



Tips for Conquering the Candidacy Exam

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As of October 2023, I received a positive result in my second candidacy exam (CE). For beginning PhD students like me, few things evoke more mild dread than the CE. Although the preparation period can be frustrating, the effort put into preparing for the CE is a crucial turning point in mastering general knowledge of your field and another unfamiliar field. The theoretical and methodological knowledge gained from the CE will undoubtedly be useful for future research projects. Here, I want to share a Triple A — assessment, assembly, action — that helped me pass the CE.

Assessment

Before studying the reading list provided by your supervisor, start by assessing what you already know and what challenges you will face. Identify areas (both theoretical and methodological) that you should further study and, more importantly, where you feel confident. This step is particularly crucial for the second CE, as you may be a newcomer to conducting research in an unfamiliar field with a novel methodological approach. Since the CE questions should be relevant to your research area, explore the connection between your research interest (e.g., criminology and school bullying) and the unfamiliar field (e.g., public health) you have chosen for your second CE. For example, using Hirschi's social bonding theory, investigate how a robust parental attachment may impact adolescent delinquency (criminology) and mental health (public health).

Assembly

With a solid understanding of your proficiency in the field, start extracting the essence of each paper from the reading list, including the theories, methods, and policy implications presented. During this process, you may come across temporarily unfamiliar concepts. In such cases, note down the keywords without delving too deep. However, for areas where you feel confident, thoroughly study at least five, preferably interdisciplinary papers involving multiple theories and novel methodological approaches. These papers will serve as your “ace” when answering CE questions. Starting with enthusiasm is always a great asset when completing any task.

Action

Once you submit your reading list to the Graduate Division, break down the study material into manageable sections and allocate specific time slots for each topic (at least 1-2 months before the CE for the entire studying period).

To read Jacky's full article, please click [here](#).

Thesis Proposal Defense

NL Team

At one point during your PhD years - usually at the end of the second year -, you'll have to go through your thesis proposal defence. As this is an important milestone for us, below are some thoughts to our experiences. A few months before the defence, you'll be informed about the specific requirements for the written version and to fix a date, so we won't focus on that.

(1) The written version is important, but so is the way you present it. You'll have a limited time to introduce your topic and your separate chapters. Do your best to stay within the time, don't overload any slides, and visualize your thoughts with supporting graphs. The committee members besides your supervisors might not have had time to go through every small detail and all your literature sources, so make it possible to follow you without losing yourself in technicalities.

(2) After dealing with your research topic for an extended period already, you are probably already familiar with the major problems and debates, especially after your candidacy exams and guided studies. Expect to be confronted with them again and think on how you want to answer them. Surely you won't have all fixed answers but demonstrate that you engaged with the problems.

(3) Always look at it from a positive side. Your committee is there to listen to your ideas, and they are interested in seeing you succeed. In your whole preparation period, you have probably gotten a feeling, if you are generally on the right track, you have had many hours of meetings with your supervisor, you had to demonstrate your abilities and arguments in the classes and the preparatory courses - and you have passed all of them, when you go to your proposal defence.

(4) Also, don't forget that the defence is, as the name implies, more of a debate and dialogue than just a one-directional session where you just receive advice. Sure, be open about feedback and be open to compromise, but you're also there to *defend* your ideas, your methods, your approach, and your possible conclusions. That means don't be shy to also disagree with comments and suggestions and explain your positions.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

✓ Call for Participants

- Re-discovering Youths Today: Identity, Subculture, Psychosocial Functioning, and Service Needs. Hong Kong Shue Yan University, November 4, 2023, 9:00 am to 6:15pm. Hybrid mode. [\[See the ad\]](#)

✓ Call for Papers

- The Gendered Self: Media and its Global Representations (Book chapter). **Deadline:** November 20, 2023. [\[See the ad\]](#)
- Special Issues of Language, Discourse & Society (Journal article). **Deadline:** December 10, 2023 & December 31, 2023. [\[See first ad\]](#) [\[See second ad\]](#)
- Special Issue of ILR Review (Journal article). **Deadline:** December 17, 2023. [\[See the ad\]](#)