

Guidelines for examinable components of practice-based degrees by research

Section A – General requirements

All graduate research candidates are bound by the provisions in the [Graduate Research Examinations Policy](#) and the associated procedures.

These guidelines describe the special requirements for graduate research degrees at La Trobe University where the research is based in practice and the examinable output(s) include an artefact (practice-based component) and a critical research component. These guidelines should be read in conjunction with the general [examinations policy suite](#) and the relevant criteria for examination and course learning outcomes in the [Graduate Research Examinations Policy](#).

1. Practice-based research

Although practice-based research can be undertaken in any discipline – from the humanities and social sciences to science, technology, engineering and medical sciences, the majority of practice-based research at La Trobe is undertaken in the creative disciplines.

A practice-based research degree, whether a Masters by research or Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), is primarily a research undertaking. The artefact and the critical research component represent complementary outcomes of a single research project, addressing specific research aims.

While the artefact and critical research component are normally presented separately, in some disciplines such as creative writing these may be integrated as one piece of work.

In all circumstances both components of the work will be examined in relation to each other, but the individual components may be viewed at different points in time: for example, examiners may attend or view a theatre performance some time prior to receiving the critical research component.

Early in candidature candidates must submit a proposal that articulates the research question, which will include a description of the project, a rationale and the methodology to be used. For PhD candidates the proposal must demonstrate how the research will contribute to new knowledge in the broader theoretical and artistic context in which they are placing their work.

All outputs of research in practice-based degrees must comply with the La Trobe [Graduate Research Examination Policy](#) and associated procedures. In particular the total examinable work must meet the requirements of the Australian Quality Framework for the relevant degree, as outlined in the [Graduate Research Examination Procedure – Thesis Requirements, Submission and Retention](#). The critical research component will conform to the same scholarly standards of language and citation as is required of any thesis for the appropriate level of degree.

1.1 The artefact

Artefacts may consist of a single piece of work such as a documentary, a film script, novel, website, screen works, installation, a manual or tool kit for an art therapy procedure, a digital art therapy program or a software program; or a combination of multiple works such as an exhibition of paintings, poetry, theatre pieces, a series of audio productions (for broadcast or podcast), exhibitions or other outputs.

1.2 The critical research component

The general purpose of the critical research component is to address the research aims employed when creating the artefact from an analytical perspective. In some disciplines, such as visual arts,

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the candidate will include a description of the process undertaken to produce the artefact, but this is not the main purpose of the critical research component.

Depending on the discipline, the critical research component may be called an exegesis, critical commentary, thesis or critical research component.

The word count for the critical research component for all practice-based research degrees should normally be in the range:

- Masters: 10 - 25,000 words
- PhD: 30 - 50,000 words

The relative emphasis given to the separate components in a practice-based degree is negotiated on an individual basis between the supervisor and the candidate and may change as the project develops. In some instances where the artefact is more extensive, for example a feature film, novel, biography or autobiography in a PhD project, the critical research component may be shorter than the minimum cited above. Where the creative work is more minor, for example a short film, the critical research component will be closer to the maximum word limit.

Where the word count in the critical research component is less than the normal minimum cited above the candidate should include a justification of this in the abstract. (Please note that this does not apply in the discipline of English where a shorter critical research component is acceptable – see Section B below).

These guidelines should be read in conjunction with the [Schedule B - Presentation of Theses for Graduate Research Degrees](#) for the presentation and formatting of the critical research component.

1.2.1 The abstract

The critical research component should include an abstract of normally not more than 300 words (as outlined in the [Graduate Research Examinations Procedure - Thesis Requirements, Submission and Retention](#)) tying the whole work together and clarifying how the separate elements form different aspects of the project.

If relevant the abstract will include:

- A justification of a lower than normal word count in the critical research component
- Any notes for the examiners on the respective weighting of the artefact versus the critical research component.

2. Notification of intent to submit

While the examination policy and procedures apply to all candidates there are some differences in the submission process for examination in practice-based research degrees summarised below.

All candidates undertaking a practice-based research degree must complete the additional section on the Notice of Intent to Submit form which relates to practice-based degrees (NOI-PB).

2.1 Capture of all components

As candidates in many practice-based disciplines will be submitting multiple components for examination the NOI-PB details will provide a record of all these components, including those to be submitted through the Graduate Research School (GRS) and any provided directly to examiners.

2.2 Timing of NOI-PB submission to the GRS

All examiners must be approved by the School Director of Graduate Research (DGR) prior to examining any component of a candidate's submission. In disciplines where there is an exhibition or performance component candidates must submit the NOI form with the additional practice based details for approval prior to finalising their arrangements for examiners to view their exhibition or performance. In most cases this means that the NOI will be submitted much earlier than the one month required in non-practice-based degrees.

3 Submission of multiple components**3.1 For examination**

All components included in the examination of a practice-based research degree must be provided to the GRS, preferably prior to the critical research component being made available to examiners, but at least prior to the formal examination period being deemed to have commenced. Please see individual disciplinary sections for more information.

3.2 For archival purposes following approval of award of the degree

After the award of the degree has been approved the multiple components will be deposited in the University Repository. If the critical research component contains any works for which copyright permission has not been obtained the candidate will need to remove these and supply an additional redacted version of the critical research component for the Repository.

If required for copyright, publication, screening or viewing purposes, the candidate can request that the work be embargoed in the repository for a negotiated length of time (see [Graduate Research Examinations Procedure - Thesis Requirements, Submission and Retention](#)).

Section B – Specific disciplinary information

The 'home' discipline of a candidate, and therefore the applicable guidelines for examination, is normally the discipline in which their principal supervisor is located.

1. English

The creative (artefact) and the critical research components may be combined or presented separately. The artefacts of candidates in English are generally in the genres of fiction, biography, autobiography, creative non-fiction, poetry or creative documentary. The critical research components may be in the range of 10,000-25,000 words for the Masters by research and 20,000- 50,000 words for the PhD.

The weightings of the respective components vary, usually within the range of 80 per cent for the creative and 20 per cent for the critical component to 50 per cent for the creative and 50 per cent for the critical component. Candidates will outline the percentage weighting of the creative and critical components in the abstract to the work as described in Section A, part 1.2.1 above.

In some instances, particularly when a thesis is presented in verse form, the length of the thesis may be somewhat lower than the maximum words prescribed for the respective degrees. It is the supervisor's responsibility to guide the candidate in terms of what is required to meet the knowledge requirements of the particular degree and for any word count lower than the normal minimum to be justified in the abstract.

The critical component should address the research question(s) that has inspired the creative

artefact and should indicate a cutting-edge awareness of the critical and theoretical literature around those questions.¹

2. Health Sciences

In the early stages of a practice-based health sciences project, candidates and supervisors should discuss the choice of artefact and research methodologies.

2.1. Critical research component (exegesis)

The exegesis must frame the artefact with a specific set of research questions. Sample questions might include:

- How is the artefact addressing questions or issues that have not been addressed elsewhere in the public sphere?
- How has the approach replicated or departed from existing practices?
- How, specifically, is the approach considered innovative?

2.2. Structure

The exegesis must include an introduction that states the aims, scope and proposed methods of the entire project and, if appropriate, how each component relates to art therapy or arts and health research. The introduction should address the examinable work as a whole.

The following chapters should be included:

- a literature review chapter addressing the themes of the exegesis. This would normally include a discussion of therapeutic and academic approaches.
- a methodology chapter explaining the techniques and approaches relating to the artefact.
- a reflective chapter that explains insights gleaned by the completion of the artefact and how these might apply to both academic and therapeutic practice. This should **not**, however, be framed as a 'making of' story where the candidate elaborates on what they have, for example, learnt about health instruction or project techniques etc.

2.3. The artefact

The artefact will be based in visual arts and address the therapeutic/wellness needs of individuals or community groups. The size and breadth of the artefact varies considerably depending on the health intervention or project and may consist of an art exhibition, video, website, a set of materials such as a story book, image/emotion cards, or art journaling tools,

The artefact will have a demonstrated relationship with the exegesis. Where an exhibition is to be held candidates must present their final exhibition in a gallery or other appropriate venue at times and dates approved by the DGR.

The proposed arrangements for the exhibition must be outlined in an exhibition presentation plan and submitted with the Notice of Intention to Submit form. This needs to be submitted at least three months prior to completion of the work to allow time for the development of the final presentation of the work, the scheduling of the exhibition and the approval of examiners by the DGR prior to issuing invitations for the examiners to attend the exhibition (*see sample order of submission below*).

¹ Published La Trobe PhD theses which have combined the artefact and the critical/exegetical components are *Kinglake-350* by Adrian Hyland (Text Publishing) and *All the Beginnings: A Queer Autobiography of the Body* by Quinn Eades (Australian Scholarly Publishing)

Where the artefact is a set of visual and other materials to be utilised directly with clients or consumers, the composite of elements must demonstrate a direct relationship with the therapeutic or health issue being addressed.

When the artefact is an exhibition it must include:

1. the artefact(s) to be assessed
2. museum-standard attribution labels for works
3. a title
4. checklist of the presented assessable work including the approved project description.

Some exhibitions will also require the inclusion of panels (didactic panels) providing background to the exhibition.

The exhibition may be the manifestation of an art-based method of inquiry employed by the maker. The exhibited works should equate with a level of art making expertise customarily expected in a public gallery. The exhibition is considered a public event unless there are exceptional reasons for a more limited audience and as such candidates must have an opening and develop exhibition invitations. A catalogue can be developed for the exhibition, although this does not form part of the assessment

Order of submission

1. Candidate submits Notice of Intention to GRS detailing all individual components three months prior to planned date of exhibition
2. DGR approves examiners
3. Candidate submits Authority to Submit form to GRS at least seven days prior to formal submission of exegesis
4. Candidate submits exegesis via the University Research Repository – six weeks prior to exhibition
5. GRS despatches exegesis to examiners
6. Exhibition is held and where a catalogue has been produced this will be provided by the supervisor or their nominated contact person directly to examiners
7. Candidate submits durable record and copy of any other components to GRS.

2.4. The examination

All three examiners (the two primary and the reserve) are required to attend the art exhibition. The examiners attend independently and follow the normal practice of not communicating with one another.

Examiners receive a copy of the exegesis prior to attending the exhibition. A durable visual record of the works, usually in digital form, is given to the examiners after the exhibition.

Following the exhibition, the two primary examiners complete their individual examination of all the examinable works, including the exegesis, the exhibition and other supporting documentation. The reserve examiner will only be called upon in the circumstances outlined in the [Graduate Research Examinations Procedure - Appointment of Examiners](#).

3. History

3.1. In the practice-based mode, a thesis in historical studies comprises of a creative work (artefact) and a supporting written exegesis (critical research component). In the practice-based mode both components are examined. Together they need to demonstrate a substantial original contribution to historical knowledge, based upon significant original historical research.

3.2. The Creative Work

A creative work represents any independent, imaginative and unique creative product (sometimes referred to as the 'artefact') that may stem from a range of disciplines or a multi-disciplinary framework within the historical fields, broadly-defined. Creative works should present a clear interpretation or argument through their creative practice and research components. Examples of creative works in history therefore can include: artwork or visual sources that are historically-based; a portfolio of feature stories relevant to the historical topic; a long form digital storytelling work or series of podcasts; a video story or documentary journalism; any kind of photomedia; a short film; curating an exhibition; or writing historical fiction, narrative non-fiction or creative biography. The creative work may incorporate more than one artistic genre. Whatever the genre, the framing – and content – needs to have a clear historical basis and demonstrate rigorous historical methodology.

3.3. The Exegesis

The purpose of the exegesis is to elucidate the creative historical work's themes and/or place it in a disciplinary context and/or explore the creative processes involved. In the latter case, it may provide guidance to the examiner regarding the sequence of development in the creative work.

The exegesis will be based on the same body of research that informs the creative work. It will explore a topic implicitly or explicitly related to the creative work, or the historical fields – broadly defined - relevant to the creative work.

The connection between the exegesis and the creative work should be obvious to examiners. They must be explicitly related and demonstrated, with a clear argument supported by historical evidence and/or theoretically-driven discussion. Also important in history are reflection on the historiographical and/or methodological implications of the research.

The historically-based exegesis will conform with the conventions and style appropriate to contemporary academic prose and be written in a style appropriate to its target readership and genre. It must demonstrate mastery of the more traditional conceptual and scholarly skills expected of a MA or PhD candidate—for example:

- wide historically-based reading; being informed about the field; referencing other primary and secondary works/sources
- being rigorous and ethical
- making substantial original contribution to historical knowledge
- writing with aesthetic merit and impact; using the language of the discourse/discipline
- arguing, including pre-emptive argument, and providing evidence for positions
- positioning the voice of the researcher, particularly in relation to the historical field

3.3.1. Some key differences between a practice-based research degree and a conventional research degree in history

| Conventional Research Degree | Practice-Based Research Degree |
|--|---|
| <p>A conventional thesis or dissertation is a written document of original research, normally based on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis of primary source material (including but not limited to letters, diaries, government reports, archival papers, newspapers etc.) • Re-examination or re- analysis of existing studies • Theoretical discussion of analytical issues relevant to the study of the discipline | <p>A practice-based thesis is a creative work and accompanying exegesis, normally based on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a historically-based research question; • original historical research (including but not limited to letters, diaries, government reports, archival papers, newspapers, oral history interviews, material and cultural heritage etc.) <p>The exegesis must demonstrate the student’s analytical understanding of their historically-based research and set the creative work within disciplinary and/or theoretical debates or frameworks.</p> |

3.4. Word Lengths

The exegesis is generally between 20% and 50% of the thesis word count, for example:

- 100,000 word Ph.D. = exegesis of 20-50,000 words.
- 50,000 word Masters = exegesis of 10-25,000 words.

You will confirm the most appropriate word lengths and specific requirements for your thesis with your supervisor. The exegesis should be consistent with the size of the final creative, historically-based project, reflecting these word length guidelines.

3.5. Structure

The exegesis does not usually precede the creative work, although this is not unheard of. While not necessarily written synchronously with the creative work, you should commence from the beginning of your research and candidature to read historical sources (both primary and secondary), keep accurate records of references, and take notes. The exegesis is an in-depth research-based piece of work which supports the creative practice work. It should describe the purpose of the work and locate it within its historical and/or cultural contexts. It should also identify the theories that you have used in creating the work. These theories should be historically-based.

The following points should be taken into account when you prepare your exegesis:

- Introduction: introduce the creative work and the conceptual framework which supports

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your understanding of it; outline where the work sits within its wider historical context, as well as what theoretical and practice-led works have informed the process and end product; also identify the purpose of the creative work, which may focus on your interpretive intentions or the work's actual function. Also, you should outline the points that will unfold in your historically-based discussion of the exegesis.

- **Body:** developing a historically-based discussion over several paragraphs, the body of your work should address the following points, ensuring internal consistency between paragraphs: the historical and/or cultural contexts; the contemporary theories and practice that underpin the creative work; the process engaged with for the production of the work; and the historical significance – your interpretation and/or the function – of the work. Further relevant points may of course be discussed.
- **Conclusion:** sum up the discussion points and the overall purpose of the creative work, including any theoretical or philosophical points, if relevant. The historically-based argument should be clear, with some further analysis of its significance and placement in the field.
- **Bibliography:** a full list of the historical works you have cited, both primary and secondary.

An exegesis could also be conceived of as a series of three journal-length articles which explore aspects of the theory, methodology, historiography etc of the research project, bookended by an introduction and conclusion which draw together themes and contexts. These chapters/articles should be of a quality and format to be ready to submit to scholarly journals, with full referencing and broad historical framing.

Clear plans should also be made for examiners to have ready access to creative work, including performances and exhibitions. USBs, CDs, and other digital attachments can be included with the thesis submission.

4. Media and Communications

4.1. Critical research component (exegesis)

The exegesis must frame the artefact with a specific set of research questions. Sample questions might include:

- How is the artefact addressing questions or issues that have not been addressed elsewhere in the public sphere?
- How has the approach replicated or departed from existing practices?
- How, specifically, is the approach considered innovative?

The exegesis must include an introduction that states the aims, scope and proposed methods of the entire project and, if appropriate, how each component relates to journalism research as defined by the [Journalism National Research Statement](#). The introduction should address the examinable work as a whole.

The following chapters should be included:

- a literature review chapter addressing the themes of the exegesis. This would normally include a discussion of journalistic and academic approaches.

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- a methodology chapter explaining the techniques and approaches relating to the artefact.
- a reflective chapter that explains insights gleaned by the completion of the artefact and how these might apply to both academic and journalistic practice. This should **not**, however, be framed as a 'making of' story where the candidate elaborates on what they have, for example, learnt about specific film techniques etc.

4.2. The artefact

The length of the artefact varies considerably depending on the format.²

In the early stages of the project, candidates and supervisors should discuss the choice of platform, storytelling mode, potential audience, and delivery and research methodologies.

4.2.1. Durable records

Candidates are required to create digital records of: audio-visual materials and websites; correspondence from audiences via email, web and social media; and copies of recorded interviews.

In some cases the artefact may include items such as a writers' festival forum or live radio segment. In such cases the supervisor will specify recording requirements.

5. Screen Arts

5.1. General

The two components in this discipline may be presented together as a whole or separately.

The critical research component, commonly referred to as the exegesis in this discipline, does not provide a direct commentary on the making of the artefact and the artefact does not simply illustrate the critical research component.

5.2. The artefact

The artefact can include any of the following forms:

- Screenplay
- Audio-visual production
- Documentary
- Web series
- Film
- Sound/audioscape
- Media art

It is acknowledged that it is not always possible to present an artefact for examination in its final form. For example a screenplay is never really completed until filmed. Where a candidate submits a 'draft' artefact, they are required to contextualise the draft and include an explanation of how this work might be further developed or incorporated into a larger work.

5.3. The critical research component (exegesis)

² One example of a past PhD submission is a web series of 15 episodes each of five minutes, equating to the length of a full-feature documentary

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While candidates will adhere to scholarly conventions and standards in the writing of the exegesis, as outlined in the [Graduate Research Examinations Procedure - Thesis Requirements, Submission and Retention](#), this does not exclude the possibility of adopting a 'personal voice' where appropriate.

5.4. Submission requirements

Both components must normally be ready for examination at the same time.

Films should be prepared in an accessible digital format and uploaded to a suitable and secure platform. The URL of the online video is made available to the examiners in the appendix of the thesis with the password and any additional instructions required to access the recording(s).

Screenplays should be consolidated with the exegesis and any appendices.

6. Theatre and Drama

6.1. The critical research component

The critical research component in this discipline can include:

- a definition or refinement of the research question/s while recognising that, in practice-based research, research questions often emerge or are clarified during the process of creating the artefact
- a literature (and practice) review
- reflection on and analysis of the artefact.

Candidates are encouraged to find a 'complementary' form of writing for the critical research component. This involves articulating an argument that has emerged from the practice and addresses the research question. The critical work should be considered as a further iteration of the artefact.

6.2. The artefact

Students are advised to document the work meticulously in the form of journals, photographs and video.

6.3. Presentation/submission requirements

The artefact and critical research components are normally presented separately, and the performance of the theatre practice normally precedes the critical research component. The critical research component must normally be submitted no later than six months after the performance of the work.

Three examiners will view the performance, or a recording of the performance depending on the circumstances of the staging of the performance and the location of the examiners.

If examiners are to be invited to a live performance the NOI-PB must be submitted to the Graduate Research School at the time that arrangements for the performance are being made, so that potential examiners can be approved prior to confirming their attendance (*see sample order of submission below*).

If examiners will be examining a recording of the performance, together with the critical research

component, the NOI-PB can be submitted at the normal time, one month prior to submission.

Order of submission (examiners attending live performance)

1. Candidate submits Notice of Intention to GRS detailing all individual components prior to performance.
2. DGR approves examiners
3. Performance is held (durable record created)
4. Candidate submits Authority to Submit form to GRS seven days prior to formal submission
5. Candidate submits critical research component via the University Research Repository and a durable record of the artefact(s) directly to GRS
6. GRS despatches critical research component and durable record of performance to examiners

6.3.1. Durable record

Live theatre performances must be electronically recorded and uploaded to a suitable and secure platform for examiners to view according to instructions from the supervisor. The URL of the online video is made available to the examiners in the appendix of the thesis with the password and any additional instructions required to access the recording(s).

7. Visual Arts

7.1. General

In this discipline candidates undertake research projects such as works of art, design, photography, installation or architectural models resulting from creative investigations. The outcome of this work, together with an exegesis, constitutes the examinable material.

7.2. The exegesis

In addition to employing a rigorous theoretical research methodology, the exegesis must clearly link to and support the studio creative work. It must document the studio process as well as the conceptual underpinning of the final exhibition.

The exegesis must be submitted six weeks prior to the final exhibition. All examiners, including the examiner who has been advised that they are the reserve examiner, are provided with the exegesis prior to attending the exhibition.

7.3. The artefact - exhibition

The artefact will consist of a coherent exhibition that has a demonstrated relationship with the exegesis. Candidates must present their final exhibition in a gallery or other appropriate venue with the approval of the School Director of Graduate Research.

The proposed arrangements for the exhibition must be outlined in an exhibition presentation plan and submitted with the NOI-PB. This needs to be submitted three months prior to completion of the work to allow time for the development of the final presentation of the work, the scheduling of the exhibition and the approval of examiners by the Board of Graduate Research, prior to issuing invitations for the examiners to attend the exhibition (*see sample order*

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of submission below).

1. The exhibition must include:
2. the artefact(s) to be assessed
3. museum-standard attribution labels for works
4. a title
5. checklist of the presented assessable work including the approved project description.

Some exhibitions will also require the inclusion of panels (didactic panels) providing background to the exhibition.

The exhibition is considered a public event and as such candidates must have an opening and develop exhibition invitations. A catalogue can be developed for the exhibition, although this does not form part of the assessment.

Order of submission

1. Candidate submits Notice of Intention to GRS detailing all individual components three months prior to planned date of exhibition
2. DGR approves examiners
3. Candidate submits Authority to Submit form to GRS at least seven days prior to formal submission of exegesis
4. Candidate submits exegesis via the University Research Repository – six weeks prior to exhibition
5. GRS despatches exegesis to examiners
6. Exhibition is held and where a catalogue has been produced this will be provided by the supervisor or their nominated contact person directly to examiners
7. Candidate submits durable record and copy of any other components to GRS.

7.4. The examination

All three examiners (the two primary and the reserve) are required to attend a visual arts exhibition. The examiners attend independently and follow the normal practice of not communicating with one another.

Examiners receive a copy of the exegesis prior to attending the exhibition. A durable visual record of the works, usually in digital form, is given to the examiners after the exhibition.

Following the exhibition, the two primary examiners complete their individual examination of all the examinable works, including the exegesis, the exhibition and other supporting documentation. The reserve examiner will be informed that they are the reserve examiner and will only be called upon in the circumstances outlined in the [Graduate Research Examinations Procedure - Appointment of Examiners](#).