

Instructions for the Opponent of the PhD defence

Institute of Ecology and Earth Sciences, University of Tartu

Doctoral thesis is based on independent research of the candidate the results of which are published in international professional literature. Typically, a thesis represents an integrated collection of research papers, three as a minimum. The introductory chapter provides a summary of the research and outlines the generalizations derived from it. Doctoral thesis may also be written as a monograph. More details can be found at [UT Regulations for Doctoral Studies](#).

We kindly ask the opponent to note the following:

1. Doctoral theses are defended at a meeting of the council in the form of a public academic discussion. The audience usually includes researchers from the home department, other PhD students, as well as the doctoral candidate's friends and family members.
2. There is only one opponent, invited from outside of the university.
3. The role of the opponent is to lead the one-to-one public discussion with the candidate. The opponent is not required to provide any written statements, either before or after the defence. The opponent's questions must not be revealed to the candidate in advance.
4. The applicant will present an introductory talk, providing a brief overview of the thesis, including its aims, background, results, and conclusions.
5. This will be followed by a discussion between the applicant and the opponent. The opponent may choose to make a short introductory presentation, though this is not mandatory. The opponent may or may not use slides to support the discussion.
6. The main goal of the disputation is to allow the applicant to publicly demonstrate their competence and understanding of the topic. The opponent's questions can range from most general ones to very specific aspects of the research. It is always useful to touch broad conceptual issues. Links made to potential applications, interests of the society and ways to communicate science are similarly welcome.
7. After the discussion between the applicant and the opponent, members of the Doctoral Committee, followed by the public, may and will ask additional questions.
8. The Doctoral Committee will make its final decision in a closed meeting by open vote. The opponent, as a member of the Committee, will participate in this meeting and has the right to vote.
9. The opponent's comments and the applicant's ability to respond are key points in the Committee's decision on whether the applicant meets the requirements for a PhD. Doctoral theses are not graded at the University of Tartu.

10. There is no formal dress code for the opponent or any Committee members. However, the applicant, opponent, and Chairman of the Committee often wear a more formal attire.

Outline of the Examination Procedure:

- Introductory words by the Chairman
- Introductory presentation by the applicant (maximum 30 minutes)
- Discussion between the applicant and the opponent (typically 1 to 1.5 hours, no formal time limit)
- Questions and comments from Committee members
- Questions and comments from the audience
- Committee deliberation in a closed meeting in a separate room, returning after the decision has been made
- Public Announcement of the decision by the Chairman of the Committee
- Concluding statement from the applicant