

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE OPPONENT OF A DOCTORAL DISSERTATION AT THE FACULTY OF SPORT AND HEALTH SCIENCES

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The task of the opponent is to examine the dissertation and its scientific quality during the public examination. In the evaluation statement submitted to the Faculty Council, the opponent proposes a grade for the dissertation, taking into account the doctoral candidate's performance during the public examination.

QUICK GUIDE FOR THE OPPONENT

- Fill in the *dissertation evaluation form* and write a [*statement of about 3–5 pages*](#), in which you assess the strengths and weaknesses of the dissertation, and provide your view on the grade ("Fail", "Pass", "Pass with distinction"). To write the statement, use the template provided on the evaluation form.
 - The grade "Pass with distinction" can only be given to work of an extremely high standard, and which belongs to the top 5% in the research area.
 - The evaluation form has been sent to the opponent by email.
- Return the statement and completed evaluation form to doctoral-dissertations@jyu.fi *within five days of the public examination event*.
 - Remember to sign the document, an electronic signature is also acceptable.
- The opponent is a member of the dissertation assessment board. The chair of the assessment board will contact the opponent prior to the public examination. Although the opponent is part of the board, they are required to submit a separate statement in accordance with these instructions.
- Detailed instructions for the task: [The public examination of the dissertation and the opponent's task](#).

SUMMARY OF THE DISSERTATION REQUIREMENTS

The doctoral dissertation requirements are available in full on the University of Jyväskylä website: [Dissertation requirements | University of Jyväskylä](#). Below is a summary of the key requirements.

Definition and scientific criteria

The dissertation must be a research-based, coherent scientific presentation in the doctoral candidate's field of study. The dissertation must demonstrate the doctoral candidate's critical thinking, in-depth knowledge of their research area, and mastery and ability to apply the methods of scientific research. It must contain new scientific knowledge and substantiated results, and it must be scientifically convincing, honest and follow the norms of research integrity.

Structure of the dissertation

An article-based dissertation consists of articles which discuss the same set of problems and a

summarising report. It may contain peer-reviewed scientific articles which have been published or accepted for publication, or manuscripts that are under scientific peer review or ready to be submitted to the peer review process. *An article-based dissertation must contain at least two, typically three to four peer-reviewed scientific publications or manuscripts, of which at least one is published or accepted for publication.*

The number of articles and manuscripts sufficient for an article dissertation is affected by the proportion of the author's independent work, as well as the a) extent, b) scientific quality and significance and c) publication type (publication [type A of the publication classification of the Ministry of Education and Culture – peer-reviewed scientific articles](#)). The Faculty of Sport and Health Sciences recommends that the article-based dissertation includes at least one article in the A1 or A3 publication category that contains new results or information. In addition, the dissertation may include articles in publication categories A2 or A4.

The summarising report of the article-based dissertation includes the set of questions connecting the articles, links to relevant literature, theoretical framework, methods, results and conclusions of the sub-studies, and an assessment of their impact. The summarising report must form a concise, balanced entity that has been compiled on the basis of both the articles and possible manuscripts included in the dissertation as well as the literature. The summarising report does not have to include new scientific knowledge that has not been presented in the articles.

A monograph dissertation is a previously unpublished, comprehensive scientific research work conducted solely in the author's name. The author may publish articles related to the dissertation topic before the actual dissertation is completed and may refer to them in the dissertation.

Extent of independent work

The doctoral candidate's independent work must be identifiable in all dissertations and *clearly described in the summarising report of the dissertation*. If the dissertation contains co-authored articles or manuscripts, the doctoral candidate must provide an explanation of the extent of their independent contribution to each joint publication in the summarising report. At the end of the description of the author's independent contribution it must be mentioned whether artificial intelligence-based applications have been used in the writing of the dissertation. If AI-based applications have been used, this must be described in the dissertation.

In an article-based dissertation at the Faculty of Sport and Health Sciences, the doctoral candidate must be the first author of at least one article. The dissertation may also include articles in which the first authorship is shared with another author or in which someone else is the first author. The supervisor may be a co-author of the articles but cannot be the first author.

THE PUBLIC EXAMINATION OF THE DISSERTATION AND THE OPPONENT'S TASK

Appointing the opponent

The faculty appoints one or more opponents for the public examination of the doctoral dissertation. The opponents must be doctoral degree holders who are professors or have demonstrated sufficient academic merit in other ways. The opponents must be from outside the University of Jyväskylä. A supervisor or follow-up group member of the dissertation cannot act as an opponent.

The appointment of opponents must comply with the impartiality requirement laid down in the Administrative Procedure Act. The opponent must not be in a relationship with the doctoral candidate that could call their impartiality into question.

The dissertation supervisor must check for any potential disqualification before appointing the opponent. *If an opponent suspects they may be disqualified, they must contact the Support for Doctoral Studies Team as soon as possible at doctoral-dissertations@jyu.fi.*

Appointing and task of the custos

A custos is appointed for the public examination, usually the supervisor of the doctoral dissertation, who acts as the chair of the event. The custos must be employed by the University of Jyväskylä. *The duties of the custos include familiarising the opponent with the examination guidelines, dissertation practices, and the grading scale in use. The custos also assists the opponent with travel arrangements.* It is advisable to discuss travel tickets, accommodation bookings, and other practical matters well in advance of the examination day with the custos.

Public examination materials and communication

The Support for Doctoral Studies Team will provide the opponent appointed by the faculty with the official opponent instructions, pre-examination statements, and the final version of the dissertation when it has been published (at least five days before the public examination). Additionally, the Support for Doctoral Studies Team will send to the opponent the doctoral candidate's summary on how the dissertation has changed since the preliminary examination.

There must be no direct communication between the opponent and the doctoral candidate before the public examination. Any necessary communication must be conducted through the custos. The opponent must mention it in their official statement if they have been in contact with the doctoral candidate during the examination process. Exceptions to this rule are the sending of the printed dissertation by postal mail and the sending of an invitation to the

karonkka (post-doctoral party), which the candidate may send directly to the opponent if this has been specifically agreed upon.

Plagiarism detection and suspected violation of good scientific practice

The manuscript is checked using plagiarism detection software (Turnitin) before it is sent to the pre-examiners. If there is a suspected violation of the responsible conduct of research in a dissertation, the University's guidelines for handling suspected cases of research misconduct must be followed: [Rector's decision on ethical guidelines for studying and the handling of academic misconduct at the University of Jyväskylä \(21.8.2023\)](#).

Opponent's statement

Within two weeks of the public examination, the opponent must submit a written statement of approximately 3–5 pages, evaluating the doctoral dissertation and proposing a grade or honorific mention. The assessment must take into account the doctoral candidate's performance during the public defense. The evaluation concerns the dissertation as a whole. In the case of an article-based dissertation, the assessment must also cover the articles included in the work (published and unpublished). The template for the pre-examination statement can be found on the faculty's dissertation evaluation form, which the pre-examiner fills in.

When the opponent receives the official appointment and the faculty's decision regarding the public examination, the dissertation manuscript has already been granted permission for public defense. The pre-examination confirmed that the dissertation met the University of Jyväskylä's requirements and the minimum criteria for approval—at least the level "Pass" on the scale "Fail – Pass – Pass with Distinction." The pre-examination also took into account compliance with responsible conduct of research and research ethics. However, if any issues related to these matters emerge during the public examination, they must be addressed in the opponent's statement.

The part of the public examination to be considered in the opponent's statement begins after the doctoral candidate's lectio praecursoria and ends with the final statement of the opponent. The statement must not address any issues other than those presented during the public examination and to which the candidate had the chance to respond.

As it may contain previously unpublished content, the dissertation cannot be processed using artificial intelligence tools.

If there are multiple opponents, they may submit individual statements or, if they prefer, a joint statement. The statement may be written in Finnish if the doctoral candidate is proficient in Finnish. Otherwise, the statement must always be written in English.

The statement addressed to the Faculty Council must include the details of the doctoral candidate, the doctoral dissertation and the opponent (name, affiliation) and it must include the signature of the

opponent.

Content of the statement and the areas to be assessed (as applicable, taking into account the discipline of the dissertation):

1. The basic idea, research design, and problem formulation

- Assessment of the research background and objectives, the relevance and clarity of the problem formulation, the positioning of the research within the scholarly tradition of the discipline, and the justification of its suitability as a doctoral dissertation.

2. Knowledge of the research field

- Assessment of the doctoral candidate's knowledge of the topic, the critical and coherent treatment of the subject, the comprehensiveness of the approach, and the clarity of the scope and limitations.

3. Research methods and data

- Assessment of the applicability and scope of the methods used, the sufficiency of the data, and any methodological advancements.

4. Research results and their presentation

- Assessment of the results and their significance, as well as the clarity of their presentation.

5. Discussion and conclusions

- Assessment of the relevance, clarity, and critical nature of the discussion, including ethical considerations, and whether the candidate has integrated their findings with existing knowledge, provided well-founded conclusions, and identified new research questions.

6. Structure, coherence, and refinement of the dissertation

- Assessment of the overall scope of the dissertation, the balanced presentation of its components, and the refinement and finalization of the text.

7. Contribution of independent work

- Assessment of the doctoral candidate's share of independent work.

8. Publications (assessed only in article-based dissertations)

- In the case of an article-based dissertation, assessment of the formation of a coherent scientific whole.

9. Public examination

- Assessment of the doctoral candidate's performance during the public examination.

Opponent's summary and justifications for the grade proposal

- The statement concludes with a summary outlining the aim of the study, the key methodological features, the main findings and conclusions, providing an overview of the quality and significance of the research, and presenting the key justifications for the grade proposal.

Submission of the opponent statement and the opponent's fee

The signed evaluation form and written statement is addressed to the Faculty Council and sent as a pdf or docx file to the Support for Doctoral Studies Team at the e-mail address doctoral-dissertations@jyu.fi (not to the doctoral candidate or supervisor) within five days of the public examination. The Support for Doctoral Studies Team forwards the statement to the doctoral candidate, the supervisor-in-charge and the Faculty Council.

The opponent will be paid a fee determined by the University of Jyväskylä. Instructions on the payment of the fee will be sent to the opponent by email when the faculty has received the final opponent's statement.

The custos, assisted by the travel secretaries, is the contact person for the reimbursement of possible travel expenses. The opponent is asked to contact the custos in matters related to the reimbursement of travel costs.

Assessment board

An assessment board is appointed to support the evaluation of the doctoral dissertation. The board submits a proposal for the grade of the dissertation to the faculty council. The assessment board consists of the opponent and a representative from the discipline who is a researcher at the level of a docent or higher (serving as chair). If necessary, a third member (doctoral representative of the Faculty of Sport and Health Sciences or the University of Jyväskylä) can also be appointed to the assessment board. All members of the board must be independent of the doctoral candidate. Supervisors or follow-up group members of the dissertation cannot be appointed to the assessment board.

The chair of the assessment board is responsible for assembling the board and contacting the opponent to agree on a meeting time. The aim is for the assessment board to convene immediately after the public examination to prepare a justified proposal for the grade of the dissertation, which the chair submits to the faculty. In addition to this, the opponent is required to submit a separate written statement after the public examination according to the instructions provided in this document.

Decision-making

Once the faculty has received the opponent's and assessment board's statements, the Faculty Council decides the grade of the dissertation. The doctoral candidate will be given the opportunity to respond to the statements before the decision is made. The doctoral candidate also has the right to submit a request for rectification concerning the grading decision of the dissertation.

GRADING SCALE

The dissertation must meet the following scientific criteria and requirements for learning and competence. The dissertation must:

- include new scientific knowledge and substantiated results as well as be scientifically convincing;
- demonstrate the candidate's critical thinking, profound knowledge of the research field, command of scientific research methods and ability to apply them as well as
- be scientifically honest and follow the norms of research integrity.

The Faculty Council decides on the final grade of the dissertation on a three-step scale of "Fail – Pass – Pass with distinction" after the public examination, based on the evaluations of the dissertation made by the opponent(s) and the assessment board.

The dissertation is graded at the Faculty of Sport and Health Sciences on the following scale:

"Pass with distinction"

The grade "Pass with distinction" is only given to work of an extremely high standard, and which belongs to the top 5% in the research area. The grade "Pass with distinction" requires that all of the following criteria are fulfilled:

- The thesis is scientifically outstanding.
- The thesis clearly advances theory and understanding in the research area.
- The observations and conclusions of the thesis are essentially new.
- The results are extremely significant in the research area.
- The scientific articles from the thesis are published in high quality international scientific journals and the thesis chapters are excellently presented (literature review, methods, results and discussion).
- The candidate played a significant and independent role in obtaining the results.
- The candidate defended the thesis excellently in the public PhD defence.

"Pass"

The scientific contribution of the work satisfies the requirements of a PhD thesis:

- The aims are clearly defined; the theoretical framework and empirical part of the work conform to accepted practices in the research field.
- The conclusions are supported by the results obtained.
- Ethical aspects have been adequately addressed.
- The candidate has shown, both in the thesis and the PhD defence, a good understanding of their own research field and its societal significance.
- They have also demonstrated competence in their research area, having

independently and critically used scientific methods to generate new scientific knowledge.

"Fail"

The work contains clear deficiencies in several of the following areas:

- The aims are not clearly defined.
- The work does not make sufficient scientific contribution.
- Both the theoretical framework and the empirical part of the work contain serious deficiencies or problems.
- The conclusions are not supported by the results obtained.
- The ethical aspects of the research have not been adequately addressed.

PUBLIC EXAMINATION EVENT

The public examination of a dissertation is a public occasion which anyone interested in science is welcome to attend. The public examination of the dissertation may last no longer than four hours, and the doctoral candidate's *lectio praecursoria* (introductory lecture) no longer than 20 minutes. Typically, the examination lasts between 2 to 2.5 hours.

Following the lectio praecursoria given by the doctoral candidate, the opponent gives a brief opening speech, summarising the position of the dissertation within the broader context of the academic field. This speech usually lasts only a few minutes and may touch upon themes such as the significance or innovativeness of the research, previous studies related to the topic, interdisciplinary connections, or the social and scientific relevance of the research. The opponent does not need to address the aims or contents of the dissertation in the opening speech, as these are covered in the lectio praecursoria. The opening speech should not include specific criticism or evaluations of the dissertation; such assessments should be presented in the opponent's closing statement at the end of the examination.

Following the opening speech, the doctoral candidate and the opponent engage in a discussion on the dissertation's topic. The opponent poses questions concerning the final version of the manuscript. The public examination should be a high-level academic dialogue between two experts in the field, rather than a mere listing of errors in the dissertation.

The opponent should allocate the available time in such a way that there is enough time left at the end of the event to discuss the research findings and conclusions. Since not all attendees may be familiar with the research field or topic, the opponent is encouraged to consider the audience when framing questions or describing specific theories or methods, so that everyone can follow the discussion. In addition to providing valuable feedback to the doctoral candidate, the public examination also serves as a learning opportunity for the audience.

In the closing statement, the opponent summarizes the strengths and weaknesses of the dissertation and states whether they recommend its acceptance as a doctoral thesis by the faculty. The closing statement should not reiterate the contents of the dissertation but rather provide an evaluative summary of its position within the research field and discipline, briefly assess the approaches, methods, conclusions, and future research opportunities. The closing statement should not include a proposed grade for the dissertation, nor should it introduce new criticism that was not discussed earlier and to which the candidate has not had the opportunity to respond.

The opening and closing statements may serve as the basis for the opponent's written statement submitted to the faculty after the public examination.

Language of the Public Examination: The doctoral candidate discusses the language used in the public examination with the custos. The custos shall determine the language of the public examination in advance, after hearing both the doctoral candidate and the opponent(s). It is possible to use several languages in the public examination if it has been agreed upon with the custos, the doctoral candidate and the opponent.

Dress Code for the Public Examination: At the public examination, the doctoral candidate, opponent, and custos dress appropriately for the dignity of the occasion. The choice of the dress code is made by the candidate in consultation with the custos. The custos will inform the Opponent of the dress code. The traditional dress codes are:

- A tailcoat and a black waistcoat
- Dark suit
- Black long-sleeved dress or two-piece suit with a small neckline without a hat

The doctoral candidate, Opponent, and Custos may also wear the [ceremonial gown of the University](#). Foreign opponents may wear the ceremonial gown of their university.

After the public examination, an informal coffee or sparkling wine reception may be held. Later in the evening, the *karonkka* (post-doctoral party) is often organized in honor of the opponent, to which the doctoral candidate invites the opponent. At the karonkka, the opponent is expected to give a short celebratory speech following the candidate's speech.

The custos provides detailed instructions regarding the public examination. Further information is available on the University of Jyväskylä website: [Public examination event | University of Jyväskylä](#).

Public examination procedure

The examination event is an open public event, where the dissertation is examined. The public examinations of doctoral dissertations at the University of Jyväskylä follow traditional customs and forms, which may vary between disciplines and change over time. The general structure of the examination and generally used phrases can be found on the University of Jyväskylä website: [Public examination of the dissertation | University of](#)

[Jyväskylä.](#)

If there are several opponents, they will agree amongst themselves on how to take turns speaking.

The aim of the public examination is to generate a high-level discussion between two experts in their respective fields on topics arising from the dissertation. An informed layperson should be able to follow the discussion, and it should give them food for thought as well. As a public occasion, public examinations are visible illustrations of university life.

If any member of the audience who has requested a turn to speak makes a comment on unethical conduct, the custos writes the comment down, or, if the comment is long and detailed, requests the comment in writing in the same form and extent as it was presented at the public examination within five days from the examination. The written comment is submitted to the faculty council for information in connection with the evaluation of the dissertation.