



McGill

*Department of Medicine
Division of Experimental Medicine
Lady Meredith House, Room 101
1110 Pine Avenue West
Montreal, Quebec, Canada
H3A 1A3*

*Tel: (514) 398-3466
Fax: (514) 398-3425
e-mail: experimental.medicine@mcgill.ca
www.expmed.mcgill.ca*

MEMORANDUM

FROM: Anne-Marie Lauzon, Director, Division of Experimental Medicine

TO: Graduate Students and Thesis Supervisors in the Division

Thesis Committee Meetings: Guidelines

Why have Thesis Committee meetings?

The progress of a student during his/her graduate studies should be monitored at regular intervals to see that the work is progressing satisfactorily, that the student will complete the thesis in a reasonable time, that when there are problems, either with the project or with the student-supervisor relationship, these are dealt with and solved promptly, that the student receives encouragement and advice from the members of the Committee, and that the format and content of the thesis is discussed before the thesis writing begins. The Division has the obligation to have regular yearly thesis committee meetings for every graduate student in the program. Both students and thesis supervisors should understand the role of the Committee.

Composition of the Thesis Committee:

For Annual Thesis Committee Meetings: The committee is composed of 4-5 members. Apart from the academic advisor and the thesis supervisor the committee must include no less than two other members with expertise in the area of the thesis project. Committee members are chosen for their knowledge in the field of the student's project so that they can help and advise with the work.

The Committee members are first contacted by the supervisor and/or the student in order to ascertain that they are willing to act as committee members. The actual scheduling of the meeting, however, is done by the Department to ensure that meetings are kept on schedule.

The committee is chaired by the student's academic advisor, who is charged with making sure all guidelines are followed and who also draws up the minutes of the meeting.

Compulsory First Meeting Within Two (2) Months of First Registration

Beginning with the Fall semester of 2015: All new students **MUST** have an initial, informal meeting with their supervisor within two (2) months of their first registration (i.e., by the end of October for students admitted in the Fall and by the end of February for students admitted in the winter). At this meeting:

- (1) Objectives will be set and timelines agreed upon with respect to the research to be performed in the context of the student's graduate program. These objectives and timelines must be written in the space provided to this end on the new "Graduate Student Research Progress and Tracking Form", to which additional pages may be appended. These objectives and timelines will be used as a guide in the determination of the student's overall performance at the subsequent annual thesis committee meeting. Both the student and the supervisor **MUST** sign this first report.
- (2) The composition of the student's thesis and comprehensive committee **MUST** be discussed and decided, and the form "Composition of Thesis and Comprehensive Committees" **MUST** be completed and signed by both the student and supervisor.

Both of these duly completed forms **MUST** be submitted to the Division's office, for inclusion in the student's file (include address).

Who Sets Up the Committee and When?

Annual Thesis Committees are set up centrally by the Division's office. Each student in the Division has been assigned a date around which their meeting must take place and this date (± 1 month) must be respected unless there are dire reasons for not doing so. Meetings are held annually. The only exception to this is if the committee members request that a meeting be held at an earlier time, or within a short delay, due to certain concerns regarding a student's progress.

Initial contact with the student and supervisor is made by the office via e-mail, the month prior to the assigned date, in order to determine availability and possible dates for holding the meeting. Once this has been done, the Division takes on the task of scheduling the meeting with the other members. Once the meeting has been scheduled, the notice is sent out by the Division's office to all members.

Documents Which Must be Completed and Circulated to Members of the Committee Prior to the Meeting

Prior to the meeting, the student is expected to draft a document which details his/her progress during the months between his first admission and the holding of his first committee meeting (or in the months between his last committee meeting and the present meeting). This "Progress Report" must specifically address:

- (1) Progress made towards the objectives which were set at the previous meeting (either the first supervisor/student meeting or the last committee meeting). This section should be quite detailed, so as to give a comprehensive global overview of the work thus far accomplished.

- (2) The report should also detail any accomplishments, and/or notes on progress outside the scope of the objectives in question, i.e. class work, conferences attended, studentships, etc.
- (3) The report must be accompanied by an additional 2-5 page document (an “Extended Abstract”) which must be formatted like a paper and include sections such as: Introduction, Methods, Results, Discussion (this should encompass such topics as challenges encountered, rationale, hypotheses, etc.). If the supervisor and student believe that the student is ready to start writing within 6 months of the holding of this meeting, a proposed outline of the final thesis should be appended to this abstract, and should be discussed at the meeting, in order to obtain feedback and the go-ahead from the committee members.

The student, and supervisor must once again determine the objectives and timelines for the next year, based on the progress made thus far, and submit these in writing in the form of a document entitled “Research Objectives”. As for the initial meeting, these objectives and timelines will serve as the basis to evaluate the student’s overall performance at the time of the next meeting. Both student and supervisor **MUST** sign and date the “Research Objectives” for the upcoming year and return all documents to the Division.

These three documents (the “Progress Report”, the “Extended Abstract”, and the “Research Objectives”) must be circulated to the Department and to all the members of the committee 1 to 2 days prior to the meeting.

What is the Format of the Thesis Committee Meeting?

The Meeting begins with a presentation of 20-30 minutes by the student, followed by up to one hour of questions and discussion of the project by the Committee.

At the first meeting, the student gives an outline of the thesis project and the rationale for undertaking it. **If the student chooses to be considered for the “fast-track” to the Ph.D. (and has so informed his/her Advisor and committee members), the scope of the first meeting will be expanded to include a rigorous assessment of the student’s knowledge of the research project AND his/her prospects of successfully completing a Ph.D. thesis (for more detailed information regarding fast-tracking, please refer to www.expmed.mcgill.ca/fasttrack).** Also, at the first Thesis Committee Meeting, the committee will decide on the areas related to the research project in which the student needs to further his/her knowledge and understanding, and on which he/she should expect to be tested at the next committee meeting or at the Preliminary Oral Examination (for Ph.D. students only). Subsequent meetings will evaluate the progress of the project. At the final Thesis Committee Meeting before submission of the thesis, the student is expected to give an outline of the dissertation. This proposed outline should have been appended to the extended abstract and circulated to members prior to the meeting (as detailed above). The Committee will discuss both the scientific content and the format of the thesis. If approved, the student can proceed with the writing and submission of the thesis. Note that at the end of each meeting, the student is asked to leave the room to allow the Committee to have a brief discussion and to enable them to complete the relevant sections of the tracking form. The student is then asked to come back to the room, and the evaluation by the committee members is then communicated and explained to him/her.

Minutes

Pages 2 and 3 of the “Graduate Student Research Progress Tracking Form” must be completed and signed by all members of the committee, as well as the student, **PRIOR to the meeting being adjourned**. The Academic Advisor **MUST** also subsequently write up detailed minutes of the meeting. A copy of the completed and signed form, along with the minutes, **MUST** be circulated in a timely manner to the members of the committee and the Division’s office via e-mail. These **MUST** also be sent to the student and should therefore include any recommendation for the project and for the student made by the committee during the meeting .



McGill

*Department of Medicine
Division of Experimental Medicine
Lady Meredith House, Room 101
1110 Pine Avenue West
Montreal, Quebec, Canada
H3A 1A3*

*Tel: (514) 398-3466
Fax: (514) 398-3425
e-mail: experimental.medicine@mcgill.ca
www.expmed.mcgill.ca*

MEMORANDUM

FROM: Anne-Marie Lauzon, Director, Division of Experimental Medicine

TO: Graduate Students and Thesis Supervisors in the Division

Re: Comprehensive Oral Examination Guidelines

Setting up the Comprehensive Oral Examination

Just like the annual Thesis Committee Meetings, Comprehensive Orals are set up centrally by the Departmental office. The oral is normally held in the fourth semester of the Ph.D, i.e. in the second year, except in cases where there has been a change of project or supervisor. At this stage the student has done a fair amount of research, although it should be emphasized that it is not the purpose of the oral to pass or fail a student on the basis of research accomplished.

As in the case of Thesis Committees, initial contact with the student and supervisor will be made via e-mail in order to determine availability and possible dates for the holding of the meeting. Once this has been done, the Division will take on the task of scheduling the meeting itself. Once the exam has been scheduled, the notice of the exam will be sent out by the Division's office.

Documents to be Completed and Circulated to All Committee Members prior to the meeting

Prior to the Comprehensive Oral Examination, the student must draft a document which details his/her progress in the months between the last meeting and the present meeting. This "Progress Report" must specifically address:

- (1) Progress made towards the objectives which were set at the previous meeting (either the first supervisor/student meeting or the last committee meeting). This section should be quite detailed, so as to give a global overview of the work thus far accomplished.
- (2) The report should also detail any accomplishments, and/or notes on progress outside the scope of the objectives in question, i.e. class work, conferences, studentships, etc.

- (3) The report must be accompanied by an additional 2-5 page document (Extended Abstract) which must be formatted like a paper and include sections such as: Introduction, Methods, Results, Discussion (this should encompass such topics as challenges encountered, rationale, hypotheses, etc.).

The student and supervisor must once again determine the objectives and timelines for the next year, based on the progress made thus far, and submit these in writing in the form of a document entitled “Research Objectives”. As for the initial meeting, these objectives and timelines will serve as the basis to evaluate the student’s overall performance at the time of the next meeting. Both student and supervisor must sign and date the “Research Objectives” for the upcoming year and return all documents to the Division

In addition, prior to the meeting the supervisor **MUST** send to each member of the committee (as well as to the Division’s office) a confidential letter assessing the student’s performance. The letter should include comments on intellectual ability, laboratory skills, demonstration of independence in the conduct of research, diligence and hard work in the performance of experiments.

These four documents (the “Progress Report”, the “Extended Abstract”, the “Research Objectives” and the confidential assessment by the supervisor), must be circulated to the Department and to all members of the committee 1 to 2 days prior to the meeting.

Composition of the Committee

For the Comprehensive Oral Examination, the oral committee only differs from the ongoing thesis committee in having one (1) extra member, which member **MUST** be from outside the Department of Medicine of McGill University. This ensures impartial assessment of the student's performance, at this critical stage. The committee is chaired by the student’s academic advisor, who is charged with making sure all guidelines are followed and who also draws up the minutes of the meeting.

Purpose of the Comprehensive Examination

The purpose of the examination is to test whether (i) the student's work is progressing satisfactorily and is of sufficiently high caliber to warrant continuation in the program, and (ii) the student has a broad enough knowledge not only of his own field of research but also of related areas in his or her discipline.

Thus, the comprehensive examination consists of a seminar presented by the student and a period of questions, asked by the committee and answered by the student. To help the committee prepare for this later section, submission of a good project description by the student and supervisor is necessary. The student must also prepare well in advance by (i) undertaking an ambitious review of the literature and (ii) by putting together a well organized seminar to demonstrate a profound understanding of the Ph.D. project and to situate it in the context of the current field.

Procedure at the Comprehensive Examination

The oral is preceded by a private meeting of the committee during which the candidate's background, academic performance and current performance in the Ph.D. program is discussed.

The student then gives a 20-30 minute presentation of his/her Ph.D. project which should include an introduction setting the Ph.D. proposal in the context of field and of the other work going on in the laboratory, methods, results and conclusions. A period of questions of at least one hour then follows.

Examination Evaluation

At the end of the meeting, the student is asked to leave the room to allow the committee to discuss the candidate's performance. A Pass or Fail decision is reached by consensus of the committee during the private discussion. The role of the chair is to obtain that consensus and to complete the relevant sections of the tracking form. The student is then asked to come back to the room and the evaluation of the committee members is then communicated and explained to him/her.

If the student fails, he/she is given the option to exit the program by writing a Master's thesis. It is also possible to award a Conditional Pass in the case where the performance was not satisfactory but extenuating circumstances justify to re-evaluate the student at a later time. This must be done no later than 6 months after the first Comprehensive. The committee members have the duty to specify to the student and supervisor the areas that require improvement, e.g. changes in project, improvement his/her knowledge of the literature, etc . A Pass is then awarded if the second examination is judged satisfactory.

Minutes

Pages 2 and 3 of the “Graduate Student Research Progress Tracking Form” **MUST** be completed and signed by all members of the committee, as well as the student, **PRIOR to the meeting being adjourned**. The Academic Advisor **MUST** also subsequently write up detailed minutes of the meeting. A copy of the completed and signed form (along with the minutes) must be circulated in a timely manner to the members of the committee and the Division’s office (exact address). These **MUST** also be sent to the student so any recommendation made to the student by the committee during the meeting must be included.