

Guidelines
for
the assessment
of
Norwegian
doctoral degrees

Recommended by
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0. About the guidelines

The guidelines were recommended by Universities Norway (UHR) on xx.xx.2020, and are supplementary to UHR's *General guidelines for scientific and artistic PhD programmes* approved on 9 April 2018 and the standard regulations for the degree dr. philos. (and equivalent degrees) (in Norwegian only – *Standardforskrift for graden dr.philos. (og tilsvarende grader)*), recommended by UHR on 9 December 1996.

The aim of the guidelines is to help ensure that the assessment of doctoral degrees in Norway, i.e. the assessment of doctoral theses, trial lectures and public defences, is carried out according to a universal standard.

The guidelines represent a standard template that can be adapted by the individual institution to serve as a useful supplement to its relevant regulations:

- The institutions' regulations regarding the philosophiae doctor degree (PhD)
- The institutions' regulations regarding the philosophiae doctor degree (PhD) in artistic research
- The institutions' regulations regarding the degree dr. philos.

and to supplementary provisions, guidelines, etc. to the institution's regulations.

If these assessment guidelines are contradictory to the institution's doctoral regulations, the doctoral regulations take precedence. Everyone who is involved in assessing doctoral work must be made aware of the institution's regulations and guidelines for the relevant degree.

Terms are defined in Section 2 of the *General guidelines for scientific and artistic PhD programmes*.

1. About Norwegian doctoral degrees

A Norwegian doctoral degree is awarded as certification of the candidate's competence in research at third-cycle level in accordance with the Norwegian Qualifications Framework for Higher Education.

The level of competence in degrees with time norms and organised research training (the PhD degree) is assumed to be equivalent to that of the dr. philos. degree, which has no time norms or organised research training. The principle of equivalence refers to the academic standard and quality of the doctoral work, not merely its volume. Emphasis must be placed on the quality, relevance and significance of the doctoral work, and not on whether it has been published or made public at the time of assessment or where it may have been published or made public.

In the organised research training, competence can also be documented through practical tests and participation in various activities within the training component. The absence of a requirement for training in the dr. philos. degree is expected to be compensated by more extensive thesis work than what would be required for the organised research training programmes. Irrespective of the type of degree, the candidate must satisfy the same minimum requirements for research competence – demonstrated through the qualification framework's requirements for knowledge, skills and general competence at the third-cycle level.

Organised research training can lead to a scientific PhD, 'philosophiae doctor', or an artistic PhD, 'philosophiae doctor in artistic research'.

General guidelines for scientific and artistic PhD programmes:

Section 3-3 The PhD in scientific research is awarded on the basis of the following:

- an approved scientific thesis, see Section 11-1
- approved completion of the training component, or other approved academic instruction or competence
- an approved trial lecture on an assigned topic
- approved public defence of the scientific thesis (disputation)

Section 3-4 The PhD in artistic research is awarded on the basis of the following:

- an approved artistic project, see Section 11-2
- an approved reflection component, see Section 11-2
- approved completion of the training component, or other approved academic instruction or competence
- an approved examination on an assigned topic
- approved public defence of the artistic PhD result (disputation)

'Standard regulations' for the degree dr. philos.:

Section 4 Assessment

The doctoral degree is awarded on the basis of the following:

- a) an approved scientific thesis and a satisfactory public defence (disputation)
- b) two approved trial lectures

2. Distribution of work between committee members

The members of the assessment committee must assess the doctoral work, trial lecture(s) if relevant, and public defence on an independent basis.

The chair of the assessment committee is the point of contact between the committee and the institution. The committee chair ensures that deadlines are met, that the assessment meets the requirements for academic quality and that the external committee members are familiar with the entire assessment process. The chair is responsible for initiating the work of the assessment committee, for coordinating the committee members' recommendations and for submitting the final recommendation to the institution.

The chair helps to clarify the distribution of work between the committee members.

3. Assessment committee's assessment of the doctoral work

3.1 Requirements for the thesis or for the artistic PhD result

General guidelines for scientific and artistic PhD programmes:

Section 11-1 Requirements for the scientific thesis

The scientific thesis must be an independent piece of research or research and development work that meets international standards with regard to ethical requirements, academic standards and methods in the discipline.

The thesis must contribute to the development of new knowledge in the field and must achieve a level that merits publication or presentation to the public in a suitable format as part of the research-based development of knowledge in the discipline.

The thesis may consist of a monograph or a collection of several shorter pieces of work. In the case of the latter, clarification must be given of how the individual pieces are related.

The main component of the scientific thesis may also consist of a new product or a systematised collection of material, or can take a different form of presentation (e.g. audio, images, film, digital forms of production) in which the theoretical and methodological bases do not appear in the product itself. In such cases, the thesis must include a supplementary part in addition to presenting the actual product. This will take the form of a written account of the research question, choice of theory and method, and an assessment of the result in accordance with international and academic standards in the discipline.

The institution will decide which languages may be used.

Section 11-2 Requirements for the artistic PhD result

The artistic PhD result must consist of an artistic project as well as material that documents artistic reflection. The artistic project must be an independent work that meets international standards with regard to the level and ethical requirements within the discipline.

The artistic PhD result must be at a level that enables it to contribute to the development of new knowledge, insight and experience in the discipline.

The artistic project may consist of one or more parts or of a collection of works comprising a whole. If the artistic project consists of several smaller works, the candidate must explain how they are related.

Normally, only works that have been produced after admission to the PhD programme may be included, but in exceptional cases, earlier works may be used if this has been a prerequisite in the project description.

The artistic project must be an artistic work of a high standard in terms of originality, expression, coherence and communication. The artistic project must be presented publicly, see Section 18-2.

The artistic reflection must be documented in the form of submitted material, specifically with regard to:

- the process concerning artistic choices and pivotal moments, use of theory and methods, dialogue with different networks and research communities, etc.
- the position and description of the candidate's artistic point of view and work in relation to the relevant field, nationally and internationally, and
- the contribution to knowledge production in the field, including any innovations in the discipline.

The candidate chooses the medium and form for the reflection component and for any other documentation. The institution will decide which languages may be used for reflection and documentation.

The artistic PhD result must be documented in a permanent format.

Section 11-3 Joint works

The institution decides whether a thesis or artistic PhD result produced in a collaboration consisting of several partners may be submitted for assessment. In such cases, it must be possible to identify the contributions of the individuals involved.

For works that have been produced in collaboration with partners or co-authors, the candidate must follow the norms for crediting co-authorship and joint work that are generally accepted in the scientific community and in accordance with international standards.

If the scientific thesis consists mainly of articles, the candidate must normally be listed as the lead author of at least half of the articles.

Theses and PhD results with several contributors must include a signed declaration that describes the candidate's contribution to each piece of work. This declaration must be signed by all the contributors including the candidate.

3.2 Assessment of the scientific thesis

General guidelines for scientific and artistic PhD programmes:

Section 15-1 Assessment of the scientific thesis

The assessment committee may require the candidate to submit their source material and additional or explanatory information.

The assessment committee may ask supervisors to provide information about the supervision carried out and the work involved in the project.

On the basis of the submitted thesis and any additional material, the assessment committee may recommend that the institution permits the candidate to make minor revisions before the committee submits its final recommendation. The committee must provide a written list of what the candidate needs to rework.

If the institution allows minor revisions to the thesis, a deadline normally not exceeding three (3) months will be set. A new deadline for submission of the committee's final recommendation must also be set. The candidate has no right of appeal against the institution's decision in relation to this section.

If the committee finds that extensive changes are needed in order to deem the thesis worthy of public defence, the committee must reject the thesis.

In the assessment of the thesis, particular emphasis is placed on whether the thesis is an independent and comprehensive scientific work of a high academic standard in terms of research questions, methodology, theoretical and empirical basis, documentation, critical assessment of the literature and form of presentation. It is particularly important that an assessment is made of the suitability of the material and methods in relation to the questions raised in the thesis, and the validity of the arguments and conclusions presented.

The thesis must constitute new knowledge within the field and be of a level that makes it worthy of publishing as part of the scientific literature within the subject area.

If the doctoral work consists of a written component in combination with a product documented in a permanent format or a production, an assessment will be made of whether the content of the combined works form a whole and that this meets the requirements for an independent piece of research for the doctoral degree. This requires the committee to attend, or in some other way witness, any production that is carried out as part of the doctoral work. It must be clear from the written component that the work satisfies the requirements for research questions, methodology, theoretical and empirical basis, documentation, critical assessment of the literature and form of presentation. The written component must also explain the choices made regarding the product or production.

If the thesis consists of a collection of several shorter pieces of work (manuscripts/articles), the committee shall, based on the summary of the thesis (cf. Section 11-1, third paragraph), assess whether the content of the individual works collectively form a whole. The summary must be written solely by the candidate, and is a very important part of the thesis both for the candidate and for the committee's assessment. In the summary, the candidate must not only summarise, but also synthesise the research questions and conclusions presented in the individual works in an overarching perspective, and in doing so show how the different works are related.

If the thesis contains several pieces of work from more than one author, the committee shall, based on the declaration of co-authorship, assess whether the candidate's contributions are identifiable and whether the candidate is solely responsible for a sufficiently large part of the thesis. If the candidate's own documentation is not sufficient, the committee can obtain additional information.

If the thesis in its entirety is submitted as a joint work, the research project and/or thesis will naturally be more extensive than would be the case for an individual piece of work. As

far as is possible, each of the candidates must be assessed and tested according to the same requirements for individual pieces of work. Monographs cannot be accepted as joint work.

3.3 Assessment of the artistic PhD result

General guidelines for scientific and artistic PhD programmes:

Section 15-2 Assessment of the artistic PhD result

The assessment committee will be provided with details of what will form the basis for the assessment, including a plan for where, when and how the artistic project is to be publicly presented (see Section 13-3), and when and in what form the reflection component is to be submitted.

Before the assessment committee starts its work, the institution may, together with the committee, review the objectives and profile of the PhD programme as well as the responsibilities and tasks of the assessment committee.

If the public presentation of the artistic project is in the form of a concert, exhibition, performance or other event taking place at a specific time and location, the assessment committee must normally attend.

There are two alternatives for submitting material documenting artistic reflection:

- If the candidate wants the committee to have access to the reflection component before presenting the artistic project, the committee must have received this material at least four (4) weeks before the presentation.
- If the candidate wishes to complete the reflection component in conjunction with the public presentation of the artistic project, this material must be available to the committee at the time of the presentation.

If the committee finds that extensive changes are needed in order to deem the thesis or artistic PhD result worthy of public defence, the committee must reject it. The candidate will not be given the opportunity to rework the thesis or artistic PhD result.

A Norwegian doctoral degree in artistic research is awarded as certification of the candidate's artistic research at third-cycle level in accordance with the Norwegian Qualifications Framework for Higher Education. The doctoral work must consist of an artistic result and material that documents artistic reflection, and this work must be comprehensive and independent and meet international standards with regard to the standard and ethical requirements within the discipline. The work must contribute to the development of new knowledge, insight and empirical evidence within the subject area.

In the assessment of the doctoral work, particular emphasis is placed on whether the work is an independent and comprehensive piece of artistic research of a high academic standard in terms of originality, coherence, expression and communication, and whether appropriate forms of presentation have been chosen for both the artistic result and for the documentation of artistic reflection. An assessment must be made of the process with regard to artistic choices, use of theory and methodology, dialogues with various networks and academic communities. The work must be clearly positioned nationally and internationally within the field and must contribute to the development of the subject area.

3.4 Assessment committee's recommendation and conclusion

General guidelines for scientific and artistic PhD programmes:

Section 15-3 Recommendation of the assessment committee

The assessment committee submits a substantiated recommendation, stating whether the thesis or artistic PhD result is worthy of public defence. In this recommendation, all parts of the submitted or presented documentation must be discussed in relation to the criteria in Section 11-1 or Section 11-2. The recommendation should take the form of an argumentation and give a clear conclusion as to whether the work should be approved or not. Any dissenting opinions or individual statements by committee members must be included in the recommendation, with reasons given.

The recommendation must contain a brief description of the work's format (monograph/collection of articles/concert etc.). It must also include reference to the key elements (e.g. theory, hypotheses, material, methodology and findings) and scientific or

artistic significance of the thesis.

If the committee approves the doctoral work for public defence, a relatively brief explanation of its reasoning should be given. The committee should then endeavour to set out its recommendation in a general and concise form. In cases where the committee concludes that the doctoral work should not be approved, a more detailed explanation of the committee's reasoning is expected. The candidate can submit comments on the committee's recommendation via their institution.

Scientific PhDs:

If the committee recommends that a scientific PhD thesis should not be approved for public defence in its current form, but that a minor revision could bring it up to a satisfactory standard within the deadline specified in the institution's PhD regulations, it can recommend that the candidate be given the opportunity to undertake such work. When recommending a minor revision, the committee must provide a written overview of what exactly needs to be revised. The committee should indicate which areas need to be strengthened (e.g. the relationship between the data material and the conclusion, use of documentation, use of terms, clarity of research questions). Making the necessary changes does not guarantee automatic approval of the thesis in the committee's final assessment. The assessment of a thesis following a minor revision does not constitute a re-assessment; it is regarded as a postponement of the original assessment. If a thesis is rejected following a minor revision, the candidate can submit the thesis for re-assessment one more time.

4. Assessment committee's assessment of the doctoral examination

The doctoral examination for the scientific PhD consists of a trial lecture and public defence of the thesis (disputation). The doctoral examination for the artistic PhD consists of a presentation that is appropriate for the art form and theme, and public defence of the artistic PhD result (disputation).

The doctoral examination for the dr. philos. degree consists of two trial lectures and a public defence of the thesis (disputation).

4.1 Trial lecture or other examination on an assigned topic

General guidelines for scientific and artistic PhD programmes:

Section 19 Doctoral examination

Section 19-1 Trial lecture or other examination on an assigned topic

After the scientific thesis has been submitted for assessment, the candidate will hold a trial lecture. Similarly, upon submission of an artistic PhD result, the candidate will present the work in a format that is appropriate for the art form or theme. Both forms of examination will be on an assigned topic. This is an independent part of the doctoral examination. The purpose is to test candidates' ability to acquire knowledge beyond their specialist field and to convey this knowledge in a lecture or other relevant form of dissemination.

The candidate is notified of the title of the examination ten (10) working days in advance. The topic must not have a direct connection to the theme of the doctoral work.

If the institution chooses to hold the examination on the specified topic on the same day as the public defence, the committee will set the topic and undertake the assessment. If the examination and public defence are to be held separately, the institution will appoint a separate committee to set the topic. In such cases, at least one of the committee members will participate in the assessment.

The institution will decide whether the candidate has passed or failed the examination on the assigned topic. If the candidate receives a fail grade, an explanation must be given.

The candidate must pass the examination on the assigned topic before the public defence can take place.

In the scientific PhD, the candidate must, during the trial lecture, document their ability to acquire and convey research-based knowledge beyond their specialist field.

In the PhD in artistic research, the candidate must present their work in a format that is appropriate for the art form and theme, and in doing so document their ability to acquire and convey knowledge beyond their specialist field.

For the dr. philos. degree, the candidate must hold two trial lectures: one on an assigned topic and one on a self-selected topic. The trial lecture on a self-selected topic must take the form of a self-contained academic presentation as opposed to a summary of the thesis and its findings.

The trial lecture should be presented in such a way that it can also benefit students at master level. The assessment committee will give the trial lecture(s) or equivalent artistic presentation a pass or fail grade. In the assessment, emphasis is placed on both academic content and the candidate's ability to convey this.

4.2 Disputation

General guidelines for scientific and artistic PhD programmes:

Section 19 Doctoral examination (continued)

Section 19-2 Public defence (disputation)

The public defence of the scientific thesis or the artistic PhD result must take place no later than two (2) months after the institution finds the work to be worthy of public defence.

The time and location of the public defence must be announced at least ten (10) working days before it is held.

The committee that originally assessed the thesis or PhD result must also assess the public defence. The public defence must be held in English or Norwegian, unless the institution approves a different language.

There are normally two opponents, and these must be members of the committee and appointed by the institution.

The public defence is chaired by a person authorised by the institution. The chair of the defence will give a brief explanation of the procedures relating to the submission and assessment of the thesis or PhD result and the result of the trial lecture on an assigned topic (see Section 19-1 where relevant). The candidate will then explain the purpose and findings of the doctoral work. The first opponent initiates the discussion with the candidate and the second opponent concludes the discussion. The institution may decide on a different distribution of tasks between the opponents and between the candidate and the first opponent. After both opponents have concluded the discussion, members of the audience will have the opportunity to comment *ex auditorio*. One of the opponents concludes the discussion and the chair of the defence concludes the disputation (see UHR's Guidelines for the assessment of Norwegian doctoral degrees).

The assessment committee submits its recommendation to the institution. The recommendation includes an explanation of how the committee has assessed the public defence of the thesis or the artistic PhD result. The recommendation must conclude whether the disputation is recommended for approval or not. If the defence is not approved, this must be substantiated in the recommendation.

For a more detailed description of the public defence process and the distribution of responsibilities between the participants, please refer to the institution's regulations on doctoral degrees and any associated provisions, as well as other traditional practices for conducting a public defence.

In the scientific doctoral thesis, the public defence must take the form of an academic discussion between the opponents and the candidate on the research questions, methodologies, empirical and theoretical basis, documentation and form of presentation. Particular emphasis should be placed on verifying the validity of the core conclusions drawn by the candidate in their work. The research questions that the opponents choose to address do not need to be limited to those covered in the committee's recommendation.

A public defence of artistic research must take the form of an academic discussion between the opponents and the candidate with the aim of shedding as much light as possible on the doctoral work in terms of the artistic result and the artistic reflection. The discussion should

address research questions, processes, choice of methods, theories, documentation and forms of presentation, and how the work contributes to new knowledge, insight and empirical evidence within the subject area. The research questions that the opponents choose to address do not need to be limited to those covered in the committee's recommendation.

The opponents should encourage academic discussion that challenges the candidate, not only in terms of the academic content of the doctoral work, but also on the candidate's ability to place the work in a wider scientific/artistic and societal context. During the public defence, the opponents and the candidate are encouraged to challenge each other academically in a respectful manner.

4.3 Assessment committee's assessment and recommendation

The assessment committee's recommendation culminates in a conclusion stating whether the defence of the thesis or the artistic result should be approved or not.

If a doctoral thesis is found worthy of public defence, this will normally lead to the defence being approved for a doctoral degree. If new points come to light during the defence which cause uncertainty among the committee and which cannot be clarified during the public defence, the committee should clarify and assess the potential implications of these before making its final recommendation.

If the core conclusions of the work prove, beyond doubt, not to be valid in view of *new points that come to light during the defence*, the assessment committee must not approve the defence in its recommendation. This also applies if, during the defence, objectionable factors of material significance to the assessment of the work come to light, such as a breach of research ethics norms or good academic practice. If the defence is not approved, the candidate will have one new attempt at a public defence.