



Guidelines for Pre-examiners (Assessors)

Based on The Faculty's [Post Graduate Study Guide](#) (Faculty Council's decision 8 June 2022, updated 10 May 2023)

General information

A doctoral dissertation is a consistent scholarly work on a subject which lies within the Faculty of Humanities' field of research and can be studied there as a major subject. The dissertation should be based on independent research that makes an original contribution to scientific knowledge.

A doctoral dissertation is either a monograph or a compilation of several separate scholarly articles. The extent of the dissertation required for a doctoral degree is 200 ECTS credits.

Doctoral dissertation

The doctoral dissertation is either a monograph or a compilation of several separate scholarly articles.

A monograph dissertation is a previously unpublished research that is written by the doctoral researcher and is published as a consistent work. The recommended length of a monograph dissertation is approximately 200-250 pages, appendices not included.

The Government Decree on University Degrees states: "As a doctoral dissertation may also be approved a number of scientific publications or manuscripts vetted for publication deemed sufficient by the university which deal with the same set of problems and a paper summarising the findings or some other work which meets corresponding scientific criteria. The publications may include co-authored publications if the author's independent contribution to them can be demonstrated." (Government Decree on University Degrees [Valtioneuvoston asetus yliopistojen tutkinnoista], 794/2004, section 22.)

An article-based dissertation is a consistent scholarly work composed of articles around one distinct topic and a summary section. An article-based dissertation of this kind must be equal to a monograph both in workload and in academic value. The publications may include co-authored publications, but the author's independent contribution to them can be demonstrated.

Article-based dissertation:

- must form a coherent whole,
- includes 3-5 articles, that
- as a rule, are either published or approved for publication
- however, one article that has not yet been accepted for publication can be included
- may contain one review article at most.

In the summary section of the article-based dissertation must be included in a clear and distinct manner:

- a list of the works in which the articles have been published or accepted for publication
- when co-authored publications are included, a written statement explaining the nature of doctoral researcher's independent contribution to these publications.

In case of co-authored publications the pre-examiners should evaluate the extent and academic merits of the doctoral researcher's input. If all the articles in the dissertation are co-authored, the doctoral researcher must be the main author of at least one article.

The article-based doctoral dissertation should form a coherent whole, and its goals, theoretical frame of reference, methods and results are presented in the summary section of the thesis. The summary is the centre of the dissertation, and its significance to the evaluation of the entire thesis is essential.

In addition, to giving an analytical introduction and presenting the research goals, the summary must round up the whole of the study. The summary section must contain an integrated and critical evaluation of the results and the rendering, not just a mere summary of the articles. As the article-based dissertation is meant to be a coherent volume, it is advisable to emphasize the connections between the articles. The summary section is not a digest version of the articles, rather it is an opportunity to revisit the choices, and evaluate the outcomes of the articles.

It is noteworthy, that unlike in a monograph (which includes separate chapters for the introduction and the conclusions), in the case of an article-based dissertation, the summary section must include both an





analytical, scientific introduction to the study as well as its results, discussions, conclusions and the significance of the research.

The recommended length for the summary section is 40-80 pages, excluding the appendices. The length of the summary section can also be evaluated in relation to the number of articles.

Pre-examination of the doctoral dissertation

Doctoral dissertations are examined in two stages: the pre-examination and the public defence of a doctoral dissertation.

While the pre-examination is in progress, neither the author of the thesis nor his or her supervisor is allowed to contact the pre-examiners. When necessary, the persons responsible for postgraduate studies at the Faculty Office will take care of the communication with the pre-examiners.

The pre-examiners must submit their statements within two months of receiving the dissertation manuscript for examination. The deadline is calculated from the date of the pre-examination decision (excluding July). The statements will be attached to the decision about granting permission, after which they will become public documents. The recommended length for the statements is between two and five pages. The pre-examiners can also issue a joint statement.

The principal duties of the pre-examiners are to assess whether the manuscript can be accepted as a dissertation in its present state or not and to provide a reasoned written statement on the matter. A manuscript that fulfils the minimum requirements should be accepted. The assessor can present suggestions for corrections and improvements even though they state that the manuscript can be accepted. The statement cannot be conditional.

The dissertation manuscript is assessed according to the following criteria:

Choice of topic, research problem, outlining the research topic and research questions: The topic should have significant information value and yet the research task should be appropriately defined.

Acknowledgement of previous research: The work must serve as an appropriate continuation of a previous debate or introduce a completely new initiative. Previous research must thus be acknowledged, but not repeated as such.

Conceptual clarity, definitions and theoretical knowledge: The reader must be able to fathom what the research is about.

Methods: The methods used must be presented and justified.

Material: The material must be qualitatively relevant in relation to the topic and quantitatively sufficient.

Results and conclusions: The scientific significance of the results and conclusions should be neither exaggerated nor underestimated. The analysis must be logical and include different points of view. Interesting prospects for follow-up research and social relevance of the research can be considered as extra merits.

Format: The structure of the dissertation must be logical and the language clear. The basic idea must not be overwhelmed by a superfluity of information.

Critical attitude: The writer should demonstrate a critical attitude towards previous research, theories, methods, materials, sources and the scientific significance of his/her own work. In other words, good research is original and independent.

Consistency: If the doctoral dissertation is a compilation of several publications or manuscripts accepted for publication, in their statements the pre-examiners must evaluate, whether these focus on the same topic and thus form a consistent scholarly work.





A positive or negative statement?

The pre-examiners must recommend in their statement that the doctoral researcher be denied permission to defend the dissertation in a public examination if it is clear that the dissertation is not a consistent scholarly work based on independent research that makes an original contribution to knowledge. The pre-examiners should also consider rejecting the dissertation if there are other serious deficiencies in the dissertation, such as the following:

- The theoretical framework has serious deficiencies.
- The research material is clearly too limited for a doctoral dissertation.
- There are major deficiencies in the writer's knowledge of literature in the field.
- The dissertation is obviously incomplete, especially in light of the above criteria.
- There are deficiencies in research ethics.

A positive statement is not, however, necessarily prevented by deficiencies that can be remedied by simple revision, moderate further reading of research literature or additional knowledge in some materials that can be acquired with moderate effort.

A negative statement usually means that the preliminary examination is discontinued upon the doctoral researcher's request or the Dean's or the Faculty Council's decision. The doctoral researcher can, according to the University act (558/2009 44§), give their own statement.

After the discontinuation of the preliminary examination, the doctoral researcher may request a new preliminary examination once the changes recommended in the preliminary examiners' statements, or other changes, have been made in the dissertation manuscript and the person in charge of doctoral studies in the doctoral researcher's major subject and the supervisors recommend that the examination process can be restarted. In these cases, the Faculty can either ask the same preliminary examiners for the task again or search for new ones.

If both of the pre-examiners recommend that the doctoral researcher can be granted permission to defend the dissertation at a public examination, the Dean will grant the permission.

The final decision on the approval or rejection of the dissertation and on its grading will be made after the public examination. A rejection of a dissertation at this later stage of the examination process is possible, but very uncommon.

The Faculty Council has assigned to the Dean the right to grant permission to defend the dissertation at a public examination. The Dean will make the decision based on the pre-examiners' and the possible language reviser's statements.

The dissertation may be published only after the Dean has granted permission to defend the dissertation.

The return of statement/report and other documents

Please return your statement/report and other documents *primarily by e-mail* to humpostgraduate@utu.fi.

Commented manuscripts can also be returned by mail. For mailing address, please contact humpostgraduate@utu.fi.