

Guidelines on the assessment and public defence of the PhD thesis at the PhD School, Faculty of Business and Social Sciences, University of Southern Denmark (SDU)

These guidelines recapitulate some of the rules laid down by the [Executive Order on the PhD Programme at the universities \(PhD Order\) no. 1124 of 19 September 2025](#) and the supplementary regulations of the PhD School at the Faculty of Business and Social Sciences, SDU.

The PhD thesis

The PhD thesis is a piece of independent work, which is based on an individual PhD programme and cannot be submitted for assessment by two or more authors jointly. The underlying research project may, however, have been carried out in cooperation with others.

The principal supervisor can decide whether manuscripts of other articles, or previously published articles, may be included in the PhD thesis. If the thesis is based on articles, it must include a summary detailing the interconnection and showing progression and summarising the overall research results. Articles that are included in the thesis may be prepared in cooperation with others on condition that they are accompanied by written declarations from each of the co-authors, specifying the PhD author's contribution to the total work. The predominant elements should be prepared independently. Co-author declarations must be signed by the co-authors and the PhD student.

The PhD thesis must be in Danish or English and abstracts in Danish and English must be included.

E-publishing of PhD theses at SDU

In cooperation between the PhD Schools at SDU and the University Library (SDUB), common procedures for submission, archiving and e-publishing of PhD theses at SDU have been established. A submission and publication system has been launched to secure maximum exposure to PhD theses from SDU and to accommodate the requirements of the PhD Order stating that PhD theses must be made available to the public in due time before the PhD defence.

This means that theses submitted to the PhD School at the Faculty of Business and Social Sciences must be handed in digitally through uploading via SDU's Research Portal (PURE) <http://www.sdu.dk/pure>

Generally, all PhD theses from SDU which have been recommended for award of the PhD degree must be published digitally through PURE.

Submission in PURE

The PhD thesis is officially handed in once it is uploaded in PURE. This means that the thesis, required attachments and administrative documents must be submitted on the date of expiry of the PhD study at the latest.

Procedures for uploading in PURE:

1. The *final and complete version* of the PhD thesis including abstracts in Danish and English must be uploaded in PURE: <http://www.sdu.dk/pure>
2. The following administrative documents must be enclosed:
 - Statement from the principal supervisor and co-author statement, if any (jointly uploaded in PDF-format)
 - Activity overview (separately uploaded in PDF-format)
3. In PURE it must be registered whether the *complete* or only *parts* of the thesis must be e-published
4. After upload in PURE the thesis will automatically be checked for plagiarism by SDUB in accordance with the existing [procedures](#)
5. After the plagiarism check SDUB forwards the thesis and administrative documents to the PhD School via FileSender for assessment
6. The PhD School Secretariat will send the thesis to the assessment committee and the principal supervisor
7. SDUB ensures that the PhD thesis is made available in PURE to the public in due time before the PhD defence once the thesis is recommended for PhD defence, unless an embargo period or permission not to publish the thesis digitally has been agreed upon. In case of any copyright issues and if publication via PURE is not permitted, the thesis must be published in print in accordance with this, SDUB will print a copy of the thesis and make it available for restricted use in the SDUB library, when the thesis is recommended for PhD defence by the assessment committee.

Detailed information about procedures for submission, publishing, copyright, etc. is available at [SDUnet](#)

Copyright issues for article-based PhD theses

To secure maximum exposure of PhD theses from SDU, all PhD theses from SDU must be published digitally if there are no restrictions on publishing. If there are no restrictions on publishing, the thesis will automatically be published before the PhD defence.

Exceptions from e-publication must be agreed upon with SDUB before submission of the thesis. This might be relevant in case of copyrighted articles, etc. Application for permission to place an embargo period for e-publishing or exception from e-publication must be sent to [SDUB](#)

Any copyright issues must be clarified before submission in PURE.

Alternative solutions for publication of the thesis in case of copyright issues, etc. will be described in the following.

Redacted version

In PURE it is possible to select whether the *complete* thesis can be published digitally. If the thesis contains articles which cannot be published parallel to the original version due to copyright issues, a *redacted* version of the thesis can be uploaded consisting of an additional document without articles which will be e-published and thus, can be made publicly accessible on the Research Portal. The *complete* version of the PhD thesis including all articles will be forwarded to the PhD School Secretariat in connection with the assessment of the thesis.

Printed version

In case of any copyright issues and if e-publishing via PURE is not permitted, the PhD thesis must be published in *print*. The thesis must still be uploaded in PURE for the assessment committee. In case of any copyright issues and if publication via PURE is not permitted, the thesis must be published in print. SDUB will print a copy of the thesis and make it available for restricted use in the SDUB library under supervision when the thesis is recommended for PhD defence by the assessment committee.

Co-author statements

Co-authored articles must be approved and signed and uploaded parallel to the upload of the thesis in PURE.

Embargo

It will be possible to apply for an embargo period for the publication of the PhD thesis if the thesis is published by another publisher, in case of copyright issues, unpublished data or manuscripts which are to be published later, etc. If exceptions from e-publication are to be made, permission must be agreed upon with SDUB in due time before submission of the thesis (preferably two to three months before submission).

If embargo period for e-publication has been agreed upon, a *redacted* version of the thesis can be uploaded consisting of an additional document without articles which will be e-published and thus, can be made publicly accessible on the Research Portal. The *complete* version of the PhD thesis including all articles must still be uploaded for the use of the assessment committee.

SDUB is responsible for the approval of applications regarding embargo (up to 12 months) and prolongation of the embargo period on behalf of the PhD School.

Further information about procedures for submission, copyright rules, etc. is available on [SDUB's website](#)

Assessment committee

In the interest of adhering to the deadlines for assessment and defence, the PhD student should notify the Head of Department and the PhD School Secretariat about submission of the thesis in good time and no later than two months before the expected submission date. It is important that this deadline be adhered to, so the assessment committee can be appointed by the submission date.

The PhD thesis is assessed by a three-member assessment committee. The members must be professors or full-time associated professors or must have corresponding academic qualifications in the relevant discipline. Two of the members must come from outside SDU, with one of these being from abroad, unless this is not appropriate for academic reasons.

For PhD students on the Industrial PhD programme, at least one member of the assessment committee must have company-relevant research experience within the relevant discipline.

For PhD students affiliated to university colleges, academies of professional higher education or maritime educational institutions one member of the assessment committee must have company-relevant research experience at reader level within the relevant discipline.

The PhD student's supervisors cannot be members of the committee, but the principal supervisor must participate in the work of the assessment committee without voting rights.

Procedures for composition of the assessment committee

1. The PhD School Secretariat will request that the Head of Department provides proposals for composition of the assessment committee before the deadline for submission of PhD thesis expires.
2. The Head of Department sends suggestions for composition of the assessment committee via the PhD School Secretariat. The Head of Department must ascertain in advance that the proposed members of the assessment committee are willing to join the committee. CVs must be submitted for external assessors. On this basis, the PhD Committee will make recommendations to the Dean concerning the composition of the assessment committee.

The PhD School Secretariat will inform the PhD student as to who will be on the assessment committee. The PhD student has one week in which to raise any objections concerning the members. If the PhD student has raised no objections within one week, the PhD School Secretariat will send the PhD thesis to the assessment committee and to the principal supervisor.

The chairperson's role in the assessment committee

The representative of SDU acts as chairperson for the committee. The chairperson is encouraged to take initiative in preparing a time frame for the assessment work, and to agree on a provisional date for the PhD defence immediately upon the appointment of the assessment committee. The chairperson is expected to inform the PhD School Secretariat about a final date for the PhD defence, time, place, and

subject of the lecture, if relevant (which might also be identical with the title of the thesis) when the committee recommends the thesis suitable as a basis for awarding the PhD degree.

Preparing the recommendation involves the entire committee. Each member of the assessment committee is expected to draft substantial comments on the PhD thesis (minimum two pages), but the chairperson is responsible for condensing the written contributions for the assessment and for ensuring the quality of its writing so that it stands as a uniform text with clear links between premises and conclusions. The language used should be sober, factual and objective. The chairperson coordinates the writing process and bears the primary responsibility for compliance with deadlines and other formalities. The chairperson should introduce the members of the committee to Danish rules for the PhD course and PhD degree including rules governing the defence. At the same time committee members receive written information about these from the PhD School. Furthermore, the chairperson should ensure that the principal supervisor is involved in the work of the committee from the start and is responsible for seeing that the principal supervisor is informed about the preliminary assessment.

The chairperson's responsibility for the form of the *final recommendation* is comparable to that for the preliminary assessment.

The principal supervisor's role in the assessment committee

The PhD student's supervisors cannot be members of the assessment committee, but the principal supervisor participates in the committee without voting.

The chairperson should ensure that the principal supervisor is involved in the work of the committee from the start. The chairperson must ensure that the principal supervisor is summoned to assessment committee meetings, kept informed of e-mails, etc. regarding the assessment of the thesis. The principal supervisor will take part in the work of the committee, answering questions on the underlying progress of the PhD, etc. and on the academic progress of the research project.

The principal supervisor must have the opportunity to comment on the preliminary assessment and to clear up any misunderstandings before it is submitted to the Dean, but without voting rights.

The chairperson is responsible for seeing that the principal supervisor is informed about the preliminary assessment.

The preliminary assessment

No later than two months (*the month of July is not counted in this period*) after the submission of the thesis the assessment committee must complete its preliminary assessment. The committee makes a recommendation to the Academic Council for passing on to the Dean via the PhD School Secretariat, as to whether the PhD thesis is suitable as a basis for awarding the PhD degree.

If the PhD thesis is based on articles, please consult the PhD School website: [Requirements to an article based PhD thesis](#)

The target group for the preliminary assessment is the author, who should be able to use the assessment in preparing for the oral defence (or if the assessment is negative in any reworking of the thesis), and the Head of PhD School, who ensures that the assessment is as it should be both as regards formalities and content.

The assessment should be reasoned and take the form of an independent document, briefly presenting the theme and structure of the thesis and indicating its strengths and weaknesses. The premises that form the basis for the assessment must be made clear. The assessment should lead to a conclusion, which should be consistent with the assessment's premises, and with the earlier exposition of the thesis. This exposition should have a sufficient degree of detail, including an explicit description of the thesis' scientific contribution and, in cases where the thesis is in part co-authored, an explicit description and assessment of the level of the PhD student's own contribution. The assessment should provide sufficient detail and should be sufficiently clear and comprehensive so that even lay readers can follow the thought processes from premise to conclusion. It should be clear whether the recommendation is made unanimously or whether there are divided opinions, and if so which members of the committee adopt which positions.

If there is unanimity, the preliminary assessment can be signed by the chairman of the committee on behalf of the others.

The preliminary assessment must be sent to the Dean via the PhD School Secretariat. The date for the defence is given and the subject of the lecture, if relevant.

If the committee judges that the thesis does not have qualities that make it suitable for an oral defence, the preliminary assessment should be able to provide the basis for the Dean's decision as to whether the thesis can be submitted again in a revised form within the timeframe of no less than three months. The committee makes a recommendation regarding the number of months of revision it judges necessary. The preliminary assessment must be signed by all members of the assessment if the thesis is deemed to be *not suitable* for an oral defence. The PhD student and the principal supervisor must have two weeks in which to comment on the recommendation.

Based on the comments of the assessment committee and, if relevant, those of the PhD student and principal supervisor, the Dean will determine one of the following in consultation with the Head of PhD School:

1. That the defence cannot take place.
2. That the PhD thesis can be resubmitted in a revised form within a deadline of at least three months. If the thesis is resubmitted, it should be assessed by the assessment committee previously appointed, unless special circumstances apply.
3. That the PhD thesis is to be assessed by a new assessment committee.

The defence of the PhD thesis

The defence must take place no sooner than two weeks after the assessment committee has announced its recommendation, and no later than three months after submission of the PhD thesis.

If special circumstances apply, the Head of PhD School can, after consulting the PhD student, determine that a planned PhD defence can be held with only two assessors present at the PhD defence. This might be decided in case of sudden illness among one of the assessors close to the already planned PhD defence. Furthermore, if special circumstances apply, the Head of PhD School can decide to postpone the defence. A postponement of the defence requires an agreement between the author of the thesis, the chairman of the assessment committee and the Head of PhD School, including the date when the PhD defence will be held.

As a rule, the members of the committee are expected to be at SDU for the defence. When it is justified by unusual circumstances the Head of PhD School may exempt from this rule upon application for dispensation.

It is the responsibility of the assessment committee chairperson to ensure that a room of a suitable size for the defence is reserved. The department is responsible for practical tasks in connection with the defence (reservation of room for the defence, sending out invitations, if appropriate, reception, assessment fee and travel accounting, etc.).

The PhD School Secretariat will inform the assessment committee members and the PhD student about the defence and will also announce the defence on the SDU website.

Procedure for the defence of the PhD thesis

During the defence, the author should be given the opportunity to give an account of his or her work and to defend the PhD thesis before members of the assessment committee. The assessment committee may inform the author, prior to the defence, of a subject for the lecture, if relevant. The defence may last a maximum of three hours, of which 30-45 minutes are set aside for the author's lecture.

The defence normally takes place as follows:

1. Introduction by the Head of Department or his or her substitute (the chairperson), presenting the PhD student and members of the assessment committee. The chairperson chairs the defence.
2. A 30-45 minute-long lecture by the author of the thesis.
3. The three members of the assessment committee comment on the thesis and question the author. The chairperson ensures that this opposition is limited to 1 hour and 30 minutes, divided between the members by internal agreement. The opposition must include concrete questions on the central themes in the thesis.
4. The chairperson may allow questions from the audience with reference to the delivered lecture.
5. The chairperson concludes the thesis defence. Before this, the chairperson may give the author of the thesis permission to make some brief comments.

Thus, no input is expected from the principal supervisor. The chairperson may, however, deviate from this rule at the request of the assessment committee. In such a case, the principal supervisor will be permitted to speak for no more than 30 minutes.

The final assessment of the PhD thesis

Immediately after the oral defence, the assessment committee prepares its final recommendation. Following a satisfactorily completed defence, the final recommendation may take the form of an addendum to the preliminary assessment. The chairperson's responsibility for the form of the final recommendation is comparable to that for the preliminary assessment. Please consult the PhD School's *Guidelines for the writing of PhD recommendations* for further information.

If aspects of the thesis are revealed during the defence that give the committee cause to alter their description and assessment of it as given in the preliminary assessment, the final recommendation should be revised accordingly. In the event of disagreement, the recommendation will be decided by majority vote. The target group for the final recommendation is the author and the Academic Council awarding the PhD degree.

The final recommendation should be signed by all members of the committee.

Award of the PhD degree

The final recommendation must be sent to the Dean via the PhD School Secretariat after the defence. The assessment committee makes a recommendation as to whether the PhD degree should be awarded.

The recommendation should be reasoned and in the event of disagreement, the recommendation will be decided by majority vote.

If the assessment committee's recommendation is negative, the Dean may decide to have the thesis assessed by a new assessment committee if the author requests this within one week.

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