

## Institute of Philosophy and Semiotics, University of Tartu Guidelines for opponents of doctoral theses<sup>1</sup>

### 1. What is a doctoral thesis?

1.1. A doctoral thesis is an independent research paper that presents a well-argued original solution to a specific scientific problem and the results of which are published in international professional literature. A doctoral thesis contains (the order may vary):

1.1.1. an overview of the current situation of the field of research and the position of the research problem in it;

1.1.2. the formulation of the research task;

1.1.3. the statements presented for defence;

1.1.4. a description of methodology;

1.1.5. the course and/or proof of the resolution of the research task;

1.1.6. conclusions;

1.1.7. a summary;

1.1.8. a list of references;

1.1.9. an exhaustive Estonian summary of different parts of the thesis if the doctoral thesis has been written in a foreign language or an exhaustive foreign-language summary of different parts of the thesis if the doctoral thesis has been written in Estonian;

1.1.10. in the case of an artistic project, its documented and published public presentation;

1.1.11. the author's curriculum vitae including the name, date of birth, an email address that continues to be valid after graduation, education and professional history, information about the main fields of research, research publications or patents, and membership in professional organisations.

1.2 A doctoral thesis may be presented in one of the following formats:

1.2.1. As an integrated collection of research publications: a summary article accompanied by the compilation of previously published articles (generally three), the collection of which is published in the university's publication series "Dissertationes ... Universitatis Tartuensis". In this case, the prerequisite is the publication of at least two articles in leading international peer-reviewed scientific journals, which have an international panel, are internationally distributed, indexed in several international databases, and open to contributions; or in publications of recognised international research publishing houses; the third article may have been peer-reviewed by two internationally recognised independent researchers selected by the council. If an article

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<sup>1</sup> These guidelines are based on Regulations for Doctoral Studies (*Doktoriõppe eeskiri*), approved by the Senate of the University of Tartu, Regulation No. 4 of 28 May 2021. In case of dispute or ambiguity, the authority lies with Regulations for Doctoral Studies.

forms a part of a joint research, the contribution of the doctoral candidate must be significant and thoroughly described in the doctoral thesis.

1.2.2. As a monograph to be published in the university's publication series "Dissertationes ... Universitatis Tartuensis", which meets the requirements listed in section 1 of the present guidelines and which has received a preliminary review by at least two independent recognised researchers of the specialisation. The author of a monograph to be published in the university's series of doctoral theses must have published or received an acceptance for publication at least one research publication on the topic of the doctoral thesis meeting the criteria described in 1.2.1.

1.2.3. As a monograph published by an internationally recognised research publishing house, supplemented by a summarising review article meeting the criteria described in clause 1.1.

1.2.4 As an artistic research, see more at RDS (clauses 93–95).

1.3. Research publications accepted for publication (but not yet published) meet the requirements listed in 1.2.1 and 1.2.2, if an official confirmation about acceptance for publishing is submitted.

## **2. The evaluation criteria**

2.1. A doctoral thesis is evaluated in two stages of which the preliminary review is the first, and the defence is the second.

2.2. By allowing a thesis to be defended, the Council of the Institute confirms that the thesis complies with the requirements and that the applicant deserves a doctorate in the event of successful defence. The thesis can nevertheless fail to be successfully defended in the extraordinary case in which serious problems are found with the content or form of the thesis, or with the oral presentation of the candidate.

2.3. The opponent must present a written review that contains the comments and questions for the academic discussion and the overall evaluation of the thesis.

2.4. The thesis is evaluated according to the following criteria:

2.4.1. The choice of topic, research problem, scope of the task and research questions: the information value of the topic must be significant.

2.4.2. The account of previous research: the study must be a purposeful continuation to an earlier discourse, or present a new approach to the topic. Earlier studies must be taken into account, but they should not be repeated.

2.4.3. Clarity of terminology and argumentation, command of the theory of the topic: it must be clear to the reader what the research is about.

2.4.4. Methodology employed: the researcher must reflect on the chosen approach and justify it.

2.4.5. Presentation of the results and conclusions: the importance of the results and conclusions must not be either over- or under-valued from the point of view of the advancement of science. The analysis must be logical and take into account different viewpoints. A further merit of the work may be the possibility for future research and the importance of the research for society.

2.4.6. Formal aspects: the presentation must have a logical structure and be clearly written. The ideas must not be submerged in a flood of information.

2.4.7. Undogmatic approach: a researcher must be critical about earlier studies, theories, methods, materials, sources and the scientific value of their work. In other words, a good piece of research is original and independent.

2.5. As described in section 1.2.1, a doctoral thesis may be presented as an integrated collection of research publications: a summarising review article accompanied by the compilation of articles or chapters (at least 3) on a related topic. The summarising review article must contain an overview of the research topic, the description of goals of the accompanying articles in the context of the current situation of the field of research, and explanation of the methods used. The summarising article unifies the results and conclusions of the accompanying articles into a coherent whole and provides an evaluation of the importance and applicability of the results and contribution to further research on the topic. The summarising review article must meet the formal requirements for research publications.

2.6. There are some differences between evaluating a doctoral thesis based on articles and a monograph:

2.6.1. Some of the articles may form a part of a joint research, in which case the contribution of the doctoral candidate must be significant and thoroughly described in the doctoral thesis.

2.6.2. The reviewer must present their opinion about the scientific level of the whole thesis (based both on the summary article and on all submitted publications). This should address the question whether the different parts of the thesis form a sufficient, coherent and comprehensive whole. No detailed review of the publications is necessary, but questions about their content may be presented in the academic discussion.

2.6.3. Publications are presented in an unmodified form. In the articles that deal with similar topics, a slight degree of overlap and repetition is allowed.

### **3. Defence of the doctoral thesis**

3.1. The defence of the doctoral thesis takes place at a meeting of the Council of the Institute as a public academic discussion. At least one opponent must be present for the defence to occur (one can also participate using real-time two-way audio-video communication).

3.2. The defence consists of the following:

3.2.1. introduction by the chair of the meeting and introduction of the doctoral candidate;

3.2.2. presentation by the doctoral candidate (*lectio praecursoria*);

3.2.3. remarks by the opponent(s)

3.2.4. academic discussion between the doctoral candidate and the opponent(s);

3.2.6. academic discussion with the participation of the members of the Council and the audience;

3.2.7. adoption of the Council's decision;

3.2.7. announcement of the Council's decision;

3.2.8. final remarks of the doctoral candidate.

3.3. The adoption of the decision takes place in a closed discussion involving the members of the Council, as well as opponent(s) and supervisor(s) who do not have the right to vote. Taking into account the assessments of the opponent(s) to the doctoral thesis and the discussion, the Council makes one of following decisions in a public vote:

3.3.1. the doctoral thesis was defended successfully (grade: ‘defended’). The doctoral degree is awarded to the doctoral candidate;

3.3.2. the doctoral thesis was not defended successfully (grade: ‘not defended’). The doctoral degree is not awarded to the doctoral candidate;

3.3.3. the decision is not made due to suspicion of plagiarism or academic fraud. The doctoral thesis is sent to experts for assessment.

#### **4. Ethical guidelines**

4.1. Institute of Philosophy and Semiotics pays particular attention to the objectivity and transparency of the evaluation process, thus aiming to avoid the conflict of interests. If a conflict of interests occurs with respect to the evaluation task, the opponent must declare this immediately in writing to the Head of the Institute. The opponent must also inform the Head of the Institute of any other aspects that may influence the objectivity of the review.

4.2. A conflict of interests occurs when:

4.2.1. the opponent may benefit in any way from the outcome of the defence;

4.2.2. the opponent has supervised or otherwise substantially advised the doctoral candidate in the preparation of the thesis (this does not include the advice given as a part of the preliminary review, or the case when the opponent has peer-reviewed the accompanying publications);

4.2.3. the opponent has published joint research with the doctoral candidate within last 5 years;

4.2.4. the opponent is a close research collaborate of the candidate or one of the co-authors of accompanying publications or stands in the superior-subordinate relationship with them;

4.2.5. the opponent has a close familial or personal relationship with the candidate or one of the co-authors.

4.3. In order to avoid legal problems, the opponent communicates during the decision-making process only with the Head of the Institute or an appointed representative of the Institute, i.e. the opponent does not pass their opinion to the doctoral candidate, supervisor, or any third parties. During the review process, the reviewer must not consult with the doctoral candidate, supervisor, or third parties, nor give them information about the contents of the review.

#### **5. Review**

5.1. The signed review must be presented at least one week before the agreed date of defence by sending it as an attachment by email to the Secretary of the Council.

#### **6. Fee**

6.1 The work of the opponent remunerated with the fee of 250 EUR. In addition, the travel and accommodation costs incurred by attending the defence are reimbursed.