

Requirements for research degrees

Doctorate (PhD, EdD, EngD, PhD by Special Regulations)

Doctoral degrees are awarded to those who have demonstrated all of the criteria below:

1. a significant contribution to the field of study through the creation and interpretation of new knowledge, connection of previously unrelated facts or the development of new theory or revision of older views;
2. submission of work of a quality in whole or in part of a standard to merit publication (whether or not subsequently published);
3. provides evidence of the acquisition of knowledge and a detailed understanding of applicable techniques for research and advanced academic enquiry;
4. is of a quality and quantity to reflect three years of full-time postgraduate study (or part-time equivalent).

Master of Science/Master of Letters

The Master of Science or Master of Letters degrees are awarded to those who have demonstrated all of the criteria below:

1. provides evidence of a useful contribution to the field of study;
2. systematic understanding of knowledge and critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights in the field of study
3. includes critical evaluation of current methodologies and wider research in the area of study;
4. provides evidence of an understanding of applicable techniques for research and advanced academic enquiry;
5. submission of work of a quality and quantity expected for two years of full-time postgraduate research and study (or part-time equivalent).

Master of Philosophy (by thesis and oral)

The Master of Philosophy degree is awarded to those who have demonstrated all of the criteria below:

1. provides evidence of a useful contribution to the field of study;
2. understanding of knowledge and critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights in the field of study
3. includes critical evaluation of current methodologies and wider research in the area of study;
4. provides evidence of an understanding of applicable techniques for research and advanced academic enquiry;
5. submission of work of a quality and quantity expected for one year of full-time postgraduate research and study (or part-time equivalent).

Form of work

All students are expected to submit a thesis. Content of a thesis may differ by subject, but it is expected to include critical review, reworking of existing material providing the provenance of such material is clearly identified, and the results of the original investigation carried out during the course. In some cases, it may also include submission of compositions or recorded work (e.g for a degree in Music).

A thesis may contain previously published material as an integral part of the thesis. This material should be set in the context of an overall thesis (as part of a connected argument) with suitable introductory and concluding passages to link the published material to the rest of the work. Although permissible, it is not expected that a thesis submitted for the awards of MSc, MLitt or MPhil will include published works.

The amount of previously published material to include is up to each candidate, however included publications must refer to research carried out as part of a candidate's degree and the thesis must keep within the word limits specified by the relevant Degree Committee¹.

Candidates for the PhD by Special Regulations and, with the approval of the relevant Degree Committee, candidates for the PhD (by general regulations) may submit a thesis consisting of a number of previously published papers. In these cases, the thesis must also contain a substantial introductory summary statement summarising rationale; placing the work in the context of the wider field of study; clarifying the extent to which works represent a consistent body of research, and the original contribution to knowledge they make; and providing clear detail on the exact contribution of the student to each included paper. It would not be necessary for any published work to be re-written prior to inclusion in a thesis. The amount of published material to include is up to each candidate, however with the exception of candidates for the PhD by Special Regulations the included publications must refer to research carried out as part of a candidate's degree. All candidates must also keep within the word limits specified by the relevant Degree Committee².

Works will be considered as 'published' if they are traceable in ordinary catalogue and copies are obtainable at the time of application or were at some previous time by members of the public through normal channels.

The thesis must also be submitted in the format prescribed by the Postgraduate Committee³.

Assessment

The examination shall consist of submission of a thesis embodying the results of the candidate's approved course of research, and examination on the general field of knowledge within which it falls.

Examiners will assess on the extent to which the thesis:

- is clearly written;
- fulfils the requirements for the degree.

¹ [Word limits and requirements of your Degree Committee | Cambridge students](#) for the PhD, EdD, MD, BusD, MSc, and MLitt. Word limits for other Degrees are specified in the Special Regulations in [Statutes and Ordinances: University of Cambridge](#), Chapter VII.

² [Word limits and requirements of your Degree Committee | Cambridge students](#)

³ [Submitting your thesis for examination | Cambridge students](#). Requirements for the MPhil by thesis: <https://www.cambridgestudents.cam.ac.uk/your-course/examinations/graduate-exam-information/submitting-and-examination/mphilmsres>

The oral examination should allow:

- the candidate to defend their thesis and clarify any matters raised by the Examiners;
- the Examiners to probe the candidate's knowledge in the general field;
- the Examiners to assure themselves that the work presented is the candidate's own and to clarify matters of any collaboration; and
- the Examiners to come to a definite conclusion about the outcome of the examination.

For MPhil programmes where the supplementary programme regulations state requirements for the examination, these shall be supplementary to the guidance detailed above⁴.

⁴ E.g. the regulations for the MPhil in Biological Anthropological Science states that the thesis shall provide evidence to satisfy the examiners that a candidate can design and carry out investigations, assess and interpret the results obtained, and place the work in the wider perspectives of the subject.