

Guidelines for the assessment of PhD Theses

The purpose of the following guide is to give some guidelines for the work of the assessment committees. The assessment of a PhD thesis takes place according to the *Ministerial Order on the PhD Programme at the Universities and Certain Higher Artistic Educational Institutions (PhD order)*. Order No. 1039 of 27 August 2013 of the Danish Ministry of Science, Innovation and Higher Education.

1. Formal requirements for the PhD thesis

Theses that are submitted to the Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Southern Denmark, can either be drawn up as a complete presentation of the research project (monograph) or be based on manuscripts or accepted papers for scientific journals. In the latter case the thesis will consist of the papers and a [overview](#) clarifying the research problem of the project, the employed methods, including the reason for choosing these, the achieved results and a critical assessment of these in relation to the existing knowledge in the field.

The assessment committee which has been appointed by the faculty is responsible for the assessment of the thesis, and it is not pivotal whether the included papers are manuscripts in preparation, accepted for publication or published in a peer-reviewed journal.

If the thesis is submitted as a monograph, it is necessary to enclose an explanation of how the complete presentation and/or results are to be published with reference to the international traditions within the specific research area.

The thesis must be written in English or Danish. A summary in both languages must be included.

If parts of the project have been accomplished in cooperation with other researchers, the PhD student's share of the work must be clarified in a declaration signed by a minimum of the first 5 co-authors as well as the last co-author and the main supervisor (if he/she is also an co-author) if these are not part of the first five co-authors.

2. Quality requirements for the thesis

The thesis must document that the PhD student is capable of completing a scientific project with an independent use of the scientific methods within the field, thereby contributing to advance the research at a level corresponding to international standards for the PhD degree within the research field.

Besides the standard requirements of originality and quality made to scientific work, an additional necessity is the correct use of the scientific methods.

The assessment committee should assess the extent to which:

- The thesis describes the elements of a research project as a focused compilation of data (knowledge) or an adaptation of empirical knowledge based on a hypothesis, a critical assessment of the results and a discussion of the generalizability of the results.
- Applied methods are described and validated. If developing new methods is included in the thesis, the standardization and quality control hereof must be described carefully, and a comparison with results achieved with acknowledged methods, if relevant, must be included.
- Results are clearly and understandably presented with the application of the relevant analytical methods (e.g. statistics, theory). Results must be assessed critically and should be related to other researchers' results. In addition, the discussion must include a statement of which results are original and/or considered to have a special news value and which perspectives the thesis opens to for future research.
- The bibliography contains references to the most recent/and or relevant acknowledged works within the field of the thesis.

A thesis often consists of multiple sub-projects. A clear and relevant coherence between these sub- projects is required. In this way, they can serve to illustrate the research field or the thesis from different perspectives – each being very relevant.

The assessment committee should assess the research effort that forms the basis of the PhD thesis. In addition, they should estimate whether the extent and content of the PhD thesis correspond to the 3-year timeframe of the PhD programme – taking into consideration the additional elements of the PhD programme (as specified by the head of the assessment committee). The submitted thesis forms the basis of the assessment.

3. The Assessment committee's preliminary and final recommendation

Within six weeks of the submission of the PhD thesis, or four weeks if the PhD thesis has been revised, the assessment committee must make its recommendations to the faculty as to whether the PhD thesis fulfils the requirements to be recommended for a defense. The recommendation must be reasoned, and in the event of disagreement, the majority will prevail.

The Assessment committee determines whether the language of the assessment should be English or Danish/Scandinavian.

The chairman is responsible for:

- Informing the committee members, that a written assessment of a PhD thesis is a

formal academic genre used to evaluate the scholarly quality, originality, and contribution. The tone is professional and academic, balancing constructive critique with recognition of strengths, and reflecting disciplinary norms and institutional expectations

- Editing the assessment so it presents as one assessment and inserting it into the faculty's assessment template. Making sure the final conclusion correlates to the assessment of the individual articles and overview or the combined work presented in the monograph.
- Filling in all relevant information in the template, including a list of articles
- Sending the assessment to the principal supervisor for readthrough and comments
- Handing in the complete assessment report to the Graduate School via phd@health.sdu.dk

Please note that two different templates apply: "Assessment of PhD Thesis", and "Assessment of Revised PhD Thesis". The correct template must always be used.

The chairman signs the complete assessment report on behalf of the entire assessment committee and with his/her signature also confirms that the principal supervisor has read and had the opportunity to comment on the assessment report before the final version is sent to the Graduate School Secretariat.

In case of dissent, all assessors and the principal supervisor must sign the assessment form, and the assessment report must contain in the concluding remark a list of who is for and who is against a public defense.

The assessment of the committee should be of 4-8 A4- pages and contain the following:

- A mention of the appointed assessment committee.
- A short mention of the principal supervisor and from which research unit the thesis arises.
- General information on the form and content of the PhD thesis, including the background of the thesis and its most important results.
- A critical and systematic walkthrough of the individual works (manuscripts/accepted papers) in the thesis, including the overview.
- A complete assessment of the PhD thesis.
- A conclusion on whether the assessment committee finds the PhD thesis suitable for defense. If the recommendation is not favorable, the assessment committee must state in the recommendation whether the PhD thesis may be resubmitted in a revised version.

The PhD student's supervisors cannot act as a member of the assessment committee, but the principal supervisor assists the assessment committee without voting rights. This comes into action when the chairman of the assessment committee forwards the recommendation to the principal supervisor. The assessment must always be forwarded by the chairman to the principal supervisor prior to submitting the assessment to the Graduate school.

In case the assessment committee cannot recommend the thesis for defense, the Graduate School will inform the candidate. The PhD candidate and the principal supervisor will be given the opportunity to submit their comments on the recommendation within a period of at least two weeks.

Any assessment, positive or not, is considered by the Committee concerning Academic Theses. The Committee concerning Academic Theses may choose to follow the recommendation of the assessment committee or they may ask the assessment committee to reconsider aspects of their assessment.

If the recommendation is favorable, the defense of the thesis can take place.

If the recommendation is not favorable, the institution will decide, based on the recommendation of the assessment committee and the PhD student's and the principal supervisor's comments, if any:

- A. That the defense of the thesis may not take place.
- B. That the PhD thesis may be resubmitted in a revised version within a deadline of at least three months. If the PhD thesis is resubmitted, it must be assessed by the same assessment committee, unless special circumstances apply. The current practice in The Faculty of Health Sciences, SDU, is that only one revision is possible. Therefore, the assessment committee must specify very carefully, in the concluding remarks section, the reasons for choosing this recommendation!

Immediately after the oral defense session, the assessment committee decides whether the course of the defense was satisfactory. If the course of the defense was satisfactory, the three members of the assessment committee will sign the Faculty PhD protocol. The preliminary recommendation and the signed protocol together form the final recommendation.