

Summary QE advice

General struggle: recall information and make cohesive arguments on the spot

Time commitment

- Variable: 1 month - 2 months - 4 months (“probably too much”) - study space in library
- 60/40 textbooks/literature vs. 30/70 textbooks/literature

Preparation - material

- Read the three textbooks
- Contact examiners for study material to focus readings
 - Ask other students about experiences with examiners
 - Anticipate questions from examiners based on past research
 - After studying, contact examiners again to ask if that is what they were looking for, or if you have questioned based on your studying ask them if you are on the right track
- Update research proposal - link to general literature/text book - Review your own research critically to anticipate questions
- Make notes from literature/textbook - mind maps - diagrams - figures
 - Focus less on details, more on general concepts
 - Focus more on understanding vs. rote memory
 - Focus also on history of the field

Mental preparation

- Discussions with peers/faculty
- Mock exams
- Practiced talking about the concepts out loud
- Embrace the [performance anxiety](#)
 - Develop a routine
 - Reframe anxiety as excitement
 - Change your body to change your mind
- Relax before the QE (if that is even possible)

Successful strategies for answering questions

- Think of the QE more as a conversation than a test
- Accept that you don't and never will know everything
- Write question down + repeat question
 - Ask for clarifications or an example
 - Think before you answer
 - End with “Did that answer your question?”

- Answer to the best of your ability but don't bullshit - use an example
- Admit when you don't know the answer - but give some potential answers
- Use the whiteboard
- Be as direct/succinct as possible
- Don't overthink the questions - there isn't always a right answer
- Prepare for big picture questions, introspective on PhD

General QE strategy

- There is a time limit to the QE (see guidelines)
- In addition to being awesome, another strategy is to run out the clock
- Thus always assume that examiners did not read the proposal in great depth
 - Have thesis present
 - Corollary 1: start with defining terms (from your proposal), before answering the specific question
 - Corollary 2: if the answer is in the proposal, lead with that and ask for further clarification
 - Corollary 3: Don't be afraid to give the obvious answer
 - Corollary 4: Explain with an example from your proposal or a course you took
 - => you are answering about concepts you know a lot about, keep talking
 - => you are running out the clock while looking smart
 - => success