

“MASCOT”

Masters Colloquium Tips (for Literary Studies)

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Masters degree courses end with a two-part assignment: students first write their M.A. thesis, then present and defend this thesis in front of their two examiners and – potentially – the general public. In Literary Studies we call this format *MaReCoLi* – Masters Research Colloquium in Literary Studies. Since the colloquium is graded and accounts for 20 % of the M.A. *Prüfungsmodul* result, students are well advised to prepare their presentation, and their performance in the discussion, diligently.

According to the M.A. *Prüfungsordnungen*, the colloquium is to take place not more than ten weeks after students have handed in their thesis. Within these ten weeks both examiners have to read, assess and grade the thesis. (If they are not overburdened with work during the semester, they usually make that deadline. It may help to discuss your due date with them early on in the process.)

Once the grade is registered in HISPOS it is the students' task to get in touch with the *Prüfungssekretariat* in order to gain access to the written assessments (*Gutachten*) the examiners have produced. The criticism and advice that the examiners express in their assessments can help you for your oral presentation and a successful defence. The colloquium offers you the chance to reconsider your thesis, suggest ways of improvement, and open it up for further debate. (Hence the defence need not be only defensive. It can, like any good research, move on, just as you will.)

This is the use of criticism. So if your examiners think that you have not stated the purpose or objective of your thesis clearly enough, or that you have not looked critically enough at the state of research in your field, then you can and should remedy this in your presentation. If you prefer not to, your examiners may take you up on the question during the ensuing discussion.

The duration of the colloquium should last no longer than 45-60 minutes. Consequently, your presentation should not cover more than 25-30 minutes and leave sufficient time for discussion.

Your presentation should meet the following requirements:

- **Do not attempt to cover each and every aspect of your thesis!** There is not enough time. Instead, try to provide a general overview of your project, its structure and method(s), and offer some in-depth information

on the major aspects. This may be a small number of close readings which highlight your thesis statement or something to that effect.

- **Use visuals!** This does not have to be a (succinct) Powerpoint presentation. A good handout serves the same purpose.
- **Involve your audience!** Your presentation is an act of oral communication. Do not read out a text in a monotonous drone, but try to look at your audience and make your talk lively and interesting.
- **Be open to questions!** Ideally, your presentation will invite questions that may be debated during the ensuing discussion. These questions should not be seen as negative criticism but rather as signs of academic curiosity and intellectual openness. A stimulating presentation may produce many queries, so do not be afraid to confront these questions with an open mind.
- **A colloquium is, literally, a serious conversation on a special (your!) topic.** It is not a question and answer game which only allows for one correct answer.

So if you see questions about your thesis/presentation as an invitation to engage in critical (but friendly) discourse, everybody will have fun and learn something, too.