

🎓 What Is a Viva Voce (PhD Defence)?

The Viva Voce, Latin for “by live voice”, is the oral examination that takes place at the end of a PhD program. It is the final assessment in which a doctoral candidate defends their thesis before a panel of academic experts [called examiners].

The viva is not just a test — it is a scholarly discussion designed to confirm:

That your research is original and contributes new knowledge to your field.

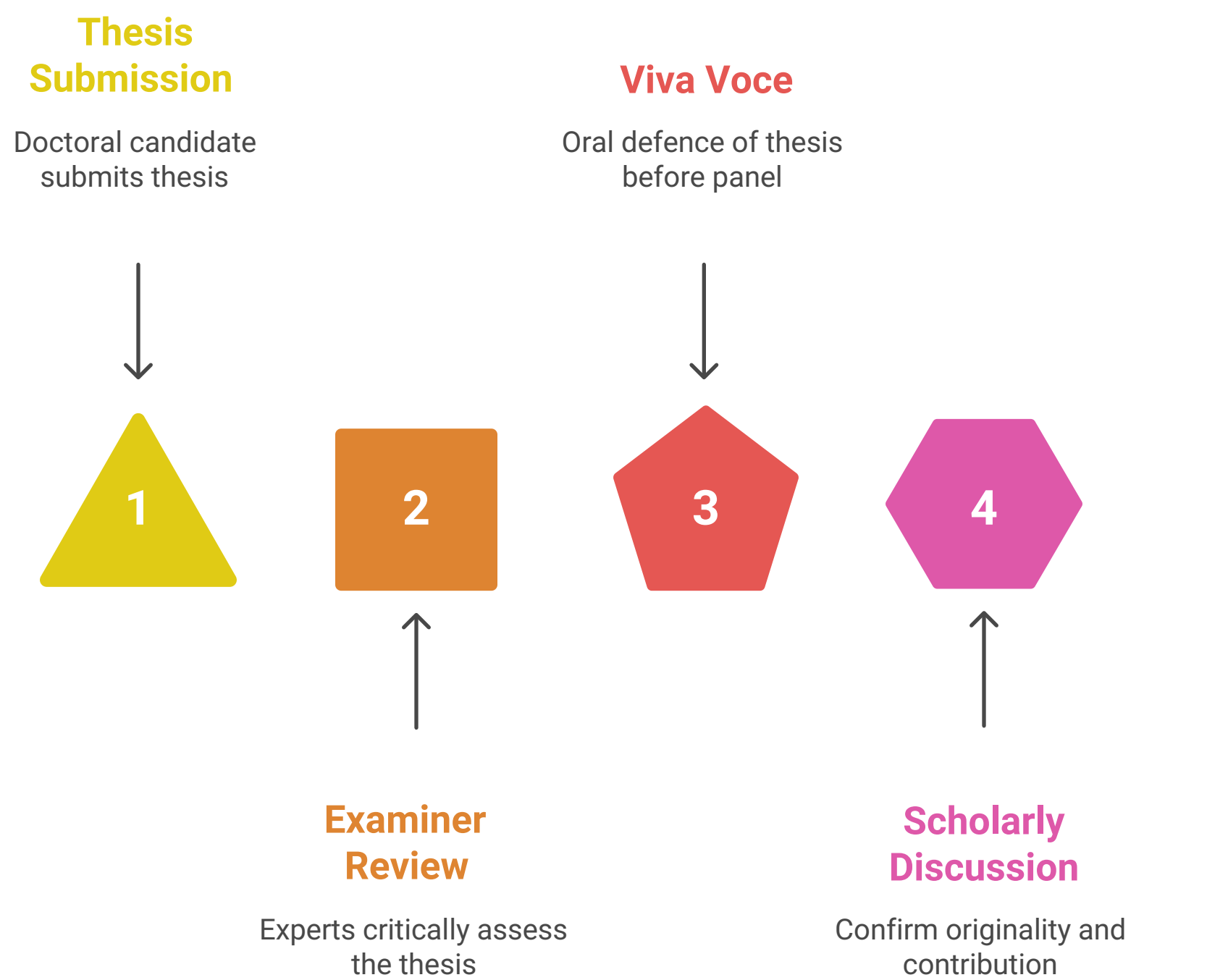
That you can critically defend your methods, arguments, and conclusions.

That you understand how your work fits within the broader discipline.

That you are capable of conducting independent research as a scholar.

In short, it’s a conversation about your work — one that proves your authority and confidence in your research area.

PhD Viva Voce Process



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🧩 Purpose of the Viva

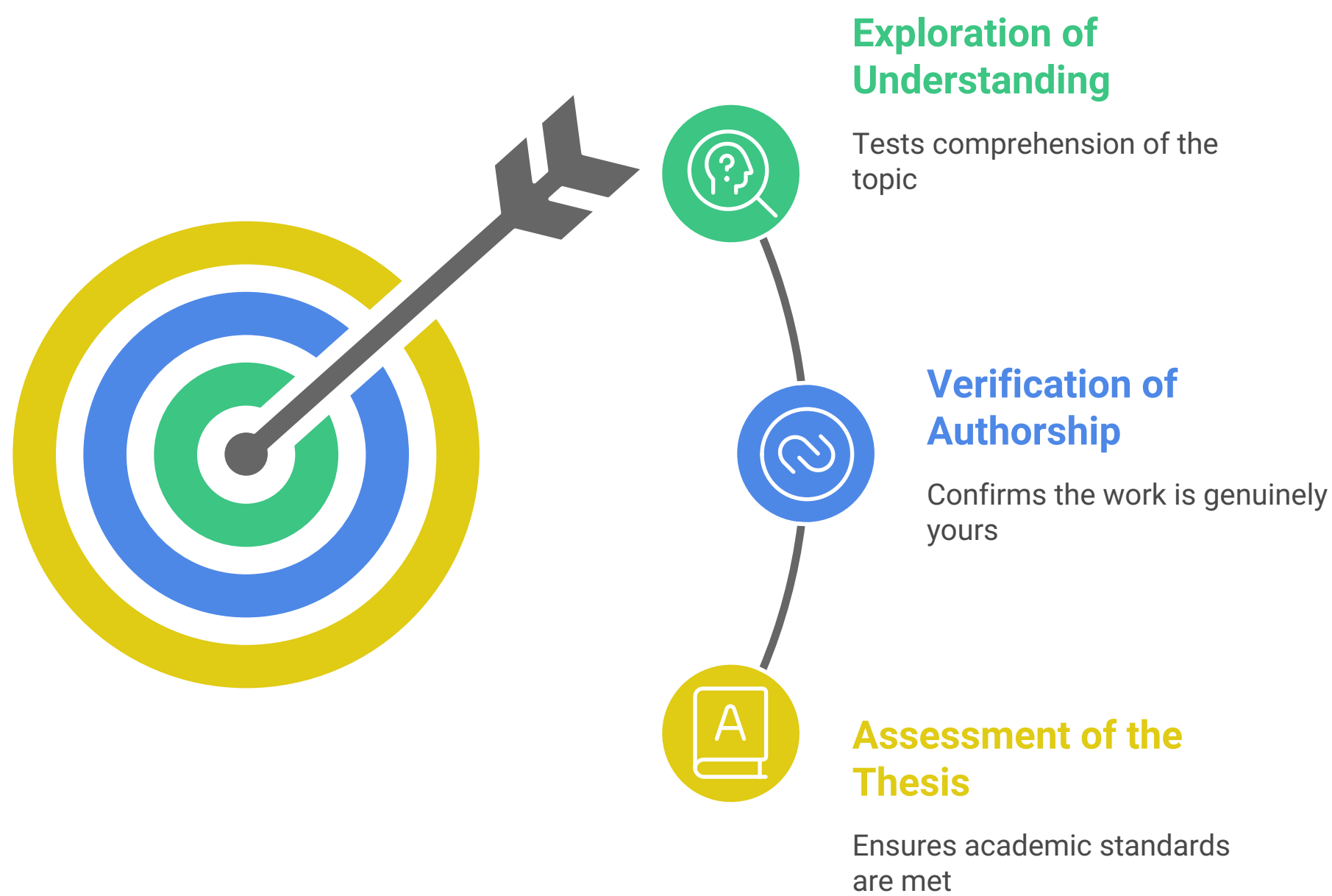
The Viva serves three main purposes:

Assessment of the thesis – Ensures the written document meets academic standards [clarity, rigor, originality, coherence].

Verification of authorship – Confirms the work is genuinely yours, especially in collaborative projects.

Exploration of understanding – Tests your comprehension of the topic, related theories, methods, and implications.

Purpose of the Viva



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⚙️!! Stages and Steps Involved in the Viva Process

Step 1: Thesis Submission

This marks the formal beginning of the viva process.

Once your supervisors agree that your thesis is ready, you submit it to the university's graduate office. Typically:

The submission must follow specific formatting rules (margins, referencing, binding).

You may submit both a printed and digital version.

A brief summary or abstract is also required.

After submission, your thesis is sent to two or more examiners:

Internal examiner – from your university, familiar with procedures.

External examiner – from another institution, expert in your field.

Example: At the University of Cambridge, PhD candidates submit a 100,000-word thesis. The internal examiner checks compliance with regulations, while the external focuses on academic quality.

Step 2: Preliminary Reading and Evaluation by Examiners

Each examiner receives a copy of your thesis several weeks before the viva. They:

Read it independently, making detailed notes and annotations.

Write a preliminary report outlining key strengths and weaknesses.

Prepare questions to ask during the oral defence.

They assess:

The originality of your contribution.

The quality of your methodology.

The soundness of your argument and analysis.

The clarity and organization of the thesis.

Example: If your PhD is in Psychology, examiners may scrutinize your statistical methods, asking why you chose ANOVA instead of regression analysis.

Step 3: Viva Scheduling

Once the examiners finish their initial review, the graduate office schedules the viva. You are informed of:

The date, time, and location [physical or virtual].

The examiners' names.

Any preparatory materials you must bring [e.g., your printed thesis copy, notes].

Some universities also assign a chairperson [neutral academic] to ensure the process is fair, formal, and properly recorded.

Example: At the University of Glasgow, the viva is chaired by a senior academic who ensures that questioning remains constructive and within policy guidelines.

Step 4: Preparation for the Viva

Preparation is both intellectual and psychological.

You should:

Re-read your thesis carefully.

Summarize key arguments and findings.

Anticipate possible questions [both broad and specific].

Discuss mock questions with your supervisor.

Prepare a concise explanation of your research journey — what motivated it, how you did it, and what it contributes.

Example Preparation Questions:

“What inspired this research topic?”

“How does your work build upon or challenge existing theories?”

“What are the limitations of your methodology?”

Step 5: The Viva Voce Examination

This is the core event, usually lasting between 1.5 to 3 hours.

Structure:

Introduction

The chair introduces everyone and explains the rules.

You are invited to relax and treat it as an academic discussion.

Candidate Presentation [if required]

Some universities require a 10–15 minute presentation summarizing your thesis — its aims, methods, results, and contributions.

Others go straight into questioning.

Main Discussion / Questioning

Examiners ask detailed questions about your thesis.

Questions may start broad [“What is your research about?”] and become more specific [“Why did you select that statistical method?”].

Expect both conceptual [theoretical framework] and technical [data, analysis] questions.

Example Questions:

“How would you improve this study if you had unlimited resources?”

“Can you defend your choice of qualitative approach over quantitative?”

“In what ways do your findings differ from Smith et al. [2020]?”

“What are the real-world implications of your research?”

Closing Discussion

You may be invited to reflect on what you learned or how you'd extend your research in the future.

Step 6: Examiner Deliberation

Once the discussion concludes, you are asked to leave the room [or virtual meeting].

Examiners:

Discuss your responses.

Compare notes on the written thesis and oral defence.

Reach a joint decision on the outcome.

Draft a final report summarizing their recommendation.

This may take 15–45 minutes depending on complexity.

The examiners' decision is communicated to you verbally (and later in writing). Common outcomes include:

Outcome	Description	Typical Time for Corrections
Pass with no corrections	Exceptional clarity and rigor	Immediate completion
Pass with minor corrections	Small revisions: typos, clarity, minor data edits	1–3 months
Pass with major corrections	Substantial revision: analysis, rewriting sections	3–6 months
Resubmission required	Serious issues; new viva may be scheduled	6–12 months
Fail	Thesis not at doctoral level	Rare (requires major rewrite or withdrawal)

Example: You may receive a “Pass with minor corrections” requiring you to rephrase ambiguous conclusions or fix referencing inconsistencies.

Step 8: Post-Viva Corrections and Final Submission

After receiving feedback, you:

Revise the thesis according to examiner comments.

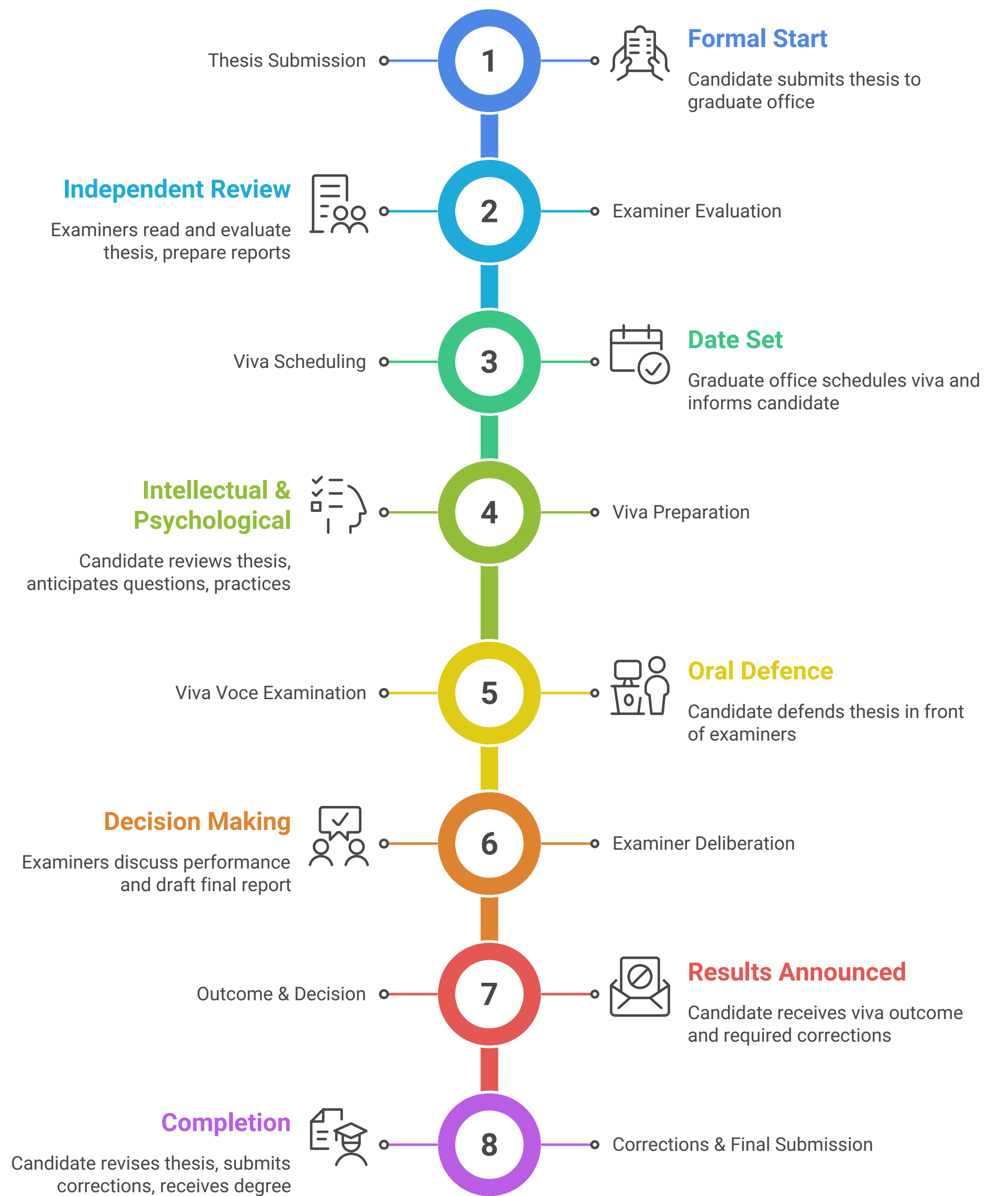
Submit a corrections report, detailing how you addressed each point.

The internal examiner (or both) checks and approves the corrections.

Once accepted, you submit the final version to the university's library or repository.

The university then officially confers your PhD degree.

Key Steps in the Viva Process



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Candidate: PhD in Environmental Engineering Thesis Title: “Modelling the Effects of Urban Green Roofs on Microclimate Regulation.” Panel: Internal examiner (civil engineering professor), external examiner (climate modelling expert).

During the viva:

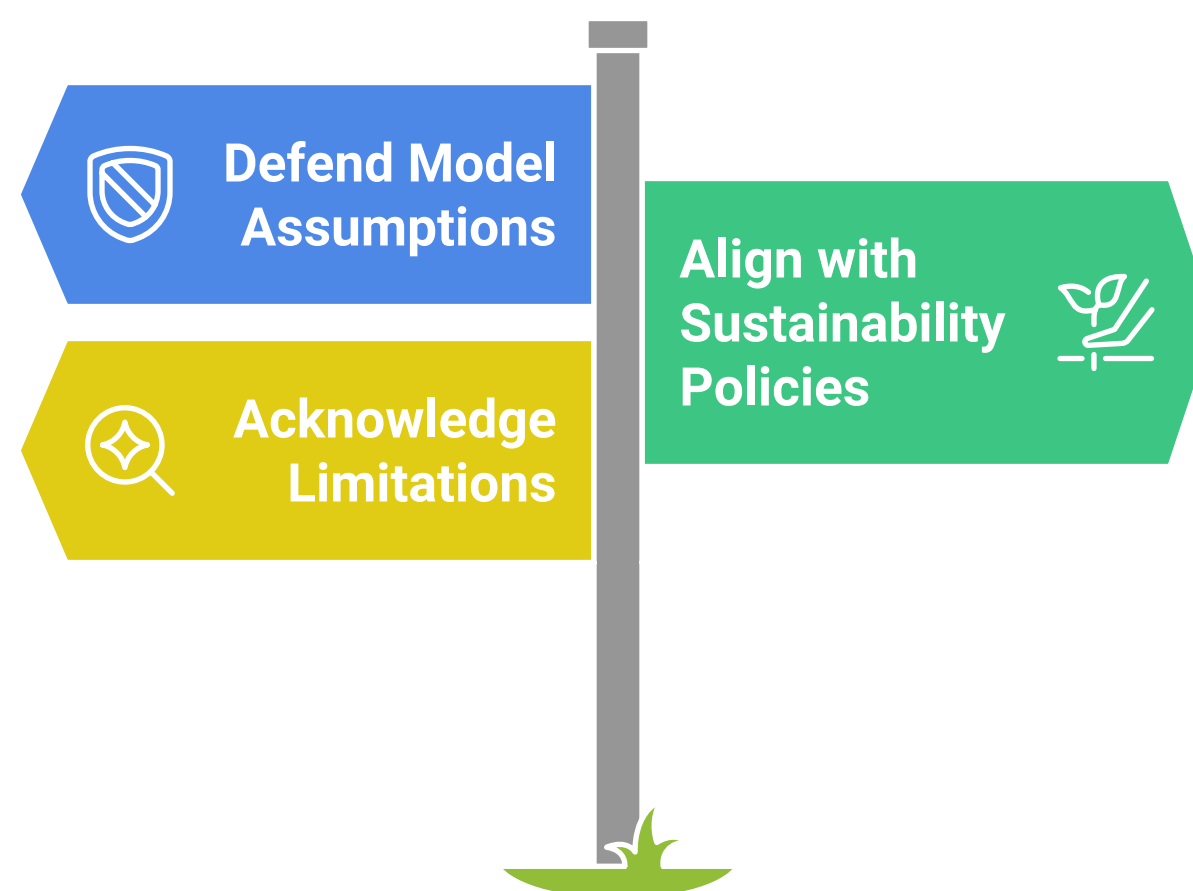
The external examiner questions the assumptions in the simulation model.

The internal examiner asks how the research aligns with local sustainability policies.

The candidate defends their model, explains limitations, and justifies data sources.

The viva ends with the panel recommending minor corrections.

How to address viva panel's questions?



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Tips for a Successful Viva

Know your thesis inside out – Read every chapter critically.

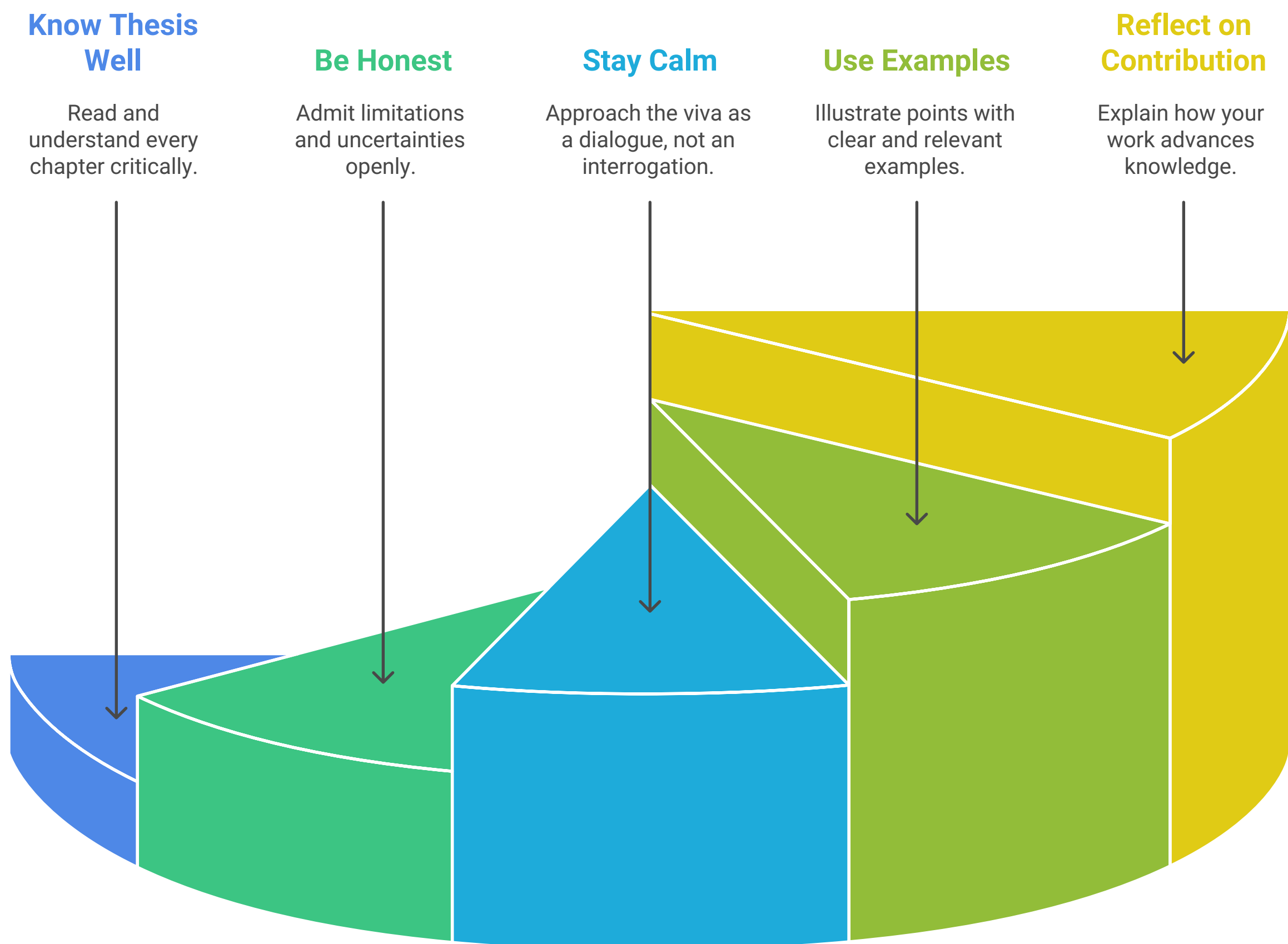
Be honest – Admit limits or uncertainties; don't bluff.

Stay calm – It's a dialogue, not an interrogation.

Use examples – Illustrate your points clearly.

Reflect on contribution – Be ready to explain how your work advances knowledge.

Steps to a Successful Viva



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✓ Summary

The PhD Viva Voce [or Defence] is the final, decisive test of your doctoral journey. It evaluates not only your written research but also your ability to think, argue, and communicate as an independent scholar.

Through structured discussion and critical questioning, it validates years of dedication — marking the moment you transition from student to doctor of philosophy.

PhD Viva Voce Journey

