

Faculty Board Working Group

Instructions for the public defence of a doctoral thesis

The public defence of the doctoral thesis is the main examination in research studies and constitutes an independent review of the research student's doctoral thesis and its defence. The external reviewer and the members of the examining committee are not to have any conflicts of interest. Scholarly collaborations directly connected to the public defence of the doctoral thesis, e.g. in the form of guest lectures and seminars, should take place once the examining committee has published its final assessment regarding the public defence.

The public defence of the doctoral thesis starts with the chair welcoming the author of the thesis, the external reviewer, and the members of the examining committee and declaring the public defence open. The chair then gives the floor to the author of the thesis who can make brief comments of an essential nature on the thesis.

The critical review of the thesis starts with a short presentation of around 15 minutes of the main features and conclusions of the thesis by the external reviewer or the author. In good time before the public defence of the thesis, the chair should have come to an agreement with the external reviewer and the author as to who will summarise the thesis. Compilation theses may require a more extensive summary addressing each article's main point and the overarching argument of the summarising introduction. If the external reviewer has summarised the thesis, the author should be given the opportunity to comment briefly on the external reviewer's presentation.

It is important that the public defence of the thesis then develops into a scholarly discussion between the external reviewer and the author on the merits and shortcomings of the thesis. The external reviewer should not elaborate more than necessary, but rather focus on posing clear questions to the author on the basis of the thesis at hand. The author, in turn, should answer the external reviewer's questions as concisely as possible. Once a question has been discussed, the external reviewer should proceed to the next one, even when the external reviewer and the author have not reached a consensus. The external reviewer should organise his or her presentation in such a way as to address the more important points first. Less essential criticism, concerning for example stylistic shortcomings, obvious typos and suchlike, should be presented last. The review concludes with a summary of the thesis's merits and shortcomings by the external reviewer.

The external reviewer and the author are to ensure that the audience, including the members of the examining committee, has no difficulty understanding what is said. Both the external reviewer and the author can use PowerPoint presentations, overhead transparencies or a whiteboard to illustrate their arguments during the public discussion as required. The necessary technical equipment is to be requested in advance from the chair of the public defence.

The public defence of a thesis usually lasts approximately two hours and should not exceed three hours. The allotted time includes time for questions and comments from the examining committee and the audience. The members of the examining committee should be given the opportunity to ask questions before the rest of the audience. The chair then declares the public defence of the thesis closed.

There are no formal requirements for particular attire for the external reviewer and the author of the thesis. For advice on suitable attire, please consult the chair who has overall responsibility for hosting the public defence of the thesis.

The examining committee usually convenes immediately after the public defence of the thesis. Its task is to assess whether the thesis is to receive a pass or fail grade. The committee, which usually consists of three people, appoints a chair among its members. Initially, the external reviewer and the supervisor may be invited to attend the examining committee's meeting to provide additional comments and answer questions. Usually, the committee then continues the meeting separately to discuss the thesis and its defence and to decide on their assessment. The chair of the committee can, however, ask the external reviewer and the supervisor to remain in attendance at the meeting if this is deemed necessary.

The chair of the committee is also responsible for ensuring that minutes from the meeting are handed in to the Faculty Secretary of Third-Cycle Studies at the Joint Faculties of Humanities and Theology. If the thesis is given a fail grade, the assessment is to be justified in writing. Individual members have the opportunity to submit written reservations even when the thesis is awarded a pass grade.

A decision to cancel a public defence of a thesis is taken by the Dean of Third-Cycle Studies after consultation with those responsible at the department in question. If the decision to cancel stems from advance notification that the external reviewer or a member of the examining committee has such significant criticism of the thesis that it is likely to fail, then all those who have been sent the thesis must be informed that it is recalled and is not to be referred to as a doctoral thesis.

It is also possible to conduct the public defence of a thesis digitally. Special regulations apply to the implementation of a digital public defence of a doctoral thesis.

All documents regarding research studies are available on <https://www.ht.lu.se/en/education/phd-studies> .