

## Defending your MS thesis or Ph.D. dissertation

MS students in the thesis option must write and defend a thesis. All PhD students must write and defend their dissertation.

1. **Know exact dates.** If you plan on graduating a certain semester, check the graduate school website for the exact dates on when you have to defend and submit all appropriate paperwork. Guidelines for writing thesis and dissertation format are also on the graduate school web site.
2. **Be in contact with advisor.** Students must be in regular contact with their advisor and committee members (CM) before the defense. Make sure that the CMs are aware of your research progress on a regular basis.
3. **Meet with committee six to nine months before your defense.** It is good practice to have at least two committee meetings six to nine months before the date of the defense. In these meetings present key results, obtain feedback, and follow through on CM suggestions. This ensures that there are no major surprises on the day of your defense.
4. **Make advisor first point of contact.** As with all research, your advisor is the first point of contact. Your advisor must approve your written thesis or dissertation before you email it (or provide paper copy) to other CMs.
5. **Schedule defense three weeks before your defense.** You must schedule (date and time) of your defense with your CMs and fill out the appropriate paperwork with the ATS staff assistant. The staff assistant will reserve a room for your defense. See the Forms page for the Notification to Defend.
6. **Provide complete thesis/dissertation to CMs two weeks before your defense for MS and four weeks for PhD.** You must provide a **complete** thesis/dissertation to your CMs. Note that the word complete is emphasized. Complete means all text, figures (with captions), references, tables, table of contents, and other elements required by the graduate school.
7. **Prepare your presentation for defense.** The time between your submission of your thesis and your defense is when most students prepare for their presentation. MS students present their work in 25-30 minutes. PhD students may take an additional 10 to 15 minutes. There will be more than just your CMs in the audience. Therefore carefully prepare your presentation.
8. **Provide copy of abstract to staff assistant one week before your defense.** You must provide an electronic copy of your abstract to the ATS staff assistant who will then email to the faculty, students, and staff.
9. **Ensure proper paperwork for the day of defense.** Make sure that your advisor picks up appropriate paperwork from the ATS office.
10. **Prepare for audience and CM questions.** After your presentation the general audience will be invited to ask questions. After the general audience is excused, the CMs will convene with the student for follow up questions. Note that the graduate school will also assign an observer from UAH (another department) who will be present at your defense. The external observer

is there to ensure that graduate school policies are being followed. He or she will also be invited by your advisor to ask questions at this stage. Be prepared to answer questions related to the courses that you have taken (as applied to your research).

11. **Wait for decision.** After this, the CMs will ask the student to step out for a few minutes and deliberate on pass/fail/conditional pass issues, and the student will be given the decision after that discussion.
12. **Fill out exit interview form.** After the student submits the written work to graduate school, he or she must fill out an exit interview form. See link on this page.
13. **Set up appointment for the interview.** Set up an appointment with the ATS staff assistant for a 30 minute time slot for exit interview with the chairperson of the ATS department.