

# INSTRUCTIONS FOR EXAMINERS AND OPPONENT OF DOCTORAL DISSERTATIONS

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR EXAMINERS

The purpose of the examination is to ensure that the doctoral dissertation meets the set scientific and formal requirements before permission to defend the thesis is granted to the doctoral candidate. The examiners are entitled to propose changes to the dissertation or even its rejection. Therefore, it is very important that the examination is performed carefully and that the Faculty will obtain explicit and unambiguous statements from the examiners.

The dissertation manuscript must be based on original scientific research. It may be a monograph or it may be based on a collection of related original publications of the candidate. The ultimate purpose of the examination is to make sure that the amount and quality of the research and the contribution of the candidate fulfill the requirements for a doctoral degree. The examiner is 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 are evaluated in a written statement by the examiner. The form of the statement is free.**

### **1. General impression of the doctoral dissertation**

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

### **2. Topic and aims**

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

### **3. Materials and methods**

- the candidate's original contribution to the collection of materials/study subjects and to the generation of results
- quality, quantity and suitability of the materials/study subjects
- complexity of the methodology
- appropriateness of controls
- development of any new methodology

### **4. Results and conclusions**

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

### **5. Organization and presentation of dissertation**

- organization of the dissertation and balance between the different parts
- quality of scientific style, presentation, language and graphics.

## 6. Literature review

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

## 7. Maturity of discussion section of thesis

- relevance, factual accuracy, critical mastery and clarity of discussion section of thesis
- 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 own contribution
  - most significant results and merits of the dissertation
  - quality of the thesis manuscript
  - major defects, if any, and measures taken to correct them
  - statement on the suitability of the work for granting a printing license.

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

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

## PROCEDURE AT DISPUTATION

1. When the participants of the disputation enter the room, the doctoral candidate who defends the dissertation 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, the 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." All are seated with the exception of the doctoral candidate.
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. The 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 herself or himself has identified, and this list may be appended to the opponent's statement which will be 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 then 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 take their seats.
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. The examination takes usually 2 – 3 hours. If the examination takes a long time, the *custos* may announce an interval. The disputation may not last longer than six hours *in toto*.
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 her/his 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 any one 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 in hand.
14. Finally the *custos* stands up and ends the proceeding with the words: "This disputation is now concluded."

## **INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE 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 whether to approve the dissertation or not. Thus, it is important that the opponent clearly states: 1) any defects of the dissertation, 2) the merits of the dissertation, 3) **a clear stand on whether the dissertation should be approved or not.**

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

It is desirable that the opponent's statement ends with a summary commenting the originality of the subject of the research 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. Does the research verify previously obtained results, complement previously made but unconnected and uncertain observations or does it include new and essential information in the field of study? Special mention should be made as to whether the dissertation includes observations and conclusions that are crucially important for the field of research in question. If the opponent so wishes, the statement may indicate that the dissertation should be accepted with distinction and explain why. For a dissertation of exceptionally high quality, a distinction may be awarded based on the recommendations of experts (opponent, examiners) and/or the doctoral committee's recommendations.

## **GUIDELINES FOR THE OPPONENT**

In the opponent's assessment of the 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 solutions to the problems presented in the dissertation been solved? What is the quality of the doctoral candidate's observations? Has any improvement in the precision of the measurement of the findings been achieved by the work?
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 result for further research.
4. An evaluation of the doctoral candidate's mastery of the field of research and the candidate's familiarity with the pertinent literature.
5. An evaluation of the structuring of the dissertation, its manner of presentation and the style and use of language.

## **COMPENSATION FOR EXAMINERS OF DOCTORAL DISSERTATIONS**

The examiners and the opponent are paid by a fixed rate of compensation, i.e., no bill is required. If the opponent wishes 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.v.m.fi](http://www.v.m.fi)). It is kindly asked that the bill is presented at the Faculty's office no later than within 45 days from the dissertation.