

The main purposes of standard committee meetings (as opposed to the oral exam, which is covered elsewhere in this document) are twofold: For the student to get feedback from the committee, and for the committee to monitor the progress of the student. The two GSAS-mandated meetings—the proposal defense (which GSAS calls the prospectus defense – see <https://gsas.columbia.edu/student-guide/dissertation/dissertation-prospectus>) and the dissertation defense (<https://gsas.columbia.edu/student-guide/dissertation/defending-your-dissertation>)—are more formal than the E3B-mandated annual meetings, and serve three purposes. The first two purposes are the same as for standard committee meetings. The third purpose is to provide a summative assessment (pass or not) of the proposal or the dissertation, as required by GSAS.

Scheduling: It is the student’s responsibility to schedule these meetings, although advisers often prompt students. Getting all these people in the same time slot is challenging, so start early (at least three months before you want to have the meeting). Most standard committee meetings should occur by March or April, so start scheduling in January.

Expected timing and format of committee meetings:

The **1st year meeting** typically occurs in the spring semester of the 1st year. By this point the student’s adviser, with input from the student, should have formed the three-person advisory committee, so this meeting consists of the student, the adviser, and two additional faculty members. The meeting is typically 1-2 hours. The student should fill out as much of the committee meeting form as is relevant ahead of time and bring it to the meeting.

Standard format: The student typically gives a brief presentation (5-20 minutes) on progress during the year, including both research and checkpoints, and lays out plans for the following summer and year, including both research and checkpoints. Most people use slides for the presentation, though it is not required by the department. Following and/or during the presentation, the student and the committee discuss the accomplishments and plans, and the committee provides feedback.

Topics to cover/discuss:

- Research:
 - Accomplishment and plans for the coming year.
 - Mention any relevant fellowships/papers/talks/grants.
- Checkpoints:
 - Coursework: Should have completed Fundamentals and Research Seminar and possibly electives in 1st year. Plans for 2nd year: Thesis Development, Research Seminar. Discuss electives/directed research/directed readings with the committee.
 - TAing: Might have completed 1 or 2 TAs in your first year. Discuss plans for the remaining TAs with the committee.
 - Oral exam: Discuss when to take it and who to have on the committee. Often fall semester of second year.
 - Proposal: Discuss when to take it and who should fill out the rest of the committee.

(The oral exam typically occurs between the 1st year and 2nd year meetings, i.e., in the fall of the 2nd year. As it is not a standard committee meeting, it is covered elsewhere in the handbook.)

The **2nd year meeting** typically occurs in the spring semester of the 2nd year. If the student is defending the proposal in the 2nd year, the proposal defense (see below) takes the place of the 2nd year meeting. At this point the committee might be the three-person advisory committee, or the student and adviser might have formed the full five-person committee. The meeting is typically 1-2 hours, though 3 hours is allowed if scheduling permits. The student should fill out as much of the committee meeting form as is relevant ahead of time and bring it to the meeting.

Standard format: The student typically gives a presentation (15-20 minutes) on progress during the year, including both research and checkpoints, and lays out plans for the following summer and year, including both research and checkpoints. Most people use slides for the presentation, though it is not required by the department. Following and/or during the presentation, the student and the committee discuss the accomplishments and plans, and the committee provides feedback.

Topics to cover/discuss:

- Research:
 - Accomplishment and plans for the coming year.
 - Mention any relevant fellowships/papers/talks/grants.
- Checkpoints:
 - Coursework: Should have completed Fundamentals, Research Seminar, Thesis Development, and possibly electives and Directed Research/Readings. Likely have all points needed for the M.A. and M.Phil. Discuss any coursework planned for the next year with the committee.
 - TAing: Likely finished 2 or 3 TAs. Discuss plans for the remaining TAs with the committee.
 - Oral exam: Have likely taken it already. If not, discuss when to take it (soon!) and who to have on the committee.
 - Proposal: Discuss when to take it (next year some time) and who should fill out the rest of the committee.

Proposal defense: The proposal defense ideally takes place in the 4th semester (spring of 2nd year) or the 5th semester (fall of 3rd year), though on occasion it takes place in the 6th semester (spring of 3rd year). The proposal defense fulfills the requirement for an annual committee meeting; i.e., it takes the place of the 2nd year or the 3rd year meeting. As the proposal defense typically takes place after other requirements (except potentially one TAs) have been met, the focus is on research rather than program checkpoints.

By departmental rules, the proposal defense committee needs to have 5 members, fulfilling the same requirements as GSAS' dissertation committee. The chair of the committee should be appointed before the meeting. The chair must be a core E3B faculty member on the PhD sponsor list, cannot be the adviser (though can be one of two or more co-advisers), and should, if possible, have tenure. Note that GSAS only requires three members for the prospectus defense, which is why there are only three lines on GSAS' prospectus defense form. The three "insider" E3B members should sign the form.

The proposal defense should be scheduled for a 3-hour time slot. The student should bring forms for both the prospectus defense and the annual committee meeting, filling out as much of the both forms as is relevant ahead of time. If you have completed all the requirements

for the M. Phil. (all required coursework, 40 points, M.A., 6 RUs, oral exam, at least 2 of the 3 TAs, and proposal defense), you should also file the M. Phil. application (https://gsas.columbia.edu/sites/default/files/inline-files/GSAS-master_phil_app_4.pdf) after the proposal defense. (If not, then file it when all the requirements are complete. Typically people have completed all the requirements when they defend their proposal with the exception of the 6 RUs.)

Standard format: Once everyone is present and settled, the chair will ask the student to leave the room while the committee touches base. When the student is invited back in, the student gives a presentation on the proposal. The purposes of this presentation are (1) to remind the committee what was in the proposal (which they will have read, but might not have looked at recently, as it was submitted to them at least a month ago), (2) to provide any updates on accomplishments and plans since the written proposal was distributed (e.g., more preliminary data or analyses, revised plans, etc.), and (3) to provide visuals for the entire group to reference during the discussion. The presentation (which should include slides) should take 20-25 minutes. Typically, the committee holds substantive questions until after the presentation, although they might ask clarifying questions if something is unclear. After the presentation, each committee member will lead a round of questioning, typically for 15-20 minutes. During this time other committee members might jump in with follow-up questions on the same topics. The questions typically focus on the proposed research and related topics. After the five rounds of questions (one for each committee member), the chair typically asks if there are any final questions. Once the question period is over, the student is asked to step out while the committee deliberates. Possible official decisions for the proposal defense are “pass” or “not pass.” Feedback can take many forms, from minor tweaks to major overhauls. When the committee has reached a decision and prepared feedback, the student is invited back in and the decision and feedback are shared with the student.

The **3rd year meeting** typically occurs in the spring semester of the 3rd year. If the student is defending the proposal in the 3rd year, the proposal defense (see above) takes the place of the 3rd year meeting. At this point the committee will be the full five-person committee. The meeting is typically 1-2 hours, though 3 hours is allowed if scheduling permits. The student should fill out as much of the committee meeting form as is relevant ahead of time and bring it to the meeting.

Standard format: The student typically gives a presentation (15-25 minutes) on progress during the year and plans for the following summer and year, focusing primarily on research, since the checkpoints (except for possibly one TAs) should be done. Most people use slides for the presentation, though it is not required by the department. Following and/or during the presentation, the student and the committee discuss the accomplishments and plans, and the committee provides feedback.

Topics to cover/discuss:

- Research:
 - Accomplishment and plans for the coming year.
 - Mention any relevant fellowships/papers/talks/grants.
- Timeline for finishing
- Checkpoints (briefly):
 - Coursework, oral exam, TAs, proposal: Should be done, except possibly 1 TA. Discuss anything that isn't yet completed.
 - Paperwork for M.Phil.: Likely already submitted.

The **4th year meeting** typically occurs in the spring semester of the 4th year. The committee will be the full five-person committee. The meeting is typically 1-2 hours, though 3 hours is allowed if scheduling permits. The student should fill out as much of the committee meeting form as is relevant ahead of time and bring it to the meeting.

Standard format: The student typically gives a presentation (15-25 minutes) on progress during the year and plans for the following summer and year, focusing on research and the timeline for defending. Most people use slides for the presentation, though it is not required by the department. Following and/or during the presentation, the student and the committee discuss the accomplishments and plans, and the committee provides feedback. At the end of the this meeting the student and committee should be clear on the timeline for finishing.

Topics to cover/discuss:

- Research:
 - Accomplishment and plans for the coming year.
 - Mention any relevant fellowships/papers/talks/grants.
- Timeline for finishing
- Plans for after the Ph.D.

If the student is will not have already defended by the end of the 5th year, then the **5th year meeting** occurs in the spring semester of the 5th year, and takes the same format as the 4th year meeting, with a more urgent focus on the timeline for finishing.

Topics to cover/discuss:

- Research:
 - Accomplishment and plans for the coming year.
 - Mention any relevant fellowships/papers/talks/grants.
- Timeline for finishing
- Plans for after the Ph.D.

Dissertation defense: The dissertation defense ideally takes place in the 5th year, though on occasion it takes place in the 6th year. The exact timing of the defense depends on the student's progress and the adviser's and committee's determination of whether the student is ready, and can also be influenced by funding. The dissertation defense fulfills the requirement for an annual committee meeting.

Deadlines: See <https://gsas.columbia.edu/student-guide/dissertation/dissertation-dates-and-deadlines> for a current list of deadlines for getting the degree by a given date. Work with your adviser and the DAAF to make sure you are hitting all the deadlines. The dissertation should be distributed four weeks in advance of the defense, and your adviser(s) should have already seen it and given feedback before then. The distribution deadline is the date by which you must distribute your dissertation (turn it in to the committee; this is the version they will examine, but you will make changes to it before the final deposited version based on the committee's feedback). The semester associated with the distribution deadline is the last semester for which you need to register. The dissertation deposit deadline is the date by which you need to deposit the final version of thesis to have your Ph.D. conferred by the stated semester.

By GSAS rules, the dissertation defense committee needs to have 5 members, fulfilling GSAS' requirements (see <https://gsas.columbia.edu/student-guide/dissertation/nomination-and->

[appointment-defense-committee](#)). This can be the same committee you had for the proposal defense, but it does not have to be; committee membership can change. The chair of the committee should be appointed before the meeting by the adviser (though the student needs to remind and consult with the adviser). The chair must be a core E3B faculty member on the PhD sponsor list, cannot be the adviser (though can be one of two or more co-advisers), and should, if possible, have tenure. The rules for the third “insider” are the same as for the chair, although GSAS makes exceptions if there is a solid reason for a third outsider. Any exceptions to GSAS rules and approvals of new outside members (see link above) should be submitted by the DGS to GSAS and approved by GSAS well in advance of the dissertation (ideally in year 3 or year 4).

The dissertation defense should be scheduled (<https://gsas.columbia.edu/scheduling-defense>) for a 3-hour time slot. It can only be done after two members of the committee affirm that they have read the dissertation and that the student is ready to defend. Work with the DAAF to submit the application for the dissertation defense (https://gsas.columbia.edu/sites/default/files/inline-files/GSAS-application-defense%281%29_1.pdf, <https://gsas.columbia.edu/student-guide/dissertation/registration-and-application-phd-defense>), with careful attention to the deadlines. GSAS will then send the required forms to the DAAF, the committee chair, and the adviser ahead of time, but the student should check with the adviser and/or chair to make sure.

Standard format: Once everyone is present and settled, the chair will ask the student to leave the room while the committee touches base. When the student is invited back in, the student gives a presentation on the dissertation (with slides). The purposes of this presentation are to remind the committee what was in the dissertation (which they will have read, but might not have looked at recently), to provide any updates on data, analyses, publication status, or conclusions since the written proposal was distributed, and to provide visuals for the entire group to reference during the discussion. The presentation should take 20-25 minutes. Extra slides with figures/tables from the dissertation that aren't part of the presentation but might be useful to reference during the discussion are often helpful. Typically, the committee holds substantive questions until after the presentation, although they might ask clarifying questions if something is unclear. After the presentation, each committee member will lead a round of questioning, typically for 15-20 minutes. During this time other committee members might jump in with follow-up questions on the same topics. The questions typically focus on the research, related topics, or big picture questions. After the five rounds of questions, the chair typically asks if there are any final questions. Once the question period is over, the student is asked to step out while the committee deliberates. When the committee has reached a decision and prepared feedback, the student is invited back in and the decision and feedback are shared with the student.

Possible official decisions for the dissertation defense are “Approved as Submitted,” which gives the student 1 month to make minor modifications and deposit, “Approved Pending Revisions,” which gives the student 6 months to revise the dissertation and deposit, “Referred,” which gives the student 1 year to make major revisions and deposit, and “Fail,” which results in dismissal from the program without a Ph.D. Revisions following either “Approved as Submitted” and “Approved Pending Revisions” need to be approved by the adviser, whereas a three-member subcommittee (including the adviser) must approve of revisions for a “Referred” decision.

Ad hoc meetings: Though not required, meetings in addition to the annual meetings/defenses are permitted, at the discretion of the student and the committee. Such ad hoc meetings would

typically be called for a particular reason, such as gauging the committee’s perspective on whether the student is ready to defend a proposal or dissertation.

Meeting	1 st year	2 nd year	Proposal Defense	3 rd year	4 th year, 5 th year	Dissertation Defense
Typical semester	Spring 1 st yr	Spring 2 nd yr (unless defending proposal in 2 nd yr)	Spring 2 nd yr, Fall 3 rd yr, or possibly Spring 3 rd yr	Spring 3 rd yr (unless defending proposal in 3 rd yr)	Spring 4 th , 5 th yr (unless defending in 5 th yr)	Ideally by Spring 5 th yr, but Fall 6 th yr or Spring 6 th yr happen
GSAS deadlines	N/A	N/A	May 31 st of 4 th year	N/A	N/A	Spring of 7 th and 9 th year*
Duration	1-2 hrs	1-3 hrs	3 hrs	1-3 hrs	1-3 hrs	3 hrs
Committee	3-member advisory	3-member advisory or 5-member	5-member	5-member	5-member	5-member
Presentation	~5-20 min, slides common	~15-20 min, slides common	20-25 min, slides required	15-25 min, slides common	15-25 min, slides common	20-25 min, slides required
Focus	Accomplishments and plans for program checkpoints and research	Accomplishments and plans for program checkpoints and research, timeline for proposal defense	Assessment of proposed research, including preliminary work and timeline	Accomplishments and plans for research	Accomplishments and plans for research, timeline for defending	Assessment of distributed dissertation
Forms (fill out in advance)	Annual committee meeting (see link from here)	Annual committee meeting	Annual committee meeting, Prospectus defense , possibly M. Phil.	Annual committee meeting	Annual committee meeting	Dissertation defense application (work with DAAF to submit); your committee will have additional forms
Outcome(s)	Feedback	Feedback	Pass/not pass, feedback	Feedback	Feedback, timeline for defending	Accept as Submitted, Approved Pending Revisions, Referred, or Fail
To prepare	Presentation, form	Presentation, form	Proposal (submit at least 1 month in advance), presentation, form	Presentation, form	Presentation, form	Dissertation (distribute at least four weeks in advance), presentation, form
Student leaves?	No	No	Yes, at beginning and end	No	No	Yes, at beginning and end

* No GSAS funding or CU housing is available beyond the 7th year; the 9th year is the hard deadline for defending. Note, however, the funding is only guaranteed through 5 years.