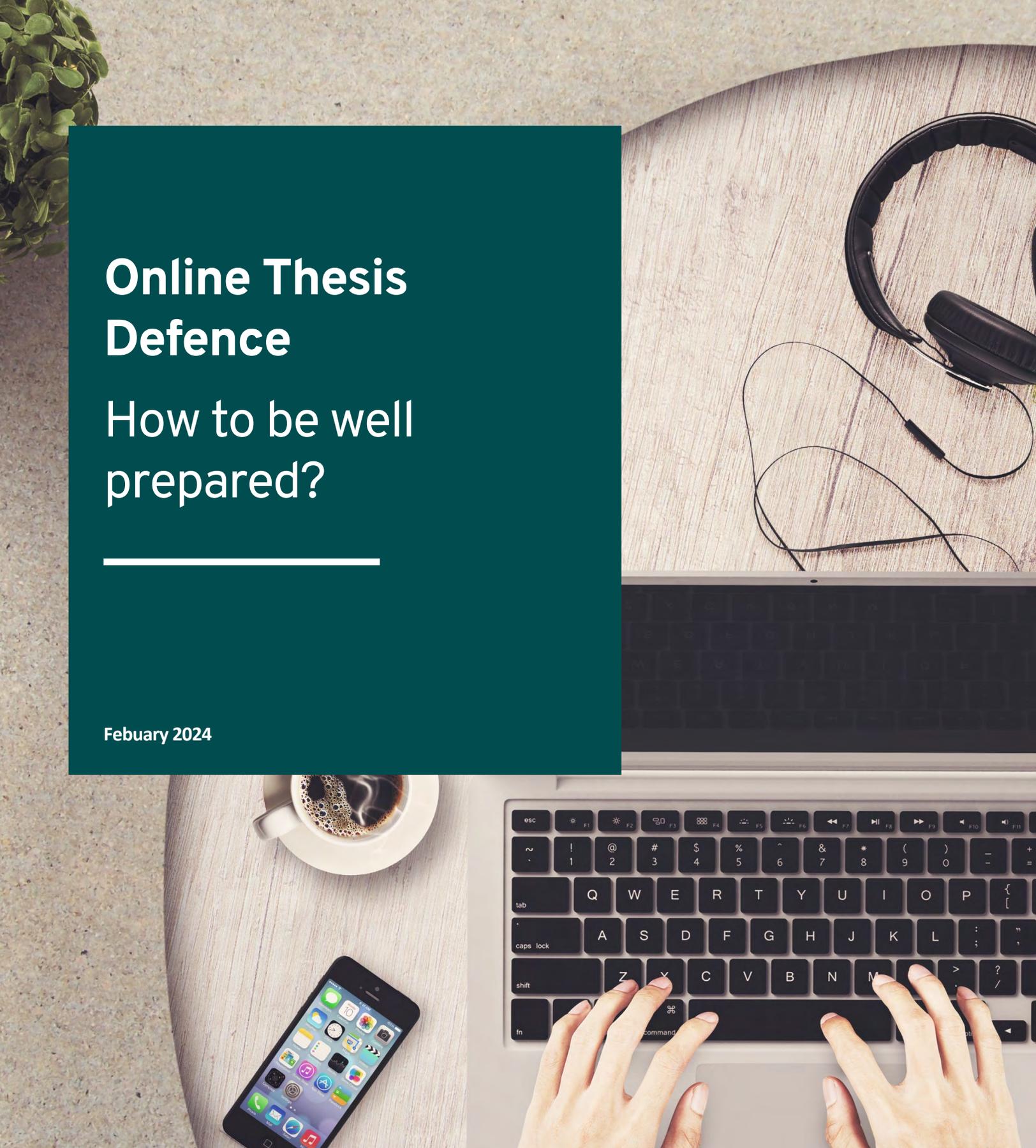


# Online Thesis Defence

## How to be well prepared?

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# Online Thesis Defence

## How to be well prepared?

The Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (FESP) has created this guide to accompany doctoral students who are about to experience an online doctoral thesis defence.

The purpose of this guide is to share best practices with those who gravitate, from near or far, around this event of high importance in the student's academic path.

### Online thesis defence: easier or not than in person?

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Whether the defence is in person or online, the process remains relatively the same, i.e. a 20-30 minute thesis presentation followed by the question period from the jury members, the jury deliberation and the announcement of the decision.

As to whether the exercise is easier online than in person, the opinions of doctoral students are divided.

For many, defending their thesis alone in front of their screen has helped to reduce stress considerably.

Others found that the degree of difficulty was similar, but the stressors were just different, such as the possibility of technical problems or problems beyond their control (power failure, noisy outdoor work near their home, etc.).

Some raised the point that the distance makes the defence more impersonal and ceremonial, while others were surprised by the warmth and richness of the discussions.

What is almost unanimous among doctoral students is the pleasure of being able to count on the virtual presence of their loved ones so that they can witness the results of their efforts and the culmination of their journey.



## Advice for doctoral students

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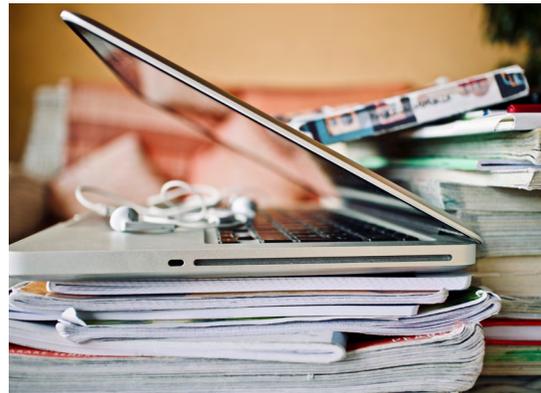
### The key to success: preparation

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An online presentation, just like an in-person presentation, requires rigorous preparation.

First of all, without having to become an expert, you must have a good command of the functionalities of the software used for the thesis defence. At Université Laval, the authorized platforms for online presentations are Zoom and Webex.

Doing tests a few days before the defence will reduce your stress. **Do not hesitate to ask questions or ask for support from a member of your faculty's technical team.**



Organizing a **general pre-presentation practice** with family members, colleagues or friends will help you fine-tune the final details of your presentation and adjust certain elements of your material.

### Learn more about technology

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- Explore the possibility of using a second screen. In addition to facilitating sharing of information, you will be able to keep eye contact with the jury members and see their reactions.
- Check the reliability of your internet connection. Is it stable? If you live with other people, ask them not to use the Wifi during your defence to avoid slowdowns.
- If you need to present bulky and heavy documents, plan to download them before your presentation. Test them a few times.
- Your visual supports (graphics, slides, etc.) must be clear, uncluttered and readable. The screen sizes of those you are evaluating and watching will vary, but in general the size of the display will be smaller than a large screen in a room. Eliminate or reduce animations and slide transitions in your presentation.
- Remember to make a paper copy of your presentation that you can annotate or have it handy on another device (tablet, phone).
- You need to make sure you hear the interactions. Should you rely on the use of headphones?

## Favour a suitable environment

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- Choose a neutral or institutional background.
- Before the defence, prepare your environment: choose a location so that the light source is in front of you or sideways to avoid backlighting; adjust the height of your camera to appear from the front and not high or low-angle (a few books stacked under your laptop can do the trick).
- Is your environment quiet and free of ambient noise? Are you afraid of an unexpected visitor? Leave a note on your door. Remember to activate the vibration mode on your phone or close it.
- Be careful not to create noise pollution yourself through nervous tics (tapping your foot, playing with your pen, rustling of sheets of paper, repetitive squeaking of your chair, etc.).
- If, for any reason, you find it difficult to set up properly at home for your defence, ask your faculty or the FESP if some rooms are available on campus.

## Pretend you're there

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- Be on time and even early. Once you're logged into the meeting, you'll already be more relaxed.
- Don't lose track of time. If you only have one screen, it is possible that when you share your presentation full screen, you may not see your computer's clock function. Think of another way to check the time.
- Dress as if the presentation was in person. Wearing shoes will help you maintain good posture during your presentation.
- Think about the image you are projecting. A person's attitude is easily captured through a screen. If you are positive, confident and poised that is also what you will project.
- Remember to look at the camera when you speak and not only at the screen you are presenting. This is especially important if you are using more than one screen. By looking at the camera, you make more direct eye contact with the jury members.
- It is known that silences are sometimes difficult to tolerate. In an online environment, this is even more true, but remember the importance of taking your time before answering questions and slowing down your speaking rate.



## Celebrate your achievement

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Participating in a virtual meeting or in person with one's family and friends after the presentation reduces the pressure and allows a better mental transition to a more festive mode. This time of celebration will promote awareness of the accomplishment you have just achieved. Take the time to do so, the defence of a thesis is an eminent moment in the life of a doctoral student.

## Tips for the presidency of the defence and the members of the jury

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The Faculty of Graduate and Postgraduate Studies offers you some advice and best practices so that the online defence can keep its formal aspect and true meaning.

## Mourning the loss of an in-person defence

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For many doctoral students, defending their thesis online represents several small loss to cope with. The loss of living this moment of great importance surrounded by their loved ones, of being in front of a larger audience, of exchanging easily with the members of the jury during a wine of honor. In short, they are disappointed not to be able to celebrate this accomplishment as they imagined to do throughout their studies.

Although this should not influence the evaluation, it is worth remembering of what students may experience and feel as they prepare to defend their thesis.



## Interesting alternatives

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- A virtual toast and praise of the doctoral student by his/her family, jury members and other guests can replace the in-person celebration.
- An abrupt end to the meeting after the announcement of the decision makes the exercise even colder and more distant.
- In the majority of cases, the main host of the virtual meeting is the defence chair. If the defence chair has to leave the meeting promptly at the end of the defence, he or she can transfer the hosting rights to a third party so that the celebrations can continue if this is the wish of the doctoral student.
- Once the defence is completed, some research directors send an email or letter of congratulations or offer a time for discussion to come back to the event. This type of attention is greatly appreciated.
- If the situation allows it, an in-person celebration may be organized in the days or weeks following the online defence.

**Questions or comments about online thesis defence?**

Contact the FESP: [evaluation@fesp.ulaval.ca](mailto:evaluation@fesp.ulaval.ca)

**Faculté des études supérieures et postdoctorales**

**fesp.ulaval.ca**