

Guidelines and framework for the preparation of PhD recommendations at the Faculty of Arts, Aarhus University

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The guidelines are primarily intended for the assessment committee but also the principal supervisor, and they describe, based on the current rules and regulations, the tasks of the assessment committee and the formal requirements, structure and content of the preliminary recommendation and the final recommendation, respectively.

Legal basis

The legal basis for awarding the PhD degree consists of the following:

- Rules and guidelines for the PhD degree programme at the Graduate School, Arts:
https://phd.arts.au.dk/fileadmin/phd.arts.au.dk/AR/Generelle_retningslinjer_UK_1-11-2012.pdf
- Ministerial Order no. 1039 of 27 August 2013 on the PhD Programme at the Universities and Certain Higher Artistic Educational Institutions (PhD Order): https://phd.arts.au.dk/fileadmin/phd.arts.au.dk/AR/Phd-bekendtgørelse_2013_UK.pdf
- Basic principles of PhD education at Aarhus University:
<https://phd.au.dk/strategy-and-collaboration/basic-principles-of-phd-education/>
- Aarhus University's rules regarding PhD education:
<https://medarbejdere.au.dk/en/strategy/au-rules-and-regulations>
- The University Act's rules regarding graduate schools and the award of PhD degrees etc.:
https://ufm.dk/en/legislation/prevaling-laws-and-regulations/education/education-institutions/?set_language=en

General requirements for the PhD dissertation

In accordance with the above legal basis, the following general requirements apply to the dissertation:

As a general rule, the assessment of the dissertation is subject to the successful completion of the entire PhD degree programme. In special cases, however, the institution may decide to accept a dissertation for assessment without the author having completed the PhD degree programme if the institution finds that the author has in other ways acquired comparable qualifications. The institution may also accept a PhD dissertation written by a PhD student from a foreign educational institution for assessment if the PhD student has completed a period of study at the Danish institution within the framework of a collaboration agreement.

The dissertation must document that the author has completed a research project by independently applying the relevant research methods, thereby carrying out research work that meets the international standards for PhD degrees within the subject area.

A dissertation may not be submitted for assessment by two or more authors jointly. The underlying research project, on the other hand, may be carried out in collaboration with others.

The dissertation can take one of the following forms:

- **Monograph:**
A dissertation written by the author independently
- **Article-based dissertation:**
A dissertation based on a collection of articles which are related in terms of content and/or method and in which the results achieved during the PhD degree programme are presented and possibly published, either by the author alone or together with other authors.

In addition, the dissertation must include an independently produced extended summary (in Danish: *kappe*), which takes the form of a large-scale summary article. The extended summary must include the following:

- The research project as a whole
- The overall issue addressed by the dissertation
- A clarification of the field of research – including method and theory
- A research overview (if not included in the sub-works)
- The relationship between the individual sub-works and their relationship to the project as a whole
- A presentation of the results achieved, including an assessment of the methods applied
- A discussion of the status of the author's own research results in relation to other significant research in the field.

For both types of dissertation, the following applies:

- The dissertation must, in principle, be written in Danish or English. However, the head of graduate school may grant pre-approval of the dissertation being written in another language.
- Other material may be submitted along with the written dissertation, such as a portfolio of works, films, software, exhibitions, performances or similar.

Regardless of the specific format of the submitted material, all elements must be contextualised in a way that is relevant to the research tradition of the subject.

- The length of the dissertation – including spaces, notes/footnotes, tables and diagrams – may not exceed 250 standard pages of 2,400 characters each, i.e.

a maximum of 600,000 characters.

In special cases, however, the PhD committee at the Graduate School, Arts may grant an exemption from this.

- The dissertation must include an abstract in both Danish and English of the research results achieved.
 - If the dissertation is written in a language other than Danish or English, the abstract must also be written in this language.
 - The abstracts in Danish, English and any other languages may not exceed 5 pages of 2,400 characters each.
- Please note that abstracts, bibliographies, catalogues, appendices, prefaces etc. are not included in the maximum number of characters.

Tasks of the assessment committee

The objective of the assessment committee's work is, based on the above-mentioned legal basis, to:

1. ensure an impartial academic assessment of the PhD dissertation
2. submit a preliminary recommendation to the graduate school management as to whether to conduct a defence
3. act as opponents at the PhD dissertation defence
4. submit a final recommendation to the institution as to whether the Academic Council should award the PhD degree.

At the start of the assessment process, all three members of the assessment committee receive the following via email to support the assessment of the dissertation:

- A link to download the PhD dissertation
- A letter to the assessment committee:
presenting the overall timetable for the assessment process, including the deadline for registration of the tentative date of the defence and submission of the preliminary recommendation

If the student has been enrolled in the PhD degree programme prior to submitting the dissertation, the following is also included:

- A solemn declaration:
a statement regarding the length of the dissertation and any previous assessment of the dissertation
- Principal supervisor statement and activity list:
documentation of completion of the other elements of the PhD degree programme in accordance with the PhD Order

- Other documents that may be relevant for the assessment of the dissertation:
e.g. co-author statements and approved requests for dispensation

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If the student has not been enrolled in the PhD degree programme prior to submitting the dissertation, the following is also included:

- A statement regarding submission of the PhD dissertation without prior enrolment in the PhD degree programme
- An overview of acquired qualifications that are comparable to a completed PhD degree programme
- Other documents that may be relevant for the assessment of the dissertation:
e.g. co-author statements

Overall timetable for the assessment of the dissertation

Immediately after submission of the dissertation

The PhD administration checks the legality of the documents received and sends the dissertation and the other documents to the assessment committee.

No later than two weeks after receipt of the dissertation

The chair of the assessment committee sends a tentative date and start time for the defence to the PhD administration and the relevant department secretary no later than two weeks after receiving the dissertation due to the pre-booking of a suitable room for the defence and IT support.

The tentative date and start time for the defence are determined jointly by the assessment committee, the PhD programme director, the principal supervisor and the author via the principal supervisor.

The final date for the defence is determined once it is clear that the dissertation can be accepted for defence, taking into account the graduate school management's deadline for approving the preliminary recommendation.

No later than two months after receipt of the dissertation

The assessment committee has two months to prepare a preliminary recommendation to the graduate school management as to whether the dissertation in its current form is found suitable for defence.

Please be aware that the month of July is not included in the calculation of the two-month period.

The chair of the assessment committee sends the preliminary recommendation in Word format to the PhD administration by the date specified in the above-mentioned letter to the assessment committee. Then the graduate school management has five working days to review the recommendation, to clarify any doubts with the assessment committee and to approve the recommendation. Remarks or suggestions for changes must be written in the same language as the preliminary recommendation and inserted as comments in the Word file.

No later than two months and one week after submission of the dissertation

The PhD administration sends the approved preliminary recommendation to the author and principal supervisor.

Recommendation to accept the dissertation for defence
Three months after submission of the dissertation

The defence takes place.

No later than one week after the defence

The assessment committee submits the final recommendation as soon as possible, but no later than one week after the defence. The chair of the assessment committee sends the recommendation in Word format to the PhD administration. Then the graduate school management has five working days to quality assure the recommendation.

No later than two weeks after the defence

The PhD administration sends the approved recommendation for the awarding of the PhD degree to the Academic Council, which then awards the PhD degree seven working days after the receipt of the recommendation.

Recommendation to not accept the dissertation for defence

If the assessment committee early in the assessment process finds that the dissertation is not suitable for defence, the chair of the assessment committee must notify the PhD programme director and the PhD administration as soon as possible.

Responsibilities of the chair

Throughout the assessment process, the chair has a number of areas of responsibility. Overall, the chair is responsible for:

- instructing the committee on the current rules regarding the assessment
- ensuring that the principal supervisor is able to follow the work of the committee from the outset – please see the “Role of the principal supervisor” section below

- coordinating the work of the assessment committee to ensure that deadlines and other formal requirements are met, including initiating the coordination with regard to setting a tentative date for the defence
 - in the event of delays or other problems, the chair must notify the relevant PhD programme administrator
- informing the assessment committee about the rules for drawing up the preliminary and final recommendation and about the tasks of the assessment committee members in connection with the defence
- combining the written contributions from the committee members and drawing up the preliminary and final recommendation, including ensuring the quality of the language used in the recommendation so that it constitutes a coherent text with a clear connection between the premises and the conclusion
 - the head of the graduate school, the PhD programme director and the PhD administration can provide advice and guidance, and should be contacted in case of doubt
- responding to any comments received from the graduate school management or from the Academic Council in connection with the quality assurance and, if necessary and after consulting with the other committee members, adjusting the recommendation
- if the dissertation is accepted for defence, allocating roles and tasks to the assessment committee members for the defence proceedings, including agreeing which topics should be brought up and which committee members should be the first and second opponents, respectively
- contacting the PhD programme administrator immediately if there is a prospect of a non-unanimous recommendation or a unanimous negative recommendation
 - any contact between the PhD student and the assessment committee takes place via the author's principal supervisor and/or PhD programme administrator.

Role of the principal supervisor

If the student has been enrolled in the PhD degree programme prior to submitting the dissertation, the following applies with regard to the author's principal supervisor:

The PhD student's principal supervisor assists the assessment committee without voting rights, among other things with a view to answering any requests for clarification concerning the underlying PhD programme and notifying the assessment committee of any matters that may be of importance to the academic assessment. The principal supervisor does not participate in the actual assessment work, and the assessment committee is entitled to communicate internally without involving the su-

pervisor. However, the principal supervisor is entitled to contact the assessment committee on the supervisor's own initiative and to receive information about significant aspects of the assessment, including seeing the first complete draft of the assessment.

Formal requirements of the preliminary and final recommendation

Length

Both the preliminary and the final recommendation must be 5-7 pages of 2,400 characters each including spaces, i.e. 12,000-16,800 characters.

Layout

To draw up the preliminary recommendation and the final recommendation, the assessment committee can use the graduate school's template, which is available in Danish and English under "Recommendation regarding PhD dissertation":

<https://phd.arts.au.dk/academic-staff/assessors-of-phd-dissertations>

If the assessment committee does not wish to use the above template, digital AU stationery can be used instead with the name and position of the chair in the colophon. The recommendation must be paginated, and all pages must feature the logo and colophon.

Language and language use

The language used must be sober, impartial and objective. Detailed instructions for improvements and changes regarding the layout or language, including specific comments on proofreading, should be avoided in the recommendation. If necessary, the assessment committee can draw up a supplementary list of mistakes, proofreading comments etc.

If all the committee members and the author can read Danish, the recommendation can be written in Danish. The assessment committee can choose to write the recommendation in English instead. If any of the committee members do not understand Danish, the recommendation must be written in English.

In special circumstances, and subject to dispensation granted by the head of graduate school, the recommendation can be written in a language other than Danish or English. This will normally be the case when dispensation has been granted to write the PhD dissertation in a language other than Danish or English.

The last page of the recommendation

Both the preliminary recommendation and the final recommendation can be signed by the chair alone on behalf of the assessment committee or by all three assessors.

In addition to the signature(s), the last page of the recommendation must contain text, i.e. at least the conclusion of the recommendation, and be dated.

Other requirements

The chair must send both the preliminary recommendation and the final recommendation in Word format to the PhD programme administrator in connection with the quality assurance by the graduate school management.

Preliminary recommendation – content and structure

The preliminary recommendation constitutes the basis of the graduate school's decision as to whether a defence should be conducted, whether the dissertation should be resubmitted by a specified deadline or whether a new assessment committee should be appointed. The preliminary recommendation also constitutes the basis of the author's preparation for the defence, and is normally used as the basis of the final recommendation. Therefore, the preliminary recommendation must be structured in a way that makes it possible to quickly draw up the final recommendation.

Overall, the preliminary recommendation must include a concise summary and a reasoned, critical assessment of the academic quality and international level of the dissertation. The premises on which the committee's assessment and conclusion are based must be stated clearly.

When a dissertation is resubmitted after being revised, the assessment committee's reassessment must take its point of departure in the previous assessment, and must in particular consider whether the revised dissertation has been sufficiently improved in relation to the points made in the previous assessment.

Structure

Headline

The headline is "Preliminary recommendation".

The name of the author and the full title of the dissertation must be indicated. It must be made clear that this is a PhD dissertation.

Section 1

This section must provide information about the assessment committee members: names, academic titles and home institutions, including country for members from outside Denmark. It must be indicated who is the chair of the committee.

The name, title and home institution of the principal supervisor must also be stated, and it must be confirmed that the principal supervisor (and any other supervisors) has been involved in the work of the assessment committee without voting rights.

If the author has not been enrolled in the PhD degree programme prior to submitting the dissertation, it must be indicated that this is the case.

Section 2

This section must explain the form of the dissertation (monograph or articles, Danish and English abstract, appendices etc.) as well as its length (number of pages excluding appendices and number of pages of appendices).

For information about the length of the dissertation including and excluding bibliography, catalogues, appendices etc., see the submitted solemn declaration.

If the PhD dissertation includes work that has been written or published in collaboration with others, this must be indicated.

Section 3

This section contains a brief summary describing the issue dealt with in the dissertation and the basis of the theory and texts/sources used, the choice of method and the structure.

Section 4

This section consists of the actual assessment and is structured as follows:

- The assessment must be critical, state the arguments and be drawn up with a view to ensuring that the relationship between strengths and weaknesses is stated so clearly that the conclusion seems fully justified:
 - The assessment must state the dissertation's contribution to research and place the dissertation in relation to the international research status of the topic concerned.
 - The assessment must also contain a conclusion as to whether the relevant research results are well founded and presented in accordance with the demands of the academic areas in question with regard to documentation, method and argumentation.
 - If the dissertation includes works written in collaboration with other people, or research results obtained in collaboration with other people, the assessment can also take into consideration the independent, original contribution of the author.
 - The assessment should also include a brief evaluation of the dissertation's thoroughness, acribia and form.
 - However, criticism of form or details should be presented secondarily and in proportion to the assessment of the central academic issues in relation to the dissertation's empirical data,

documentation, method and theory foundation, position in relation to other international research etc.

- It should be clear whether any criticism of the dissertation's language, form or academic acrobatics is so significant that it raises questions about the tenability of the dissertation's central hypotheses and research results.
- The assessment should conclude with a rounded, overall evaluation preparing the way for the conclusion.

Section 5

The assessment committee concludes whether the dissertation in its preliminary form is suitable for defence.

The conclusion must be expressed in the form of a declaration and must not contain moderating expressions such as "...are in no doubt that..." or "despite the points mentioned above..." etc., and the recommendation must be made in the following way:

- The dissertation should be accepted for defence
- The dissertation should be accepted for revision
 - A period of at least three months for a reworking of the dissertation must be proposed
- The dissertation should not be accepted for defence
 - The assessment is completed without a recommendation that the dissertation should be accepted for defence or revision.

It must be clearly stated whether:

- the recommendation is unanimous:
 - "A unanimous assessment committee recommends that the dissertation should be accepted for defence"
 - "A unanimous assessment committee recommends that the author should have the opportunity to revise and resubmit the dissertation"
 - "A unanimous assessment committee recommends that the dissertation should not be accepted for defence"

or whether:

- the recommendation is non-unanimous, and, if so, which members of the assessment committee have which viewpoints, with a separate account of any majority and minority assessment:
 - "A majority of the assessment committee recommends that the dissertation....., while a minority of the assessment committee recommends that the dissertation.....".
- the assessment committee members are equally divided between all three viewpoints, i.e. acceptance for defence, acceptance for revision and non-acceptance for defence.

Recommendation that the dissertation should be accepted for defence

The recommendation must be concluded with a summary of which themes or issues the assessment committee would like to see discussed during the oral defence, while detailed instructions for improvements and changes, including specific comments on proofreading, should be avoided.

The date and start time of the oral defence must be stated.

Recommendation that the dissertation should be revised or that the dissertation should not be accepted for defence

The PhD programme director and the PhD programme administrator must be informed as early as possible in the assessment process if the assessment committee concludes that the dissertation is not suitable for defence.

If the committee recommends that the PhD dissertation can be submitted in a new, revised form, the recommendation must state clearly which parts of the dissertation need to be improved if the revised dissertation is to be recommended for defence after being resubmitted, as well as proposing a period of revision of at least three months.

Section 6

Date and signatures: The preliminary recommendation can be signed by the chair of the assessment committee alone on behalf of the committee or by the entire assessment committee.

Final recommendation – content and structure

The final recommendation constitutes the basis for the Academic Council's decision as to whether the PhD degree should be conferred. The assessment committee should be aware that in Denmark, the final recommendation is normally enclosed with job applications – so it should be designed to give an impression of the performance of the person concerned during the PhD degree programme, as revealed in the PhD dissertation and during the defence.

If the assessment committee so wishes, the final recommendation may include a separate appendix recommending that the academic results should be published.

The final recommendation must observe the same formal requirements and structure as the preliminary recommendation, i.e. heading and sections 1-6, and must include a brief account of the oral defence proceedings. This account must be included as an integral part of the assessment. If aspects of the dissertation come to light during the defence that give the committee reason to amend their descriptions and assessments

of the dissertation in the preliminary recommendation, the final recommendation must be revised accordingly.

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If the dissertation has been assessed previously and resubmitted after necessary revisions, this must not be stated in the wording of the final recommendation.

When drawing up the final recommendation, the assessment committee must be especially aware of the following:

- The date in the colophon must be updated with the date of the defence/preparation of the final recommendation
- **Headline:**
The headline must be changed from “Preliminary recommendation of...” to “Recommendation of...”
- **Section 3 (summary) and section 4 (critical assessment):**
 - The sections are revised to the extent necessary so that the assessment of the dissertation and the defence appears as an integrated whole, including observations and points from the oral defence that are of importance for the assessment of the research results achieved
 - Any references that point towards the defence must be deleted
- **Section 5 (recommendation):**
The sentence regarding acceptance for defence from the preliminary recommendation must be deleted and replaced with:
 - the date of the defence
 - a brief description of the defence proceedings
 - a conclusion as to whether the PhD degree should be awarded:
It must be stated whether the recommendation is unanimous or not:
 - If the recommendation is not unanimous, there must be a brief explanation of the issues to which the minority and majority, respectively, have attached importance in their different conclusions
 - If the recommendation is negative, the chair must notify the principal supervisor and the PhD programme director, who must inform the author as soon as possible
- **Section 6:**
 - The date of the defence or preparation of the recommendation must be stated
 - The recommendation must be signed by the chair alone on behalf of the assessment committee or by all three members of the assessment committee
 - Please note that the last page of the recommendation must not contain only the date and signatures, but must at least include the last part of the recommendation’s conclusion in section 5.