Some tips

Examination outcomes:

Examination is done by 2, sometimes 3 external examiners. These have been put forward by your thesis team, and have been assessed and approved by your University using a formal process.

When you submit your thesis, your Examinations Office manages its distribution and retrieval from examiners. There is nothing for you to do at this point.

After examination, your thesis will receive an independent rating from each examiner:

The thesis:
1. needs no, or only very minor changes (rare)
2. requires a range of changes, and these can be signed off by your Supervisory team (most common)
3. requires changes and resubmission to one (or more) examiners (some)
4. is not awarded a PhD, but is awarded an MPhil (rare)
5. is failed (very rare)
6. Has issues such as plagiarism (rare – but don’t let this be you. Do things by the book)

What if examiners have different ratings

If they are similar and do not impact your thesis finalisation process (outcomes 1 to 2) then this is taken as a matter of course.

If one examiner requires a resubmission showing changes, it is best to make the changes for both examiners, and then resubmit as required to the examiner who wants to see it again. In this way, you are providing them with an improved version. Note that on resubmission, examiners may only “pass” or “fail” the thesis.

What if one examiner is “a problem”

If your team thinks it appropriate they can seek an arbitration examiner. This will require the appointment of a separate examiner who will “assess the relevance of the assessment of the examiner being queried”. They will not re-examine the thesis. If this arises from a fail provided by an examiner, it is a good idea to do re-submissions and other changes before going down this path – so that the assessment is made on the improved thesis.

This adds a lot of time, extra activities and some risk. Do it as a last resort. Escalate your responses, don’t jump to this.

What happens if examiners take longer than they should

Examiners are required to turn around a thesis in 6 weeks at most Universities, though they are often late. This is a big undertaking, and many may be difficult to fit the work into that
time. Nevertheless, the University will contact the examiner, and escalate this as necessary. If an examiner disappears then another can be appointed.

You cannot contact the examiner yourself, nor can your supervisors. Your team can contact your examinations office however.

What to do while waiting for your examinations to be complete

- Regain your social life.
- Write a paper with your supervisory team
- Enjoy the break
Responding to examiners – do’s an don’ts

Do

• Keep the version of the thesis that you submitted. This is the base from which corrections are made

• Do discuss the examiners’ requirements

• Make sure you address every comment an examiner has made. You MUST do this

• Address each issue for each examiner as a separate item

• Do keep track of changes and the examiner they have been made for as you modify your thesis.

• Provide short summary of the examiner’s comment (or include it verbatim) with a matched response. In your response if practical state the changes verbatim, with a reference to the page and section in the thesis.

• Make a document showing the examiners comments and your responses self contained. This is particularly important if you have to resubmit to an examiner. Ideally you do not want the examiner going back to the thesis itself.

• Accept the criticisms made - If they were right, fix it. If they have misunderstood your thesis, then make a change to the text to emphasise the point(s) that they misunderstood.

• Reject the criticisms only if they are demonstrably wrong. Caution is advised and your supervisors should be in agreement.

• Provide a combined response to minor/pervasive changes – eg. reference corrections, specific grammar and spelling issues highlighted, etc. If these are considered by the examiner as major, highlight what you have done about it (eg. additional proofreading, etc).

Don’t

• Take it personally.

• Criticise the examiner’s authority or knowledge. This is not up for discussion.

• Where examiners differ, you should not just take the viewpoint of one. You need to argue for the position on its merits, not on another examiner’s comments. This also applies where contradictions are made in a comment. Select the approach that you argue makes best sense.
• State that “this was mentioned there.” You should reword things to remove ambiguities that you presumably created in the original. It could be a simple as creating a cross reference or footnote.

Some useful web sites:

Here’s a useful article: https://doctoralwriting.wordpress.com/2016/06/09/but-but-writing-for-examination-and-the-right-of-reply/

Examination and related processes for each University
UWA: http://www.postgraduate.uwa.edu.au/students/thesis/examination


ECU: http://intranet.ecu.edu.au/research/for-research-students/research-journey/thesis-examination