



UMEÅ UNIVERSITY

Guidelines for thesis defence proceedings and the examining committee's meeting at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities

These guidelines were established by the Faculty of Arts and Humanities Board on 12 June 2020 and were updated on 15 April 2022. The guidelines regulate the proceedings when a doctoral thesis is publicly defended at the faculty. This document also sets out the agenda for the examining committee's meeting after the thesis defence proceedings. In addition to the faculty's guidelines, there are local rules for the defence of a thesis and the examining committee at Umeå University, as well as national regulations stated in the Higher Education Ordinance. Umeå University's local rules set out, for example, how the external reviewer is to be appointed and the composition of the examining committee.

For each thesis defence, a Chair is appointed who must be a PhD holder and teacher at Umeå University. At the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, the Chair of the thesis defence proceedings cannot be the supervisor of the doctoral student defending the thesis. The Chair has overall responsibility for the proceedings, including responsibility for dealing with unforeseen events and deviations.

The final decision as to whether the doctoral student passes or fails the examination is taken by the examining committee at its meeting after the defence proceedings. In the decision both the content and the doctoral student's defence of the thesis should be taken into account. If, whilst reading the thesis, any member of the examining committee, or the external reviewer, has any doubts as to whether the work presented will pass, they are expected to contact the Chair immediately so that the thesis may be withdrawn and the public defence cancelled.

Proceedings at the defence of a thesis

The proceedings at the public defence of a thesis are normally as follows:

1. The Chair welcomes everyone. The Chair presents the doctoral student, the external reviewer and the examining committee.
2. The Chair goes through the proceedings so the audience is informed of what will happen and explains that the general public are welcome to participate in the latter part of the proceedings.
3. The Chair addresses the doctoral student and asks if he or she has anything to add before the floor is handed over to the external reviewer. This would be the time when, for example, the doctoral student presents the errata list if there is one.
4. The Chair asks the external reviewer to summarise the thesis. This is to take about 15 minutes. The summary is to be informative to the audience and include the purpose and main results of the thesis.
5. After presenting the summary of the thesis, the external reviewer turns to the doctoral student and asks if the summary was satisfactory and if the doctoral student has anything to comment on, add, or correct.
6. After the doctoral student has responded, the external reviewer begins the formal discussion with the doctoral student. The purpose of the discussion is to provide more information to the examining committee for their assessment of the thesis and the doctoral student's oral defence of it, and to present the research to the members of the general public who have been invited to participate in the proceedings. Some examples of fundamental questions to be discussed by the external reviewer and the doctoral student are the choice of subject, material and method.



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More detailed questions may be asked on the application of theory, analysis of empirical evidence, presentation of specific results and conclusions. Details concerning language and printing errors are usually not discussed at the defence of the thesis, but these can be communicated to the doctoral student at another time.

7. After the discussion, the external reviewer summarises his or her views on the thesis, such as its academic value and originality.
8. The Chair invites the examining committee to pose questions to the doctoral student.
9. The Chair invites the audience to pose questions.
10. The Chair declares the public defence closed.
11. The Chair, the external reviewer, examination committee, and supervisors retire to discuss the result of the examination.

Agenda for the examining committee's meeting

1. The meeting is opened by the Chair of the thesis defence proceedings.
2. The examining committee appoints a Chair from among its members. The Chair is also responsible for taking the minutes, using the form provided by the faculty for the purpose.
3. The external reviewer summarises his or her views on the thesis, the doctoral student's defence and ability to discuss his or her thesis work.
4. The examining committee discusses the thesis and its defence in relation to the national qualification requirements with the external reviewer and supervisor(s).
5. The Chair of the thesis defence proceedings, the supervisor(s) and the external reviewer leave the meeting.
6. The examining committee deliberates and grades the thesis and its defence. If the thesis is assessed as having failed, this must always be justified in the minutes.
7. The Chair of the meeting fills in the faculty's form for the minutes of the examining committee's meeting and all members sign the minutes.
8. The Chair of the examining committee declares the meeting closed.
9. The Chair of the examining committee hands over the minutes to the Chair of the thesis defence proceedings.

When the meeting is completed, it is the task of the Chair of the examining committee to orally notify the doctoral student of the grade.

Additional information

The external reviewer is crucial for the quality assessment of the doctoral student. The role of reviewer - called *opponent* in Swedish – is similar to that of the external examiner in the UK or the USA. However, unlike in the UK and the USA, the external reviewer in Sweden has no vote in the formal decision as to whether the doctoral student passes or fails the examination. The reviewer is, thus, not an examiner in the formal sense.

The formal decision is made by an examination committee of three members of which at least one must come from another faculty or university. In case a member of the committee is unable to attend, for example, due to illness, there is a pre-appointed reserve member of the committee. This person only takes part in the formal decision if a committee member is unable to attend but may be present during the discussion. Pass and Fail are the only possible grades. No written motivation for the grade Pass.

Many doctoral students invite colleagues, friends, family, supervisors, members of the examination committee and the external reviewer to a party on the evening of the defence proceedings.