

Instructions for dissertation opponents

We thank you for agreeing to be an opponent for a dissertation at the University of Jyväskylä.

Doctoral dissertations are evaluated in two stages, of which the preliminary-examination is the first and the public examination is the second.

We ask that you familiarize yourself with the preliminary examination process at the University of Jyväskylä as outlined below.

We'd like to remind you that *the doctoral student is not allowed to communicate directly with the opponent*. The communication between the doctoral student and the opponent must go via the Custos. The doctoral student must tell his/her supervisors if he/she has communicated directly with the opponent during the process.

Definition of a doctoral dissertation

A doctoral dissertation is an independent, research-based, scientific study carried out in one of the Faculty's disciplines. The doctoral dissertation can be

- a monograph or
- an article-based doctoral dissertation which consists of a selection of scientific publications or articles accompanied by a compiling and evaluative section.

The dissertation can also consist of several published monographs or a combination of a monograph and one or more articles. In this case, it must contain a conclusive and evaluative part similar to the one found in an article dissertation. The dissertation can also be digital, meaning that it can contain metatextual structures and multimedia.

For more information on the Faculty's instructions for what each of these dissertation forms should contain, please refer to the following: <https://www.jyu.fi/hytk/fi/en/research/doctoral-studies/degree-requirements>.

The public examination: stages leading to it

Prior to the public examination, the Faculty Council has appointed the opponent or opponents as well as the Custos.

The Custos is the chairperson of the public examination and supervises the event. The Custos also

- rules on the language to be used in the public examination after having heard the views of both the doctoral candidate and the opponent. More than one language can be used in the public examination, if the doctoral candidate and opponent agree to this.

- provides advice and instruction to the opponent regarding procedures related to the public examination.
- familiarizes the opponent with the grade scale in use in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences.

The opponent is entitled to receive a version of the dissertation manuscript in which the contents are in their final form a minimum of one month in advance of the public examination.

The public examination

According to university statutes, the duration of the public examination can be no longer than four hours. Today, the public examination seldom exceeds two hours.

The public examination begins with the oral summary presentation (*lectio praecursoria*) by the doctoral candidate which lasts a maximum of 20 minutes.

This is followed by a short opening statement by the opponent in which he/she summarizes the position of the dissertation research within its broader disciplinary context. Typical themes of the opening statement are the importance or innovative nature of this doctoral research and/or its perspectives; the history or tradition of research on this dissertation topic, the connections between this research topic and other subjects, and the social and scientific relevance of the doctoral research. The opening statement should not be lengthy, several minutes suffice. The opponent does not need to mention the goals or contents of the dissertation in the opening statement, since that is the purpose of the doctoral candidate's *lectio praecursoria*. Also, the opponent's opening statement should not yet present any concrete criticisms or evaluations of the quality of the doctoral dissertation, those should be saved for the opponent's more lengthy summary closing statement at the end of the public examination.

After the opponent's opening statement follows a discussion between the opponent and the doctoral candidate, in which the opponent asks questions of the doctoral candidate regarding what has been written in the final version of the doctoral manuscript. The questions should lead to an intellectual and scholarly discussion on the issues written about in the dissertation manuscript, and should not be a mere listing of what the opponent considers to have been the mistakes made in the dissertation. The opponent should give the doctoral candidate the opportunity to answer the questions asked and to defend his/her choices made in writing the dissertation. The aim is for the discussion to focus on the most relevant issues regarding the doctoral research work. The discussion should not progress page by page, but instead chapter by chapter or according to the successive phases of the research process. The opponent should divide the available time so that there remains sufficient time at the end of the discussion to address the research results and conclusions. Since not all of the audience is familiar with the research field and topic under discussion, we ask that opponents keep the audience in mind when asking questions or describing a particular theory or method, so that the audience can follow the discussion. The public examination serves not only as an occasion for the opponent to provide valuable feedback to the doctoral candidate, but it is also an important learning occasion for the audience, including Masters' and doctoral level students.

In the opponent's summary closing statement presented orally, he/she summarizes the strengths and weaknesses of the dissertation and states whether or not he/she proposes that the dissertation be

accepted by the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. The summary closing statement should not refer to the contents of the dissertation but should instead present a summary evaluation of its position within the research area and discipline, as well as a brief evaluation of its approaches, methods, conclusions, and possibilities for future research. This closing statement should not, however, suggest or recommend a grade for the dissertation. It also should not contain any significant criticism that was not presented in the course of the discussion between opponent and doctoral candidate, that is, against which the doctoral candidate has not had the opportunity to defend his/her choices. Together, the opening statement and the closing statement can be used as the basis for the opponent's written statement to the Faculty sent after the public examination.

Following the public examination, there is usually an informal coffee party and an evaluation meeting in which the opponent presents his/her views on the grade of the dissertation. Later in the evening there is often an evening party (*karonkka*) organized in the opponent's honor, at which the opponent will be expected to make a short congratulatory speech (following the doctoral candidate's speech). The opponent is invited by the doctoral candidate to attend these parties.

Instructions concerning the public dissertation examination are can also be found on our website <https://www.jyu.fi/hytk/en/research/doctoral-studies/guide-for-the-doctoral-candidate>, especially in the part "Public examination of the dissertation, post-doctoral party, and further information for the candidate".

Final evaluation report by the opponent

The Faculty Council grades the dissertation after receiving three statements:

- the statement of the assessment board;
- the statement of the opponent; and
- the statement of the Custos.

Supervisor of the doctoral dissertation cannot be a member of the board or take part in the evaluation of the thesis.

An assessment board will propose the grade for the doctoral dissertation. The Assessment Board is composed of three members: the dissertation opponent, a so-called external member, and a member of the teaching staff of the academic programme in question who has not been a supervisor of the dissertation. Within the Assessment Board, the Custos of the public examination serves as the representative of the academic programme and is the chairperson, unless the Custos has been the first or second supervisor of the dissertation, in which case some other representative of the academic programme serves as the chairperson of the assessment board.

The Assessment Board meets after the public examination to discuss the grade of the dissertation. The chair of the Assessment Board will convey the Board's statement regarding the grade to the Faculty.

There is more information about assessment board in our website: <https://www.jyu.fi/hytk/fi/en/research/doctoral-studies/guide-for-the-doctoral-candidate> ("The evaluation of postgraduate theses and the appeal procedure").

The opponent is requested to send his/her final written evaluation to the Faculty within two weeks of the public examination. The written evaluation should provide comments on each of the eight separate criteria of evaluation in the evaluation scale found at <https://www.jyu.fi/hytk/fi/en/research/doctoral-studies/guide-for-the-doctoral-candidate/hytk-scale-for-theses.pdf>. As can be seen from the last criterion in the table, in his/her written evaluation the opponent should take into account how effectively the doctoral candidate has defended his/her choices regarding the dissertation research work during the public examination. Like the oral closing statement presented at the public examination, the written evaluation should not contain any significant criticism that was not presented in the course of the discussion between opponent and doctoral candidate, that is, against which the doctoral candidate did not have the opportunity to defend his/her choices.

In order to expedite the evaluation process, the written evaluation should be sent as a .pdf or .doc document to the Faculty at this address: doct-hum-soc@jyu.fi.

An original, signed copy of the written evaluation as well as the original, signed payment forms and receipts should be sent to the Faculty Council at the following address:

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
P.O. Box 35
40014 University of Jyväskylä, Finland

The PhD candidate is entitled to submit a rebuttal regarding the report, and is also entitled to submit an appeal regarding the final grade given to the dissertation.

Practical matters

The Custos is the contact person who provides advice and assistance to the opponent, and informs the opponent regarding the etiquette, customs and procedures during the public examination. These can also be read here: <https://opiskelu.jyu.fi/en/instructions/doctoral-dissertation>

Travel and accommodation

There are good train and bus connections from Helsinki to Jyväskylä, which can be quicker than flight connections. Booking tickets, accommodation and other practical matters can be discussed in advance with the Custos appointed for the public examination.

The opponent's travelling and accommodation expenses (for two nights if needed) are paid for by the Faculty, in addition to the remuneration for the final report.

Opponent's remuneration

The opponent's remuneration per dissertation is 500 €. It is paid after receipt of the final written evaluation and the payment forms.