

Oral Examination (Viva) Procedure

Section 1 - Introduction

- (1) This procedure explains how the University conducts Oral Examinations (Viva).
- (2) The purpose of the Oral Examination (Viva) is to:
 - a. verify the author of material submitted in response to an assessment task; and
 - b. provide a quality assurance measure for assessment tasks and related academic issues.
- (3) This document should be read in conjunction with the [Course Management and Assessment Manual](#).

Section 2 - Audience

- (4) This procedure should be read and understood by staff and students who may be selected to participate in an Oral Examination (Viva).

Section 3 - Principles

- (5) An Oral Examination (Viva) is a way to demonstrate alignment of a student's performance and to reflect on assessment processes. A student should perform at a similar standard in an Oral Examination (Viva) to that in other assessment forms. A student's performance in an Oral Examination (Viva) should demonstrate they understand the material at a level that is commensurate with that demonstrated in a related assessment task. An oral examination provides the student with an opportunity to better explain material subject to assessment, and to demonstrate their knowledge and competence.
- (6) The Oral Examination (Viva) may be conducted on any assessable task, and should be conducted:
 - a. in a non-threatening environment;
 - b. by the Course Co-ordinator (or their nominee appointed by the Deputy Head of School); and
 - c. where practicable, before the fully graded date for the course.
- (7) The Course Outline should state that an Oral Examination may be conducted as per this procedure. [Standard text](#) has been developed for inclusion in the Course Outline and Task Instructions.
- (8) The Course Co-ordinator should be aware that students may experience anxiety or stress throughout the process. Consideration should be given to individual differences, cultural backgrounds and students with special needs. Should the Course Co-ordinator have any concerns about a student's wellbeing at any point of the process they should immediately contact Campus Care on 02 4921 8600 or campuscare@newcastle.edu.au.

Section 4 - Process

Step 1: Select Students

(9) Students will be selected using the selection method outlined in clauses 13 to 17.

(10) The selection method should:

- a. maintain a balance between assuring the integrity of student submissions and minimising the impact of compliance; and
- b. ensure that individual students are not selected multiple times 'at random' for a single course enrolment.

(11) Students must be selected using one or a combination of methods.

(12) The Course Co-ordinator and Deputy Head of School:

- a. must consult on the selection method; and
- b. confirm that the number of students selected is appropriate; and
- c. confirm that sufficient resources are available within the School to conduct the Oral Examination (Viva) within a reasonable timeframe in consideration of the fully graded date.

(13) The Course Co-ordinator is responsible for storing a list of the selected students in the Course Assessment Return.

Selection Method

(14) There are four methods to select students:

Method A: Random Selection

(15) Students may be selected at random from the course. This method is usually paired with a percentage system.

Example

5% of enrolled students are selected at random. The Course Co-ordinator may review the number of assessment tasks that a student is required to complete during the course and calculate the percentage of the enrolled students to be selected for each task to ensure that each student is likely to have 2 (+/-1) Oral Examinations (Vivas) during a standard term.

Method B: Selection Based on Features of the Work Submitted

(16) A student may be selected for Oral Examinations (Viva) where the Course Co-ordinator considers that their submitted assessment material may indicate a possible breach of University policy. Some of these indicators are listed below, and further details of these are available from the relevant Student Academic Conduct Officer:

Possible Indicator	Example
The material is not consistent with the language, level, or structure expected from this student.	A student who has previously struggled with expression now submit works in perfect prose.
The material does not address the question in the way that was expected from the cohort.	A student has selected strange examples or has answered a different question than the one which was asked.
Referencing styles and the reference list is unusual.	The student has used a non-standard referencing system and/or obscure, difficult to obtain, or unusual reference items.
The material contains other indications that it may have been purchased, worked on with other students, or otherwise acquired.	The work has the name of other students/people in the headers or footers. Unexpected layouts, variable names, or structures shared across multiple works.

Method C: Selection Based on a Change in Quality of Submission

(17) A student may be selected where their recently submitted work is a significant improvement on work previously submitted.

Example
A student who has previously received grades close to the pass mark now presents work at a high distinction level. It is also possible to combine this with a “percentage increase” so students who improve more than 20% (for example) from the previous result might be selected.

Method D: Combination of Method A, B and/or C.

(18) Further Guidance: for selection Method B and C, these cases may be referred directly to the Student Academic Conduct Officer without conducting an Oral Examination (Viva). Course Co-ordinators should consult with the relevant Student Academic Conduct Officer for further information.

Step 2: Communication and Arrangements

(19) It is the responsibility of the Course Co-ordinator to arrange the date, time, and venue for the Oral Examination (Viva) and to inform the selected students of the arrangements in writing.

(20) The Oral Examination may be conducted via video conference (e.g. Zoom), telephone, or face to face.

(21) The venue for the Oral Examination (Viva) must be an appropriate space for this type of interaction with students. The Course Co-ordinator must ensure their safety and that of the student when selecting the location of the meeting space. Private yet “public facing” locations should be used where a third party(s) has not been nominated to be present. Reasonable Adjustment Plans may specify changes as appropriate to the needs of a student.

(22) Selected students must be emailed and provided with information on the student selection method and arrangements to conduct the Oral Examination (Viva). A [recommended email template](#) has been developed for Course Co-ordinators.

(23) If considered appropriate by the student, Course Co-ordinator, or Deputy Head of School, a third party may be present for the Oral Examination (Viva).

Step 3: Conducting the Oral Examination (Viva)

Before the Oral Examination (Viva)

(24) Course Co-ordinators must prepare questions for the interview in advance. Recommended sample questions have been prepared for reference.

(25) The conduct of the Oral Examination (Viva) should be positive and not adversarial. The Course Co-ordinator must give the student the chance to explain / demonstrate competence as part of a quality assurance process.

(26) The Course Co-ordinator should have a copy of the student's previously submitted task and a copy of their official University photograph (if available).

During the Oral Examination (Viva)

(27) The student is required to present their current University Student Card or other photo identification (such as proof of age card, driver’s licence, or passport) to the Course Co-ordinator at the commencement of the examination. If a student fails to provide suitable photo identification, they will be required to provide additional information to the Course Co-ordinator to ensure they can verify their identity.

(28) If considered appropriate, the student may be requested to bring assessment material to the interview.

(29) If the examination is being conducted via video conference (e.g. Zoom), the Course Co-ordinator is required to seek consent to record the Oral Examination (Viva) at the start of the interview. A [recommended script](#) for the Course Co-ordinator has been prepared.

(30) Students may be asked to rephrase responses they provided in an original assessment task, answer similar questions, or apply the same concept to different cases to demonstrate that they have an understanding of the material. There will be an opportunity to ask students about the choices they made in the assessment task and why they selected particular ways to address questions.

(31) The Oral Examination (Viva) is not a general re-examination of the course in its entirety and may cover only materials and learning outcomes testing in the original assessment task.

(32) The Course Co-ordinator should note any issues that relate to the quality of the assessment task that emerge during the examination, including ambiguities around task components, issues with task timing or difficulty, or curriculum alignment matters. Any issues identified should be addressed during the course evaluation process.

Step 4: Outcome of the Oral Examination (Viva)

(33) Within three (3) working days of the Oral Examination (Viva) the student will be informed of the outcome by the Course Co-ordinator in writing. [Recommended email templates](#) have been developed for Course Co-ordinators.

(34) The following table outlines the possible outcomes and actions to be taken:

Outcome Number	Outcome Description	Actions to be Taken
1	The Course Coordinator is satisfied that the student's oral responses are commensurate with the work originally submitted.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">i. The student's mark will not be changed (either up or down) as a result of the Oral Examination (Viva).ii. If the original work has not been marked, it should be marked as per the usual process.iii. The Course Co-ordinator will inform the student in writing that they are satisfied that their oral responses are commensurate with their work originally submitted.iv. The Course Co-ordinator should store any recordings, documentation and/or notes from the Oral Examination (Viva) for 6 months after the relevant fully graded date as per the Records Governance Policy.
2	The Course Coordinator is not satisfied that the student's oral responses are commensurate with the work originally submitted	<ul style="list-style-type: none">i. The Course Co-ordinator will inform the student in writing that they are not satisfied that the student's oral responses are commensurate with the work originally submitted and that the matter will be referred to the Student Academic Conduct Officer.ii. The Course Co-ordinator will store all recordings, documentation and/or notes from the Oral Examination (Viva) for 6 months after the relevant fully graded date per the Records Governance Policy.iii. The Course Co-ordinator will refer the suspected breach of academic integrity to the relevant Student Academic Conduct Officer.iv. The Student Academic Conduct Officer will be responsible for reviewing the matter and initiating any appropriate action per the Student Conduct Rule. For all matters referred the Course Co-ordinator will provide all records, documentation and/or notes from the Oral Examination (Viva) to the Student Academic Conduct Officer. The Student Academic Conduct Officer will be responsible for managing the retention of records per the Records Governance Policy.

Section 5 - Roles and Responsibilities

(35) The Student is responsible for:

- a. responding to emails from the Course Co-ordinator to arrange the Oral Examination (Viva);
- b. attending the Oral Examination (Viva);
- c. presenting their current University Student Card or other photo identification (such as proof of age card, driver's licence, or passport) to the Course Co-ordinator at the commencement of the Oral Examination (Viva);
- d. bringing any course materials as requested by the Course Co-ordinator; and
- e. participating in the Oral Examination (Viva) process.

(36) The Course Co-ordinator is responsible for:

- a. ensuring the Course Outline includes information on an Oral Examination (Viva);
- b. confirming with the Deputy Head of School the agreed selection process;
- c. selecting students for the Oral Examination (Viva);
- d. communicating arrangements for the Oral Examination (Viva) with the selected students;
- e. conducting the Oral Examination (Viva);
- f. determining the outcome of the Oral Examination (Viva);
- g. advising the student in writing of the outcome of the Oral Examination (Viva) within three (3) University working days;
- h. referring cases to the Student Academic Conduct Officer where appropriate; and
- i. storing any recordings, documentation and/or notes from the Oral Examination (Vivas) per the [Records Governance Policy](#).

(37) The Student Academic Conduct Officer is responsible for:

- a. responding to requests from Course Co-ordinators to assist with an Oral Examination (Viva);
- b. providing additional documentation and resources on contract cheating (if required);
- c. complying with the provisions of the [Student Conduct Rule](#) for all cases referred;
- d. managing the retention of records for storage in for all referred cases, in accordance with the [Records Governance Policy](#); and
- e. providing guidance for staff in dealing with students who refuse to attend an Oral Examination (Viva).

Status and Details

Status	Current
Effective Date	15th March 2021
Review Date	15th March 2024
Approval Authority	Academic Senate
Approval Date	14th March 2021
Expiry Date	Not Applicable
Responsible Executive	Mark Hoffman Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) and Vice President
Enquiries Contact	Marcus Rodrigs Student Academic Conduct Officer (SACO) Coordinator <hr/> Academic Division

Glossary Terms and Definitions

"University" - The University of Newcastle, a body corporate established under sections 4 and 5 of the University of Newcastle Act 1989.

"Working day" - Any day other than Saturday, Sunday, or a public holiday in Newcastle, on which business may be conducted.

"Reasonable Adjustment Plan" - A document developed by a student with disability and the University's AccessAbility Team which records reasonable adjustments.

"Campus Care" - The program which has been set up as a central point of enquiry for information, advice and support in managing inappropriate, concerning or threatening behaviours.

"Course" - When referring to a course offered by the University, a course is a set of learning activities or learning opportunities with defined, assessed and recorded learning outcomes. A course will be identified by an alphanumeric course code and course title. Course types include core courses, compulsory courses, directed courses, capstone courses and electives. For all other uses of this term, the generic definition applies.

"Student" - A person formally enrolled in a course or active in a program offered by the University or affiliated entity.

"School" - An organisational unit forming part of a College or Division, responsible for offering a particular course.

"Staff" - Means a person who was at the relevant time employed by the University and includes professional and academic staff of the University, by contract or ongoing, as well as conjoint staff but does not include visitors to the University.

"Term" - When referring to an academic period, term means a period of time aligned to an academic year for the delivery of a course in which students enrol and for which they are usually charged fees for example semesters, trimesters, summer, winter or full-year term. The academic year for a term is determined by the academic year in which the course commences, not concludes. For all other uses of this term, the generic definition applies.

"fully graded date" - The approved date for the term at which official course results are released and published.