

## Preparing for my Viva

A viva is an oral exam which is often experienced by final year students. It's not uncommon, however, for a viva to be given as part of a module examination.

### What is the purpose of the viva?

- **Module examination.** Although this used to be more widespread in the social sciences, using a viva as part of a module examination is becoming increasingly common. The format of such a viva may vary, but most likely will focus on your knowledge and understanding of a particular aspect of the module.
- **Assessing your degree programme.** This is often conducted by an external examiner who is interested in the quality of your degree programme and may ask about the quality of teaching, research support and/or student support.
- **Assessing your degree subject knowledge.** This viva will generally be conducted by an external examiner and although the format may vary depending on your university, it's likely to involve a discussion of relevant topical subjects. You're likely to discuss your final year project as part of this.

### How can I prepare?

- **Format.** Make sure you know what the format of the viva will be.
- **Revise.** If you're attending a module examination viva, you should prepare as you would for a written exam. If the viva is to assess your degree subject knowledge, make sure you're familiar with your final year project.
- **Who is your examiner?** It could be useful to know who will be examining you – if it's an external academic, type their name into Google and make sure you're familiar with their area of expertise. Finding a photograph of the examiner may help to calm your nerves.
- **Discuss.** Don't answer questions with 'yes' or 'no', but justify your comments with examples or evidence.
- **Make a list of possible questions.** There may be obvious questions you're likely to be asked, and preparing the answers to these questions is always helpful.
- **Consider your University experience.** Although it's tempting to concentrate on the negative aspects of your course, try to recall some of the positive experiences you had. Make sure you have evidence to back up your statements and possible solutions if appropriate.
- **Listen carefully to the questions.** If you don't understand what the examiner is asking, ask them to repeat the question. If you still don't understand, it's better to admit you don't know what they're asking.
- **Control your nerves.** At the end of the day, the examiner is on your 'side' and wants to get the best out of you.