

INSTRUCTIONS FOR EXAMINERS AND OPPONENTS OF DOCTORAL DISSERTATIONS

INSTRUCTIONS FOR EXAMINERS

The purpose of preliminary examination is to ensure that doctoral dissertations meet the set scientific and formal requirements before permission is granted for a doctoral candidate to defend their thesis. Examiners are entitled to propose changes to, or even rejection of a dissertation. Therefore, it is extremely important that examination is performed carefully and that the Faculty obtain explicit and unambiguous statements from examiners.

A dissertation manuscript must be based on original scientific research. The manuscript may be a monograph or based on a collection of related original publications by the candidate. Examination aims at ensuring that the amount and quality of research, and the contribution of the candidate fulfill the requirements for a doctoral degree. **Examiners are asked to provide a written statement and to fill in the attached form.** The Faculty expects that at least the following aspects of the dissertation be evaluated in a written statement by the examiner. The form of the statement is free.

1. General notes on the doctoral dissertation

- brief overview of the scientific content and quality of the dissertation
- clarity of presentation

2. Topic and aims

- originality, currentness and scientific relevance of the topic
- literature review of topic
- value added to existing knowledge by the new data

3. Materials and methods

- The candidate's contribution to the collection of materials or studied subjects, and to the generation of results. If the thesis consists of original publications, examiners should evaluate the doctoral candidate's contribution to the original publications – a clarification of the candidate's contribution is provided by the Faculty
- quality, quantity and suitability of the materials or studied subjects
- complexity of the methodology
- appropriateness of controls
- development of any new methodology

4. Results and conclusions

- reliability and scientific significance of new findings
- extent of reproduction or confirmation of earlier observations
- appropriateness of statistical analyses
- justification of conclusions drawn from original observations

5. Organization and presentation of dissertation

- organization of the dissertation and balance between sections
- quality of scientific style, presentation, language and graphics



6. Literature review

- scope and factual content of literature review
- the candidate's familiarity and critical mastery of the current literature
- adequacy and appropriateness of references

7. Maturity of discussion section

- relevance, factual accuracy, critical mastery and clarity of discussion section
- relationship between candidate's own results and existing information; evaluation of strengths and weaknesses of both
- formulation of synthesis of the entire dissertation project – maturity of the candidate as a scientist

8. Summary

- brief description on the nature of the research
 - description of candidate's contribution
 - most significant results and merits of dissertation
 - quality of thesis manuscript
 - major defects, if any, and measures taken to correct them
 - statement on the suitability of the work for granting a printing license.

Examiners must discuss any minor defects and errors in a thesis manuscript with the doctoral candidate, request revisions be made, and approve the final version. This must be done **before** an examiner submits their statement to the Faculty. If there are fundamental defects (e.g. related to the candidate's own contribution, reliability of methods), a statement should be sent to the Faculty complete with a recommendation of not granting permission to the doctoral candidate to defend their thesis. **An examiner must not recommend permission for the doctoral candidate to defend their thesis in a dissertation unless they can approve the final, corrected manuscript without reservations.**

If a dissertation is of exceptionally high quality, an examiner may suggest **approval with distinction**. The basis for distinction must be included in the examiner's statement. Distinction may be awarded to a dissertation of exceptional merit on the basis of recommendations by the opponent and the examiners.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR OFFICIAL OPPONENT'S STATEMENT

The opponent's statement consists of an evaluation of the dissertation and its public defence. The statement constitutes the final basis for the Faculty Council's decision on approving or rejecting the dissertation. Thus, it is important that the opponent clearly states: 1) any defects of the dissertation, 2) the merits of the dissertation, **3) a clear stance on whether the dissertation should be approved or not.**

The opponent's statement may be free form, but it should include the same points that are mentioned in the instructions concerning examiners' statements, where applicable. Additionally, the opponent's statement should include a brief description and evaluation of the public disputation of the dissertation and any contributions of the other participants at the disputation.

The opponent's statement should ideally end with a summary commenting the originality of the research subject and clearly stating whether the topic is relevant, is handled in a way that meets scientific criteria and whether the dissertation, in general, is original and comprehensive. Attention should be paid to whether the research verifies previously obtained results, complements previously made but unconnected and uncertain observations or includes new and essential information in the field of study. Special mention should be made of whether the dissertation includes observations and conclusions that are crucially important to the field of research in question. If the opponent so wishes, the statement may indicate that the dissertation should be accepted with distinction. The basis of distinction should be included in the statement. For dissertations of exceptionally high quality, distinction may be awarded based on the recommendations of examiners and the opponent.

In an opponent's assessment of a doctoral dissertation, the following points merit special attention:

1. An evaluation of the topic of the dissertation, including consideration of the number of problems which have had to be solved. The significance of the conclusions should be reflected upon with the following criteria in mind: To what extent are new ideas or insights provided? How have the problems presented in the dissertation been solved? What is the quality of the doctoral candidate's observations?
2. An evaluation of how original the planning and the execution of the research have been.
3. An evaluation of the quality of the doctoral candidate's achievements. This evaluation may rest on the level of care with which the achievements have been reached, on the level of difficulty of the methods used, on the development of new methods (if any) and on the applicability of the results for further research.
4. An evaluation of the doctoral candidate's mastery of the field of research and the candidate's familiarity with pertinent literature.
5. An evaluation of the structuring of the dissertation, the manner of presentation therein and the style and use of language.



PROCEDURE AT DISPUTATION

1. When the participants of the disputation enter the room, the defending doctoral candidate enters first, followed by the custos (chairperson). The opponent enters last.
2. The correct form of attire for all participants is black dress with long sleeves for ladies and tail coat for gentlemen (or, where appropriate, uniforms without decorations). Alternatively, if the doctoral candidate, custos and opponent so agree, formal suits may be worn. Where appropriate, participants may wear a doctor's gown (with or without the relevant headdress). Participants holding Nordic doctorates are to carry their doctor's hat in their hand while entering and leaving the room; during the disputation the hat is placed on the table with the lyre facing the audience.
3. When all are seated, the custos opens the proceedings with the following words: "As custos appointed by the Faculty of..., I open this doctoral disputation." The doctoral candidate remains standing.
4. The doctoral candidate delivers the *lectio praecursoria* (the introductory lecture) standing. The *lectio* begins with the greeting: "Learned custos, my esteemed opponent, ladies and gentlemen...". The *lectio* may not exceed 20 minutes.
5. Correction of misprints is not part of the proceedings at the disputation. The doctoral candidate may provide the opponent with a written list of errors which the candidate has identified, and this list may be appended to the opponent's statement submitted to the Faculty.
6. On concluding the *lectio praecursoria* the doctoral candidate addresses the opponent with the following words: "Professor (or Doctor, etc.) NN, I respectfully ask you, as the opponent duly appointed by the Faculty of... for my disputation, to present any criticism you may have against my doctoral dissertation."
7. The opponent stands (as does the doctoral candidate) and delivers a short statement on the scientific status and significance of the topic of the dissertation, together with other similar comments of a more general nature. After this statement, both opponent and doctoral candidate are seated.
8. When examining the dissertation, the opponent should begin by dealing with general and methodological questions, and then proceed to a detailed scrutiny of the text.
9. Examination usually takes 2–3 hours. If the examination is lengthy, the custos may announce an interval. The disputation may not last longer than six hours in total.
10. When the opponent's examination of the dissertation is over, the opponent stands and delivers a final statement, during which the doctoral candidate also stands.
11. The doctoral candidate remains standing and expresses their gratitude to the opponent for the discussion.
12. Next, the doctoral candidate turns to the audience, and invites contributions as follows: "I now respectfully invite anyone in the audience who wishes to offer criticism against my dissertation to ask the custos for permission to speak".



13. The custos may then grant permission for the audience to speak, and is responsible for ensuring that the doctoral candidate can reply immediately to each question, and that the discussion does not stray from the matter at hand.
14. Finally, the custos stands up and ends the proceeding with the words: "This disputation is now concluded"

COMPENSATION FOR EXAMINERS AND OPPONENTS OF DOCTORAL DISSERTATIONS

Examiners and opponents are compensated according to a fixed rate of compensation. If the opponent requires compensation for travel expenses, an application should be made on the University's or the Government's official form for application of compensation of travel expenses. The expenses are paid as stated in the State's Traveling Regulations (www.vm.fi). The invoice for travel expenses should be presented at the Faculty's office no later than within 45 days from the dissertation.