

Virtual Thesis Defense Checklist

(Note: this is in addition to, not a replacement for, the graduation checklist.)

Student Responsibilities

More than 1 week before the defense:

- Recruit your thesis Chair, and remind them that they will need to run the post-defense committee Zoom meeting and to report the results (including this [form](#)) to be-grad-office@mit.edu.
- Identify your Zoom Moderator with assistance from your Chair. The Moderator should be someone on the committee, or someone who will be present throughout the entire defense (e.g. faculty assistant), but NOT the defending student. See Zoom Moderator responsibilities below, and make sure your Moderator reviews them. Get the Zoom meeting ID and password for your public defense from your Moderator.
- Practice using Zoom and screen sharing. Make sure you share the screen you intend to. <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/201362153-How-Do-I-Share-My-Screen->
- Plan your presentation & pay attention to small details. Examples:
 - Dress professionally, as you would in a physical defense
 - Be aware of what is in the background of your screen at home
 - Choose a location that is as quiet as possible
 - It's OK to use headphones or earbuds
 - Be sure not to share any private information – your defense is public

1 week before the defense:

- Send your approved draft thesis and executive summary to thesis committee members. CC your supervisor, so that they can approve by email.
- Send your defense announcement information to be-grad-office@mit.edu. This includes date, time, title, abstract, and the names and titles of your committee members. Let us know who your moderator will be. Be sure to include your Zoom link and password for the defense announcement..
- The BE Academic Office will send out your defense announcement to BE.

At the defense:

- Your Chair should review the protocol for questions with all attendees before you start.
- Remember to unmute before you start presenting. Most likely, all participants including you will be muted when joining.
- Present your defense. Be sure to pause briefly from time to time to allow your Chair or Moderator to politely call on anyone with a clarifying question and listen for your Chair/Moderator to point out questions.
- Answer questions. If people get a little rowdy, remind everyone to please mute their mics and raise their hands – the Chair and Moderator can call on people and help out with this.

After the defense:

- Attend the closed committee Zoom to discuss your defense. You will be asked to leave the meeting so the committee can deliberate.
- Wait to be invited back to the meeting to discuss the results of their deliberations. Do not rejoin until you are invited.

Thesis Chair – Additional Responsibilities

Prior to the defense:

- Send a Zoom link to thesis committee members and the defending student for the post-defense closed meeting. It is not advisable to use the same link as the defense because that link was advertised to the public and you may get people adding themselves to the closed meeting.
- Your administrative assistant can assist with the Zoom meeting and/or communication with the committee and candidate, but should not attend the closed meeting.

At the defense:

- At the START of the defense, define the Zoom protocol (in addition to the normal protocols). Suggestions:
 - Everyone keeps their microphones muted, unless speaking.
 - Use the Zoom “raise your hand” feature to speak, please do not interrupt. The Chair and Moderator will keep track of hand raising and call on people to speak.
 - Only interrupt the presentation for a clarifying question about the data or slide presented. More in-depth questions should be held until after the presentation. The Chat window can be used to “save” questions for later.
- Keep an eye on the Zoom participants window, to gently interrupt for clarifying questions. (There should be a Moderator to help with this task, in case the Chair gets very involved in listening.)
- Manage the Q&A session after the thesis presentation. Don't forget to check the Chat Window for saved questions.
- When there are no more questions, remind the committee members and the candidate to leave the defense meeting and join the closed committee meeting. Be prepared to send an email reminder with the link. Host the closed meeting.
- Let the student and advisor know when to leave the closed meeting for deliberations.
- At the end of the closed meeting, re-invite the candidate and advisor to join the meeting, and discuss the results with the student. (A phone call may also be acceptable, as long as everyone that normally would participate in the feedback session is able to.)
- Email be-grad-office@mit.edu with the defense result [form](#) (pass/fail).

Defense Moderator/Host Responsibilities

- Schedule the meeting in Zoom and send the link to the student for their defense announcement.
 - It is advisable to use a unique meeting code rather than your personal Zoom link.
 - Make sure you're using the MIT Zoom account, and not a free account with time limits. (URL will have mit.zoom.us instead of zoom.us)
 - When creating the meeting, use the following settings:
 - Require a meeting password
 - Participant video is ON
 - Audio from both phone and computer
 - Check Enable join before host
 - Check Mute participants upon entry
- During the meeting, monitor the participants list for raised hands. If there is a hand raised, gently interrupt between slides or during a pause, let the student know that there is a question, and invite the person with the raised hand to unmute and ask. (Remember that you need to unmute to do this.). The Chair might do this, but keep an eye on things in case the Chair becomes engrossed in the student's presentation.
- End the meeting after the defense (unless the student has arranged with you otherwise).