

Quick Reference Guide for ECE PhD Qualifying Exam

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Proposal Title

Student's Name

Supervisor's Name

Supervisory Committee:

Date

Overview

- Introduction
- Accomplished Work
- Proposed Work

Introduction

- Describe why research should be carried out on this topic
- Include at least 1-3 slides for an examination committee member who is not an expert in this field
- Describe what are the major challenges and which one(s) are you going to tackle
- Spend ~5 minutes for this section

Work Accomplished

- Describe the work you have done
- Depending upon when in your PhD this exam is taking place, the results can be preliminary or fully verified/published
- Don't worry if results are preliminary and if you are taking the exam in year 1 or 2.
- Show that your work done so far has rigor and novelty. Point out any challenges that you have overcome.
- Spend ~ 10 minutes on this

Work Proposed

- Describe your plan going forward
- Why is it important?
- How will you do it?
- What results do you aim to get out of the work?
- When will you finish?
- Include a Gantt chart
- Spend ~10 minutes in this section

Overall

- Aim for 25 minutes of presentation, < 25 slides
- Do not speak too fast
- Committee examining you on three aspects:
- Qualifying – are you qualified to carry on as a PhD candidate?
- Proposal – does it make sense, is it too easy, too trivial, irrelevant, too difficult, may take forever?
- Q/A - how well you answer questions, how well you communicate
- A good PhD candidate should be able to “teach” – convey his/her messages clearly

Q/A

- Ask the committee member to repeat the question if you do not understand it
- Give direct answers, do not beat around the bush
- If you don't know the answer, say so. The time will be better spent on a different question

Some Reasons for Fail/Conditional Pass

- Future work section briefly presented, not flushed out
- Proposal document >> 30 pages
- Check instructions
- Committee cannot extrapolate from the “work accomplished” that the student is capable of succeeding in PhD
- Work accomplished or proposed is irrelevant, trivial, has no novelty, will likely have no impact
- Poor presentation, confusing
- Why/When/What/How – No clarity

Tips

- Ask your supervisor to share an example of a good QE proposal document
- Work with him/her to prepare for your presentation
- Even if you have published in top-tier conferences/journals, put time and effort in preparing for the exam