

Instructions for the public defence of a doctoral thesis

General information

In Sweden, a doctoral thesis is the result of at least four years of supervised research.

The thesis can be written either as a monograph (a coherent piece of work) or as a compilation thesis (a summary of research articles or book chapters that the doctoral student has written alone or co-authored). The doctoral student's own contribution to the different parts of a compilation thesis must be clearly distinguishable. A compilation thesis generally consists of several publications and a summarising chapter ("kappa"). The articles and summarising chapter must be of such quality that they meet the scholarly and formal criteria for publication in recognised international research journals.

In Sweden, the author of a doctoral thesis must defend their thesis at a public defence.

The members of the examining committee and the external reviewer read the thesis before the public defence. They must address any concerns that they have before the defence to the principal supervisor. These may have to do with, for example, the quality of the thesis, indications of potential plagiarism, or uncertainty regarding the doctoral student's own contribution to the articles. In some cases, it may be necessary to postpone the defence.

The thesis is made available three weeks before the defence, and both the external reviewer and the members of the examining committee receive one hard copy by post and one electronic copy by email.

Public defence procedures and guidelines

The public defence is led by a chair. The defence begins with the chair presenting the author of the thesis, the external reviewer, and the examining committee. The chair then gives the floor to the author, who is given the opportunity to correct any errors detected after the printing of the thesis. This initial part of the defence should take no more than 5 minutes.

The author of the thesis then gives the floor to the external reviewer, who gives a summary of the thesis. This should take about 20 minutes.

Next, the external reviewer initiates a discussion of the thesis. The external reviewer's primary role is to lead the public discussion of the scholarly aspects of the thesis, drawing attention to both its strengths and its weaknesses. It is important that the author of the thesis should be given time to respond and otherwise take part in the discussion. It is essential that all parts of the thesis should be reviewed (introduction, purpose, background, theory, method/analysis, results, and discussion). The relationship between the different parts must also be considered. Particular attention should be paid to whether and how the thesis contributes to research in the field. Needless to say, the focus must be on the scholarly quality of the thesis. It is, however, also important to consider its communicative aspects.

In total, the discussion of the thesis takes about 1.5 hours.

The external reviewer concludes the discussion with an overall assessment (5–10 minutes) of the thesis, summarising its strengths without indicating whether a passing grade will be awarded, as this is for the examining committee to decide.

The three members of the examining committee can then ask questions (usually one question each). Their questions may concern any part of the thesis. Preferably, this part of the defence should take about 10–15 minutes.

In the final part of the defence, the so-called *ex auditorium*, a couple of questions are taken from the audience. Preferably, this part should take no more than 5–10 minutes.

The public discussion and examination of the thesis should preferably provide the examining committee with answers to the following questions:

- Is the problem studied relevant?
- Were appropriate methods used?
- Are the results presented in a satisfactory way?
- Are the references cited correctly?
- Do the results presented justify the conclusions?

The chair closes the defence. The entire procedure usually takes 2 hours, but there is no minimum or maximum time limit. It is important to take the time needed for a proper discussion of the scholarly aspects of the thesis.

Assessment

The examining committee, which normally meets immediately after the public defence, is quorate when all members are present. Their meeting should take no more than 1 hour. The committee appoints a chair among themselves. The chair should be the person most qualified for the task. The chair decides who may be present during the committee's meeting and which of those present are entitled to participate in the deliberations.

The thesis is assessed as Pass or Fail. The assessment must be based on the requirements for a doctoral degree. Both the content and the defence of the thesis must be considered.

Only the examining committee participates in the decision, which is taken by majority vote.

The decision taken by the examining committee must be minuted. An individual member who holds a different opinion has the right to have their opinion recorded in the minutes. HLK's research coordinator provides a template for the minutes. The chair of the examining committee ensures that the minutes are completed and then signed by all members of the committee. The minutes are submitted to the research coordinator, who forwards them to the registrar for registration.

The chair of the examining committee announces the thesis grade to the author of the thesis in public. The chair also conveys the main comments from the grading meeting to the author.