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Review of Rowena Murray, How to Survive your Viva: Defending a Thesis in an Oral Examination (Maidenhead and London: Open University Press, 2003). xv + 154 pp. ISBN – 335 – 21284 – 0. £16.99.

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Rowena Murray's book guides the reader through the process of preparing for a viva by timetabling the period after submission of the thesis, and suggesting ways of 'rehearsing' for the viva. While the tongue in cheek title is assisted by a cover sketch which shows a grateful examinee sagging at the knees, presumably after the rigours of oral examination, Murray's style is straightforward and direct; Chapter Seven ends with a salutatory lesson on 'How to fail your viva'. This is probably as useful as instructions on how to pass. Each chapter is subdivided under its heading in the Contents listings, making it simple to navigate to specific topics and to 'dip into' the book. The first three chapters are of general interest, addressing research and practice orientation, defining the viva and its purpose, and the roles and responsibilities of examiners. The most useful sections, in my opinion, (and the ones most likely to be read by nervous examinees) are located within Chapters Four, Five, Six and Eight, where Murray advises on specific preparation for viva 'performance', and in Chapter Seven where the actual viva is discussed. This last chapter is often alarming, as 'hostile' or seemingly indifferent examiners are discussed, but Murray balances this with suggestions about positive rather than passive reaction. Although this book concentrates on before and during the viva, there is a very helpful chapter on viva outcomes. In Chapter Nine, Murray discusses viva decisions, as well as revisions and corrections. Murray offers helpful advice about seeking revisions clarification and pragmatic advice about appeals. In general, the author aims to demystify the process of oral examination by quoting viva research and using anecdotal evidence to

demonstrate her points. Murray constantly reiterates that it is the student's responsibility to find out about practices in their own institution, to discuss the viva with supervisors and to relate her advice to the student's own work and discipline. I think that this book might help candidates to prepare for examination as long as the student remains aware that each viva is different and cannot be specifically anticipated.