

Below is a set of questions to think about at all stages of your degree, but especially as you write your dissertation. At the crudest level you should do this because it is likely that you'll be asked at least a few of them in your defense. More importantly, they are the type of questions you will need to be able to answer if you are to successfully publish your research, get grant support for future research, convince people (e.g., taxpayers) that what you do is a good use of their money, get a job, and so on. Answers to at least some of these questions (which will depend on the nature of your study) should appear in the final summary chapter of your dissertation/thesis.

What are the most significant results of your study?

Why is your study species/system particularly good for addressing your questions?

Could you give a 10 minute talk about your research without mentioning the study species? (i.e., is your research broadly applicable)

In what way is your species an exemplar of avian (or other taxon, as appropriate) conservation/ecology/evolution?

What is known about your species' conservation/ecology/evolution that was not known before your research began?

How do your results contribute to general conservation/ecological/evolutionary understanding? That is, what is known now that was not known before, and is broadly applicable within your field?

What are the next important research questions for your study system and why? (Ideally 3-5, in a prioritized list ... with justification.)

An alternative form of the previous question is: if someone gave you \$100,000 to extend your work, how would you use the money? What if they gave you a million?

Why should the molecular biologist in the room care about your research? Why should my brother care?

These questions apply primarily if it is a conservation project:

Why save your species?

What would you tell the people who manage your study species/system about what they should do differently? What are the top 3 things (prioritized; no more than 3) that they should do to improve protection?

[Several colleagues at UConn and Tufts contributed to the creation of this list.]