

A useful tool for helping researchers with their viva

Hints and tips

Vitae resources: developing the
skills and careers of researchers

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The following book is extremely helpful for both researchers and supervisors in preparation for the viva – ‘The Doctoral Examination Process, A handbook for students, examiners and supervisors’ by Penny Tinkler, and Carolyn Jackson (ISBN 0-335-21305-7).

The table below is taken from this book and is a useful starting point for developing questions to ask your researcher in a mock viva:

Questions fit for purpose

Examination and developmental purposes	Types of questions
Clarification	How many....? How did....? When....? What....? What do you mean by....?
Check understanding	Explain how....? Explain the meaning of....?
Prompt justification/defence	“Why” types of question – Why did you....? Can you explain why....? Can you account for....?
Link to broader context	Questions about applications, relevance, contribution to field, originality. Also comparative questions – How does your approach compare with...?
Prompt evaluation	Questions that encourage reflection on the candidate’s work and self assessment: Can you reflect on....? How would you assess....? How might you....? To what extent....? Also hypothetical questions – What if you....?