

How to handle yourself during a defense or committee meeting

First and foremost: remember that this is an incredible opportunity for you! This may be one of the only times that you a group of experts together in one place and focused on providing you with feedback to advance your research and career! The following are some tips that may help you know what to expect and feel more prepared.

For an undergraduate thesis defense:

- Be sure to schedule the date for your defense at least one month in advance, as it can be difficult finding a date and time when your whole committee is available.
- Arrive to the room where your defense will take place ~15 minutes early so you have plenty of time to set up your presentation, troubleshoot if necessary, and welcome your committee as they arrive.
- You do not need to bring food or snacks to the meeting! We actually expect that you will not do so.
- Have your presentation ready in multiple formats as backup, such as saved on your computer, on a flash drive, and on Google Drive. Bring necessary cables for presenting from your laptop, including a power cord.
- If allowed - check with your mentor - bring any friends who want to support you while you defend your thesis!
- Begin your presentation by thanking everyone for coming and announcing the purpose of the meeting—"Today I will be defending my Honors Thesis entitled XX".
- Decide if you would like committee members to ask questions during your presentation or save them all for the end, and let them know at the beginning of your presentation. Prepare for questions you think may be asked.
- Be sure to make notes of the feedback you receive from the faculty, especially if you intend to carry your project forward to publication or conduct similar research in the future.
- Once your presentation is over and all questions have been answered, it is customary for your committee to ask you and anyone not on the committee to leave the room so they can decide whether you were successful in defending your thesis. This usually only lasts a short time. If all goes well - and normally, the defense wouldn't proceed if your advisor didn't think it would be successful - your committee will invite you back into the room and congratulate you on completing your honors thesis!
- Go celebrate!

For a graduate student defense or committee meeting:

- **Again, keep in mind that this is one of the few times in your career that you will get supportive feedback from a panel of scientific experts all focused on improving your research and career! Take advantage of this precious opportunity by being prepared.**
- Provide a summary of your progress in advance (a short document, <2 pages), and have a PowerPoint ready to share your plans and most recent findings.
- Use the summary document and the PowerPoint let the committee know in advance what you most want feedback on.
- Be prepared for questions that push your boundaries of understanding. That is one goal of the meetings. We can't help you progress unless we know what the limits of your knowledge are. But also try not to get flustered, and ask for clarifications or a moment to collect your thoughts if you do find yourself panicking.
- Do not feel pressure to bring snacks or drinks for the committee. In fact, in Evolutionary Anthropology, students are not allowed to do so!
- Take notes. Ask questions if you don't understand the committee's advice. Make them realize that you are taking their feedback seriously!
- Even if some members of the committee are critical, be grateful for the feedback, and follow up with specific committee members after the meeting to clarify points they made, update them on any new results based on their feedback, and keep them informed of your progress with grant applications and journal article submissions.