster.ca/content.php?catoid=48&navoid=9526#3-2-theses

- Graduate Writing Resources
  https://gs.mcmaster.ca/current-students/resources/graduate-writing/

McMaster University

The Key to a Successful Defence

- Initiate at least 8 weeks before your intended defence date
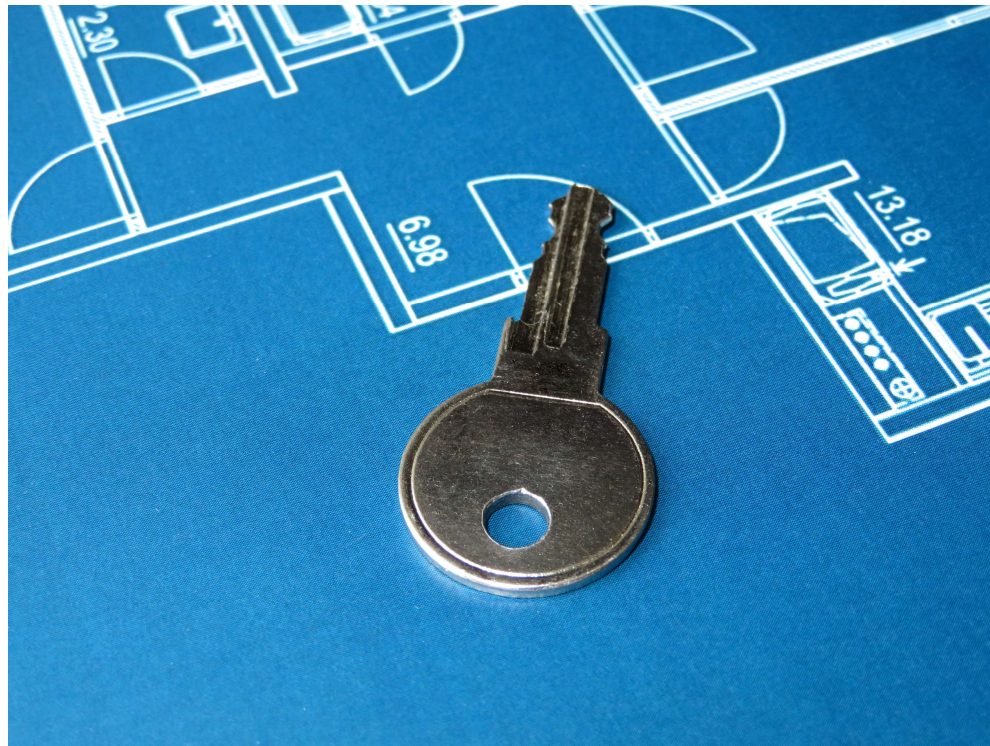
Frank Coruzzi &
Nadine Pielaszek
Academic Services Officers
School of Graduate Studies
gthesis@mcmaster.ca

GOOD LUCK!