



Pre-examiners and opponents

GUIDELINES FOR THESIS PRE-EXAMINERS AND OPPONENTS

Short guide for pre-examiners:

- The evaluation should be conducted within **two (2) months** after the pre-examiner has received the thesis manuscript.
- The purpose of the pre-examination is to ensure that the thesis manuscript meets the set scientific and formal requirements.
- The pre-examiner is asked to write a statement of 1–3 pages in length and fill in the pre-examiner's assessment form.
- If the pre-examiner recommends granting the permission to defend the thesis, the pre-examiner also proposes a grade for the thesis (Pass, or Pass with distinction). "Pass with distinction" is given only for an exceptionally high quality thesis representing the top 15% in its field.
- If the pre-examiner is unable to recommend granting the permission to defend the thesis, even if the thesis were to undergo major revision, he/she should provide the reason for this and propose the grade "fail".

Short guide for opponent(s):

- During the thesis defense, the opponent is asked to follow the procedural guidelines given by the Graduate School or custodian.
- A written statement of 2–5 pages in length, and a completed "Opponent's assessment form" should be delivered within one (1) week following the thesis defense.
- The opponent is asked to propose a grade for the thesis (Fail, Pass, or Pass with distinction). "Pass with distinction" is given only for an exceptionally high quality thesis representing the top 15% in its field.



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Guidelines for the thesis manuscript pre-examiners

Doctoral thesis requirements

According to University law (794/2004) 5 22§, "As a doctoral dissertation may also be approved a number of scientific publications or manuscripts vetted for publication deemed sufficient by the university which deal with the same set of problems, and a paper summarizing the findings, or some other work which meets the corresponding scientific criteria".

In line with the University Law, the University of Oulu Graduate School has defined that the doctoral thesis should show evidence that the doctoral student can independently and critically apply scientific research methods and generate new scientific knowledge. A doctoral thesis can be a compilation of published research articles and/or manuscripts, and a summary based on these, or it can be a monograph, the results of which may have been, or will be, published also in other scientific series. A compilation-based thesis may include multiple published articles, accepted manuscripts, or other manuscripts, but a single article published, or accepted for publication, in a high-quality scientific journal can be sufficient. The doctoral thesis may contain joint publications, or manuscripts, if the independent contribution of the doctoral student can be clearly demonstrated. The doctoral training is defined in such a way that the doctoral degree and related research can be completed within a time equivalent to four years of full-time studies and research work. When evaluating the thesis, the pre-examiner should take this time constraint into account and benchmark the thesis in question to the general level of the approved theses in the field of research.

Pre-examiner's assignment

When choosing the pre-examiners, the issues concerning possible conflicts of interest, impartiality in examining the thesis, and expertise in the research area, have been considered. However, if the pre-examiner recognizes a conflict of interest, he/she is asked to immediately contact the Lead Specialist.

The purpose of the examination procedure is to ensure, before the thesis defense permission is granted, that the thesis manuscript meets the set scientific and formal requirements. In addition, the examination procedure is the stage at which the pre-examiners can impact on the quality of the thesis by suggesting either mandatory, or voluntary revisions.

The pre-examiner may, if necessary, discuss with the supervisor or the doctoral candidate about some aspects of the review, or possible revisions to the thesis manuscript. However, the pre-examiner is not supposed to serve as an additional supervisor or adviser of the thesis research.



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The pre-examiner is asked to write a statement (typically of 1–3 pages in length) and fill in the pre-examiner's assessment form. In the form, the thesis is assessed on a scale of 1 (poor) – 4 (excellent). Guidelines have been prepared to facilitate the assessment, and are attached to the form. Pre-examiners can also rely on other criteria if well justified. In the same form, the pre-examiners are asked to indicate whether they consider that permission should be granted to defend the thesis, or not. The recommendation to grant the permission to defend is interpreted so that the pre-examiner considers that the dissertation can be graded either as pass, or pass with distinction considering the written thesis manuscript (more details about the grading below). In that assessment, the pre-examiner can make four different recommendations:

A. Thesis defense permission may be granted.

The thesis is acceptable and ready for publication as such, or there are at most some very minor technical or language corrections to be made.

B. Thesis defense permission could be granted after making the recommended minor revisions (no need for new pre-examination).

The thesis is acceptable from the research contents perspective, but some clarifications or corrections need to be made (detailed in the written statement). The corrections are straightforward and can be checked by the supervisor and there is no need for a further review round. The quality of the thesis is evident and the pre-examiner can give his/her recommendation of the grade of the thesis. (If this is not the case, this option should not be picked, but a new review round should be requested.)

C. Major revisions should be made to the thesis manuscript (new pre-examination required) after which the defense permission is reconsidered.

The thesis requires major corrections also to the content (detailed in the written statement). A new review round is necessary. The recommendation for the thesis grade is not given yet.

D. Thesis defense permission should not to be granted.

The research or results have major shortcomings such that the thesis does not meet the requirements for a doctoral thesis. At least one more year of research work is needed for it to qualify as a doctoral thesis, or the complete set-up is erroneous. This option should also be selected if severe plagiarism is observed. In any case, the details should be reported in the written statement. The recommendation for the thesis grade does not need to be given, but if it were, it would typically be "fail".

The pre-examiner should consider the following aspects in her/his **written statement**, and emphasize the field-specific features and characters: Scientific significance, problem setting, theoretical framework, methods and data, own contribution, findings and validity (and, if applicable, the statistical analysis), conclusions and discussion, and finally the composition and presentation of the work. Guidelines on how to evaluate these on a scale of 1 – 4 are attached to the assessment form. The pre-examiners should conclude the statement with a brief summary of the merits and shortcomings of the thesis, and propose whether the



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permission to publish and defend the thesis should be granted or denied. That statement should be in line with one of the options A–D (see above) picked by the pre-examiner in the grading form.

When the thesis is in a form that the pre-examiner can recommend granting the permission to defend the thesis, **the pre-examiner proposes a grade for the thesis**. If significant improvements are needed, the pre-examiner should check the revised thesis manuscript so that a grade recommendation can be made. The doctoral training committee evaluates the thesis on the basis of the statements submitted by the pre-examiners and by the opponent(s). There are three possible grades: **Fail, Pass, and Pass with distinction**. The grade fail would imply that the permission to defend should not be recommended. To receive a grade of "Pass with distinction", the thesis should be of an exceptionally high quality and represent the top 15% in its field. If the pre-examiner is proposing this, the statement must conclude with a short separate explanation of why the higher grade should be awarded. The grade of "Pass with distinction" presumes that:

- The thesis is scientifically exceptional,
- The observations and findings are essentially new,
- The findings are important to the field,
- The articles in a compilation-based thesis are published in high-level, international series,

The faculty of the candidate takes care of paying the indemnities of the pre-examiner. The fees are paid upon completion of the examination and receipt of the pre-examiner's statement. The pre-examiner is asked to fill in the Commission Form and to submit it to the Service Point of the faculty. More detailed instructions for this will be provided by the faculty upon request.

The statement and the assessment form should be submitted within two (2) months from the date on which the manuscript was received by the pre-examiner. The statement of the pre-examiner is addressed to the doctoral training committee, and delivered to the Lead Specialist.

Thank you for your cooperation!



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Guidelines for the opponent

When choosing the opponent, the issues concerning possible conflicts of interest, impartiality in examining the thesis, and expertise in the research area, have been considered. However, if the pre-examiner recognizes a conflict of interest, he/she is asked to immediately contact the Lead Specialist.

The role of the opponent's statement is important, because it is considered to be the final characterization of the scientific value of thesis. The following guidelines are provided in order to facilitate the task of the opponent in giving his/her statement, and to harmonize the grading of theses throughout the university. Opponents may also rely on other criteria if well justified.

During the thesis defense, the opponent is asked to follow the procedural guidelines (Chapter 4 in this [document](#)) given by the Graduate School or custodian. If there are opponents participating in the thesis defense other than those that were nominated by the graduate school (i.e. those who participate during the time the floor is opened for the audience to join the discussion), sometimes referred to as "extra opponents", the key contents of their statements should be recorded by the nominated opponent(s). Such comments should be reflected in the opponent's written statement.

According to the rules of the University of Oulu Graduate School, the opponent should address a **written statement** to the doctoral training committee **within one week following the thesis defense**. In his/her statement, the opponent should especially take into account the scientific value of the thesis. In addition, the opponent should evaluate the candidate's ability to publically defend his/her thesis. After receiving the statement, the doctoral training committee makes the decisions regarding the acceptance of doctoral thesis and its grade.

The doctoral training committee may require one or two opponents to participate in the public examination of the thesis (in exceptional cases, such as in Joint Doctoral Degrees, even more opponents can be required). If there are two opponents, they should, together, agree beforehand on how to handle the thesis and the examination. In addition, they are asked to write a joint statement of thesis and the fluency of the public examination.

In addition to the written statement (recommended length: 2–5 pages), the opponent should fill in the attached form, on which the thesis and the public defense should be evaluated on a scale 1 (poor) – 4 (excellent). If there are two nominated opponents, they can either fill in one form jointly, or two separate ones. Guidelines describing how to evaluate these are attached to the assessment form. In addition, the opponent should clearly state his/her recommendation for the grade of the thesis. The written assessment should also reflect on the following aspects:



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- Scientific significance
- Problem setting
- Theoretical framework
- Methods and data
- Own contribution
- Findings and validity
- Conclusions and discussion
- Composition and presentation of the work
- The candidate's ability to publically defend his/her thesis.

The doctoral training committee evaluates the thesis on the basis of the statements submitted by the pre-examiners and by the opponent. There are three grades: **Fail, Pass, and Pass with distinction**. The latter is only awarded for exceptionally high-quality theses. To receive a grade of "Pass with distinction", the thesis should represent the top 15% in its field. If the opponent is proposing this, the statement must conclude with a short separate explanation of why the higher grade should be awarded. The grade of "Pass with distinction" presumes that:

- The thesis is scientifically exceptional,
- The observations and findings are essentially new,
- The findings are important to the field,
- The articles in a compilation-based thesis are published in high-level international series,
- The thesis was defended outstandingly during the public examination.

The faculty of the candidate takes care of paying the fee and travel costs of the opponent. The fees are paid upon completion of the examination and receipt of the opponent's statement. The opponent is asked to fill in the Commission Form and to submit it to the Service Point of the faculty. More detailed instructions for this will be provided by the faculty upon request.

We kindly ask you to write the statement and fill in the assessment form right after the thesis ceremony and deliver them to the Lead Specialist.

Thank you for your cooperation!