

*** Before you read this, make sure to read the ME Graduate Handbook (found at me.stanford.edu → academics → graduate programs)

*** Note that these are guidelines for **Allison's PhD students**. Different advisors have different preferences (especially when it comes to when a thesis draft should be complete and given to the committee)

*** For some Stanford Fellowships (SGF, SIGF, BioX), you **MUST** go TGR prior to final year of fellowship funding (i.e., prior to/during first quarter of final year)

*** Note that you can consider doing the Dissertation Boot Camp to help you write: <https://hume.stanford.edu/writing/graduate-students/dissertation-boot-camp>. There are multiple sessions per year.

Before you go TGR and before you schedule your green light meeting (Typically 1-1.5 years before graduation)

- Discuss your proposed timeline and job application process with Allison
- Note that if you plan to walk at graduation, you must have either completed your defense already, or scheduled a defense for some time in the summer *and* plan to submit your final thesis by the end of summer (last day of summer classes). Currently (as of 2019), the ME Department has a form that students must fill out if they want to walk in graduation without having already completed the defense.
- Form your Reading Committee:
 - This should be Allison plus two (or more) other faculty members (they must be part of the academic council unless you do a petition - only one of them is allowed to be non-academic council)
 - Think about who does research relevant to your thesis topic, then discuss the possible options with Allison
 - This committee must be formed before your Green Light Meeting and before you go TGR

About 6 months to 1 year before you plan to defend

- Typically, before your green light meeting, Allison will want you to have 1 journal paper accepted, 1 journal paper submitted, and a plan for what work you want to do to finish your thesis. (This is because a typical thesis will consist of an introductory chapter, 3 main chapters (each the equivalent of a journal paper), and a concluding chapter.)
- Schedule your Green Light Meeting:
 - This meeting is with your reading committee members (usually 3 people)
 - An administrator can help you reserve a room
 - When scheduling this meeting, you can send your committee your dissertation proposal as well as any publications that will be in your dissertation
- The meeting will be at least an hour. Often scheduling constraints dictate that it be an hour, but if possible try to schedule for 90 minutes, especially if your committee members have not been previously involved in your research.

- Prepare slides that would take about 20 minutes if you presented them straight through. The committee will interrupt and discuss things with you as you show your slides.
- Make sure to clearly show your contributions; provide some context (prior work in the field) to show where your work fits in
- Make sure to clearly state what your chapters will be
- Make sure to clearly show what work has already been published
- This is not a practice thesis defense, you do not have time for that level of detail. Put details in backup slides.
- The last slide should include a month-by-month schedule for your remaining time, and include milestones like the thesis defense and thesis submission date
- Be ready for feedback and discussion about what you will need to do to be ready to defend and submit your thesis. Make sure you understand the recommendations/requirements. (For example: If a committee member suggests you do a particular thing, make sure you understand if that is a general suggestion for the field or a requirement they are placing in order for them to approve your thesis.)
- You can also use this time to ask for feedback/guidance if you're unsure on how to finish the last chapter of your thesis
- Keep in mind that your committee members can be references for jobs (especially faculty jobs), and you want to demonstrate intellectual curiosity and professionalism and cultivate a collegial atmosphere while also trying to pin down exactly what you need to do to graduate.
- Example slides can be found [here](#)
- Bring to the Green Light Meeting the [green light meeting form](#) (also available in building 530 in the "wall of forms"), make sure Allison fills it out at the meeting, and then turn it into the ME Office.

About 3-4 months* before you plan to defend

- * sometimes more like 2 months prior, in any case, when you are sure you will be ready
 - Make sure you have submitted the [completion of teaching assistant form](#) and turn it into the ME student services office. Also check with the ME office to ensure that you have all the required documents on file.
 - Form your Defense Committee and schedule your defense:
 - Find a *set* of dates that works for all **3** members of your READING committee (be sure ask for a 3-hour time slot -- although usually takes about 2 hours)
 - Allison recommends first checking general days when your reading committee will be in town and available, then using when2meet (rather than a doodle poll, which gets really long if you want check each possible time period) to fully capture availability.
 - Then, fill in the rest of your defense committee with **2** other members who can fit into the available dates chosen by the reading committee (one of these members will be the Chair of your defense, and he or she must be from outside the ME Department)
 - If a committee member cannot make a 3-hour slot and you need to shorten it, make sure this is okay with all committee members.

- Schedule a room for your defense (3.5 hour slot)
 - Depending on the expected size of your audience, we suggest 520-131, Durand 450, or MERL 203. If you expect a larger audience, additional options include 550-200, 320-105, and 300-300.
 - Work with Allison's academic administrator (currently Brittany Coffey <cofferb@stanford.edu>) to schedule the room
 - To check availability of registrar-controlled rooms (for example, 320-105), look here: <http://scheduling.stanford.edu>
 - Keep in mind that you want the room scheduled for at least 30 minutes before the defense so you can set up.

At least 2 months before the defense

- Make a plan with Allison for reviewing drafts of your thesis chapters
- Expect several rounds of back-and-forth review of individual chapters before she reads the entire draft together (usually for the introduction, conclusion, and last main chapter -- usually the other main chapters have already been completed as journal papers so those are formatted and approved very quickly)
- Start putting together a draft of your defense slides (and think about if you want to do a practice defense talk and if so, when it will be)
- Let Allison know if you will have family/significant others attending/in town for the defense. Allison wants to take them (and you) out to a nice dinner.

At least 2 weeks before the defense

- Fill out the [university oral examination form](#) (can also be found in the ME student service office) and turn it in to the ME student services office.
- Student services will email you and give you a folder for your defense with the necessary paperwork.

2 weeks before the defense (or 1 week if necessary -- it depends on how close to the end of your graduation quarter it is)

- Allison-approved draft complete and ready to send to the reading committee
- Send an email to your Reading Committee: Send a copy of your thesis and offer to bring a printed copy for them
- Send an email to your entire defense committee to remind them of the time and date and room of the defense
- Ask your committee chair if they want to see the folder (you got from the ME office) before the defense. Otherwise just bring the folder to the defense and give it to the chair
- Go through defense slides with Allison
- Practice your defense talk
- Note that most people bring food for the audience at their defense, but it is not required. Similarly, most people host a small on-campus reception the same day after the defense, but it is not required.

Day of your defense

- Day before: send one more reminder email to your defense committee

- Make sure the room is configured as desired and that your computer/slides/videos work with the projector
- The open session will be about 1 hour (50 min talk, 10 min questions)
- Allison will take a few minutes at the beginning to introduce (say funny things about) you
- What to bring: Bring a printed copy of your slides for each committee member. Number the slides so the committee can reference them.
 - Sample slides can be found [here](#)
- The closed session will vary in length (usually about 1-1.5 hours)
 - The committee members will each ask you a few questions. Usually each faculty member takes their turn, but sometimes there is jumping back and forth between people, or a faculty member may have a second round of questions.
 - Be ready to answer detailed questions about your research (how exactly did X work, why did you do it Y way) and ready to roll with speculative questions like “What would be the next step in your research?” Another I have heard is “If you had infinite \$ (or time), what would you have done differently in this research?”
 - Usually the last person to ask questions will be your advisor
 - Once the questions are over, the committee will ask you to step outside for a few minutes while they discuss and vote. (Don’t worry if it takes a while, sometimes they’re just talking about how awesome you are!)
- As soon as you get your result, discuss with your committee members *in person* your timeline for finishing the thesis and ask them when you can expect to get edits back (be sure to know their availability as well since you’ll need to get signatures)
- Make sure that someone (your chair or your advisor) will immediately go to Student services to drop off the “red folder” with the signed oral exam form (signed only by the chair) and voting ballots.
- Then follow up with an email reminding them of the timeline

Finishing the thesis

- Best to give yourself a month between the defense and when you plan to submit
 - Don’t plan a big vacation to celebrate because you may need time to address the committee’s comments
- Send a follow-up email confirming the timeline for getting edits back from each committee member
- When you get the edits back, there may be some discussion via email or in person
- Once you finish the edits, there may be more discussion in order to get the thesis to a point where they are ready to sign off
- Prepare the thesis approval emails for your reading committee members following the official instructions and get email responses from each member of the Reading Committee. Before you can submit your thesis online, you must have collected all the approval emails.
- Double check all formatting requirements on the Stanford [webpage](#)
- Submit your thesis online (make sure Allison knows when you are planning to do this)
- Allison will then need to approve your thesis online
- Has to be submitted by NOON on the last day of classes of the quarter you finish in

- Best not to do this actually ON the last day

General last items

- Your student status should continue until the end of the quarter that you submit your thesis, but be sure to double check this
- If you need a short-term postdoc as a transition, be sure to discuss this with Allison far in advance (since the appointment process takes time and availability depends on funding)
- For the last quarter in which you will be enrolled, sign up as a graduation quarter, which will have greatly reduced tuition. (Pre-2020, one had to defend in the quarter before the graduation quarter, but this changed and now you can take a graduation quarter for the quarter in which you defend *and* submit your thesis.)
- Be sure to let Allison and the CDR staff know your plans for which day will be your last day on campus
- Arrange a 1-hour physical lab walk-through with Allison to make sure you have all of your stuff and we know what to do with your remaining experimental setup/materials (beforehand, clean out your desk and take home any personal items, hand over any items that will belong to other lab members moving forward, and know where the items are that you will discuss with Allison)
- At least 3 weeks before your departure, contact Sreela Kodali (or the current lab computing czar) to initiate the process of transferring you google drive research file ownership to Allison
- Read all emails from the ME Office about graduation if you plan to walk, and let Allison know if you do plan to walk since she will want to be there to hood you
- Make sure to apply for graduation through Axess
- Note that the last 6 months can be very busy (you're often applying for jobs, finishing research, and doing a lot of writing) so it's normal to feel stressed. Be sure to talk to Allison about strategies for making things as smooth as possible

Thesis notes

- Note that for each main chapter, the bulk of the chapter will likely be your journal paper, but you will need to change the introduction and conclusion a little for each chapter in order to tie the thesis chapters together
- Introduction is more work
 - Lay out the context of your contributions
 - About 5 pages minimum. Often longer if you include background.
- Shared contributions
 - In introduction to the chapter, call out that work was done in collaboration with other people (especially students)
- Background information can be its own section or split among each chapter
- Conclusion includes more broad future work and directions than the conclusions for the individual chapters. The conclusion should be about 3 pages at the very minimum.
- For the figure list at the beginning of the thesis, shorter captions can be used with the syntax `\caption[short concise caption in figure list]{Long extended caption with details in text}`

- Be sure to put appropriate copyright and citations for all previously published figures (even from your own published work). For IEEE publications, it's fairly easy and you just need to use this format “© year IEEE” and then cite the paper. Details are provided at https://www.ieee.org/content/dam/ieee-org/ieee/web/org/pubs/permissions_faq.pdf (section called “Does IEEE require individuals working on a thesis or dissertation to obtain formal permission for reuse?”). For other cases, you may need to get explicit permission to reuse material, so check this through the publisher’s webpage
- How do you style the thesis?
 - The Stanford thesis LaTeX style file (unofficial) is available here: <https://library.stanford.edu/research/bibliography-management/latex-bibtex-and-overleaf>
 - An Overleaf template is available here: <https://www.overleaf.com/read/tmbvmkjsvqjm>. It cannot be edited but can be copied for your own use.
 - The raw files (which can be uploaded to your own Overleaf document) are available as a ZIP file in the “Finishing PhD > thesis writing” folder.

Printable Checklist to complete your PhD

Going TGR (once you have completed coursework requirements)

- Selected and reached out to reading committee members
- Submitted reading committee form
- For non-academic council (max 1):
 - Submitted non-academic council petition form
 - Obtained and submitted non-academic council committee member's CV

Greenlight Meeting (~once you have one more or so chapter's worth of work left)

- Discussed with Allison the proposed plan/timeline for completing your PhD (typically 0.5-1 chapter's work left)
- Scheduled greenlight meeting
- Held a greenlight practice talk
 - Completed greenlight meeting form
- Submitted greenlight meeting form

Scheduling the Defense (~3-4 months before defense date)

- Find a range of defense dates suitable for your 3 reading committee members
- Decide with Allison who will be your additional reading committee member and defense chair (total of 2 people, chair must not be in the ME department)
 - Reach out to the identified people to see if they are willing and able to participate on the possible defense dates
- Booked a room for the defense

Preparing the Dissertation (~2 months before defense)

- Decided with Allison a schedule for reviewing draft chapters
- Obtain documented copyright permissions of any published work used in the thesis

Preparing the Defense

- Start making defense slide deck
- Scheduled practice defense
- 2 weeks before defense: Fill out and submit the University Oral Examination form to ME Student Services
 - Obtain the RED folder from ME Student Services
- Email to Reading Committee
 - Defense date, time, and venue
 - Draft of Allison-approved dissertation
- (optional) Logistics for defense
 - Refreshments
 - A/V: some people want special mics and cameras to record or present remotely
 - Found a friend or two to help with refreshments and A/V (e.g. managing Zoom session)
 - Sent out email to publicize defense on listservs/facebook etc.
- Day of Defense:
 - Copies of slides for each committee member
 - RED folder
 - Checked A/V and room logistics

Completing Dissertation

- Sent follow-up email to finalize timeline for getting feedback on thesis from reading committee members, making edits, and final approval (note you have to submit before the last day of classes)
- Once members are ready to approve, send out the approval emails (see template) and obtain the email approvals.
 - Submit the email approvals together with the online form
- Remove the copyright page and the signature page from the final PDF
- Submit the dissertation online through Axess (~several days before last day of classes!)
 - Allison should be the final reader
 - Let Allison know when you have submitted so she can do the final reader approval

TEMPLATE for eSignature Form (Taken from [this](#) Stanford webpage)

Dear Professor _____,

The University Registrar's Office has outlined a procedure for collecting reading committee signatures. I am emailing to request your "signature" for my dissertation/thesis titled _____.

In lieu of a traditional, physical signature page, this email thread will serve as the document certifying that you have read my dissertation/thesis, and that it is fully adequate in scope and quality as a dissertation/thesis for the degree of _____ [e.g., Doctor of Philosophy, Engineer Thesis, Doctor of Musical Arts, Doctor of the Science of Law]

Please reply to this message to let me know whether you approve my dissertation/thesis for submission. (This email thread will then constitute your "signature" of approval.)