

Information to the assessment committee

MF Norwegian School of Theology, Religion and Society

Assessing a Norwegian PhD

The evaluation a Norwegian PhD dissertation follows international standards in the field and should focus on whether it is an independent, cohesive scientific work of high academic merit with regards to research questions, methodology, theory, material, analysis, and presentation. The dissertation should generate new academic knowledge. The material and methods used should be suitable for addressing the research question, and the arguments and conclusions, tenable.

Still, members of the assessment committee might find that the process of evaluating a PhD thesis is different in Norway compared to other contexts.

In Norway the thesis should be evaluated as it is submitted. The dissertation should be of sufficiently high quality to be published as part of the academic literature in the field. However, it does not need to be ready for book publication. Usually, the candidate will revise the dissertation after considering the statement given by the assessment committee and according to the discussion during the public defence, before approaching a publisher.

A list of errors (errata list) may be sent to the assessment committee. This list might typically include formal errors such as typos and punctuation errors. The errata list may not include substantial changes of text or extensive deletions. The list will be added as an insert in the dissertation that is available during the public defence.

Further, a Norwegian PhD dissertation is not given a grade, but the assessment committee will conclude that it either 1) is worthy of public defence, 2) may be revised and resubmitted

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within 6 months, or 3) is not approved (and may not be resubmitted for at least 6 months). The committee should recommend revision and resubmission if it believes that a revision could give satisfactory results within 6 months of work and the committee should provide guidelines regarding those areas in which the dissertation should be strengthened (i.e., use of methodology, relationship between the material and conclusion, use of concepts, clarity of research question). If the committee finds that profound changes regarding theory, hypothesis, material and/or methodology are necessary for the dissertation to be approved for public defence, the committee should not recommend submission of the same dissertation in revised form for evaluation, but conclude that the dissertation is not approved.

If the dissertation, despite possible criticism, comments or suggestions stated in the report, is deemed “worthy of public defence”, both the trial lecture and the public defence are normally also approved by the assessment committee.

The committee’s statement

The committee chairperson (internal member) is responsible for organizing the committee's work, coordinating the committee's statement and clarifying the division of work between the committee members during the public defence. The chairperson will contact you soon.

The committee's statement will normally follow this structure:

1. Description of the work (normally by committee chair)
2. Positive qualities
3. Matters to be discussed, problems, weaknesses
4. Conclusion
5. Date and names of the committee members

There are three possible conclusions and the conclusion of the assessment committee should be clearly stated at the end of the report:

- a) The present thesis is deemed **worthy of being defended** publicly.
- b) The candidate is granted permission to make **minor revisions** before the final recommendation is made. The present thesis must then be re-worked within a framework of

maximum six months. Recommendations of what needs to be done must be included in the committee's statement.

c) The thesis needs **major revisions and is not worthy of defence**. In this case, the candidate can resubmit the thesis only after at least six months. The committee's statement must include recommendations about what needs to be changed to fulfil the expectations of a PhD dissertation in the field.

The committee leader sends the statement electronically to the PhD coordinator.

If the committee's decision is unanimous, MF's rector will make a decision in line with the committee's decision. If the committee's decision is not unanimous, the case will be presented to and discussed by MF's research committee.

Topic for trial lecture

Regarding the topic of the stated trial lecture, the regulations state: "The topic of the trial lecture must not be directly related to the topic of the dissertation, but contribute to documenting the doctoral student's academic breadth within the chosen subject area." The assessment committee agrees on the topic for the trial lecture and the order of the external opponents when it finalises the committee statement.

The public defence

If the assessment committee decides that a PhD thesis is worthy of being publicly defended, a public defence is organized at MF in Oslo. This includes both a trial lecture and a discussion of the thesis. The defence is chaired by MF's rector. Members of the assessment committee who reside outside of Europe, are normally expected to take part in the public defence digitally in the Central European Time given.

The trial lecture

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The purpose of the public trial lecture is to test the candidate's ability to acquire knowledge and discuss research beyond the topic of the thesis and the candidate's ability to present this in a public lecture. The trial lecture will normally be conducted in the language of the thesis.

The assessment committee decides the topic for the trial lecture and submits this to the PhD-coordinator at MF together with the report from the committee.

Two weeks before the lecture, MF informs the candidate of the topic.

The trial lecture starts at 10.15 AM on the day set for the public defence. A written copy of the lecture will be sent to the assessment committee one day in advance.

The assessment committee must consider whether the lecture is "satisfactory" as an academic lecture. There is no further grading of the trial lecture.

The assessment committee will also be invited to give the candidate brief feedback in the break between the trial lecture and the public defence proper.

The defence

The aim of the public defence is to give the audience an understanding of what kind of research the doctoral candidate has undertaken and the contribution this research makes to knowledge production and contemporary research in the field. The discussion should highlight constructive and critical comments on the various aspects of the dissertation, for example concerning the research questions, hypothesis, design, methods, theoretical framework, material, analysis, and results. A good public defence is one where a real and interesting scholarly dialogue takes place.

The public defence starts at 12:15 pm on the set day.

After a brief, formal introduction by the rector, the doctoral candidate is given up to 10 mins to present their work, normally by giving a brief abstract of the PhD thesis.

This is followed by a discussion with the first examiner. This normally takes approx. 60 minutes, including responses from the doctoral candidate.

The committee usually agrees in advance on which aspects and topics that are to be discussed by the two examiners respectively. We suggest that the first examiner initially states the main themes that they are going to discuss, time allowing. A good exchange is stimulating, critical, and scholarly informative. Decisive critical questions and inquiries as well as suggestions for alternative approaches are welcome. The candidate should experience the exchange as an opportunity to present and elaborate her/his work, as well as to learn from others during the session.

After the short break (15 minutes), questions *ex auditorio* are welcomed. Those who want to pose such questions must indicate this to the leader of the public defence before the end of the break. Comments or questions *ex auditorio* are short and to-the-point, and the doctoral candidate gives short responses.

The second examiner closes the public defence with a somewhat shorter discussion, approx. 45-60 mins. It is the second examiner's task to decide when to finish the dialogue by thanking the doctoral candidate for the work and the discussions.

Assessment

After the defence, the committee will discuss whether it can be approved. As the PhD thesis has already been found worthy of being publicly defended, both the thesis and the defence will normally be approved for the doctoral degree.

If, however, during the public defence, the thesis' central conclusions prove to be undoubtedly untenable or significant breaches of key norms of research ethics or good

academic practice are discovered, the assessment committee may consider the public defence as not approved.

Normally the leader of the examination committee will announce the assessment of the defence: "The examination has heard the public defence by the candidate NN and finds the defence to be satisfactory".

The rector will then summarize the approved requirements for the PhD degree and award the PhD degree to the candidate.

This concludes the public defence (normally before 3 PM).

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