

EDUCATION

SURVIVING YOUR THESIS DEFENCE AS AN UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT



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For most undergraduate students, the thesis defence marks both the grand finale and the ultimate test of their academic journey. It's the day when months of hard work, sleepless nights, and endless revisions culminate in one defining moment before a panel of evaluators.

However, as exciting as it sounds, it can also feel nerve-wracking. Standing before professors and peers, defending your ideas and research methods, can make even the most confident student anxious.

Thankfully, with the right mindset and preparation, surviving your thesis defence becomes a lot easier.

Know your research inside and out

When you're presenting your thesis, the panel expects you to thoroughly know and understand what you have worked on. Just being aware of the conclusion or findings won't do; you also need to know the research methodology used, why you chose that particular methodology, how you collected your data, and so on. Basically, every aspect of your thesis is up for discussion, so you should prepare yourself accordingly. It's also crucial to highlight the gaps in your research.

The more you review your material beforehand, the more prepared you will feel to navigate any challenges that may come your way.

Rehearse the tough questions

Thesis panel or committee members rarely make the viva during the defence easy. They can jump in with questions at any point, often targeting you with the weakest part of your research. This can feel unsettling, especially if you are already nervous. That's why it's crucial to know and rehearse the tough questions beforehand.

But how exactly will you know what these "tough" questions are?

The best way to do so is by analysing your research's weakest areas, which is something you should continuously keep track of as you work on your thesis.

This will help you realise the common viva queries that might pop up and anticipate challenges to your methods or findings. Also, don't hesitate to seek help from your thesis supervisor. Their experience and judgement can prepare you to navigate any tough question that you might have to face during the defence or viva.

You can even ask your seniors, friends, or other faculty members experienced in the particular subject matter to

grill you with tough questions. The more challenging you feel while rehearsing, the easier it will be for you to answer on the final day.

Stay mentally and physically grounded

Let's be real, by the time the defence arrives, you might be skipping meals to get more work done or staying awake night after night to finish your thesis. This can backfire during your defence presentation or viva.

If your mind feels foggy and your body starts to shake, your anxiety will only intensify. Even the simplest question can suddenly seem confusing. That's why it's essential to eat properly and get enough sleep before your viva—never skip meals or stay up too late.

A short walk or listening to calming music before facing the panel can also help relax your body and reduce stress.

In the end, don't think of your thesis defence as a battle that you must win. Instead, think of it as a way to communicate the hard work and effort you have put into the research and your final paper. With focus and a bit of confidence, you can turn your defence into a proud conclusion to your undergraduate journey.

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Thesis anxiety: How writing an academic paper can get to you

The pressure of perfection

Writing a thesis often feels like balancing on a tightrope. Every sentence must sound intelligent, every argument must align with existing research, and every citation must be flawless. This constant demand for perfection can make even the most confident student second-guess their work.

The weight of expectations

Whether it's from professors, peers, or family, expectations can feel crushing. Many students fear disappointing those who believe in them, which only amplifies the anxiety of each draft or deadline.

Isolation and overthinking

Thesis writing—or academic writing, in general—can be a lonely process. Long hours spent alone with your research can lead to overthinking, burnout, and a sense of disconnect from everyday life.

Finding calm amid the chaos

Coping with thesis anxiety means taking breaks, reaching out for feedback, and remembering that progress matters more than perfection. So, every time you sit yourself down to write your thesis, tell yourself that it's not just about finishing the paper. It's about surviving the process.

