

# Procedure for the Oral Defense of a Doctoral Thesis at the Faculty of Forest Sciences



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Swedish University of  
Agricultural Sciences

- Only one examiner (referred to as 'the Opponent' or external examiner) is required for the oral defense of the thesis. Formal dress is not (or only exceptionally) used by the Opponent, nor by the Respondent defending the thesis. The defence is conducted in the presence of an audience, often consisting of up to 30 - 50 persons.
- The proceedings are conducted by a Chairman, who starts by reading the title of the thesis and by declaring that the thesis has been accepted for official defense. The Chairman introduces the Opponent, the Respondent, the Supervisors of the Respondent and the Evaluation Committee (3 members selected by the Faculty). The Chairman then asks the Respondent for a short comment regarding any corrections of the text; these are usually presented on an Errata List.
- The Chairman then gives the floor to the Respondent. The Respondent makes a 15 - 30 minutes presentation/summary of the thesis.
- Thereafter the Chairman gives the word to the Opponent. The Opponent may start with a general presentation of the subject for the thesis to thereafter point out the main achievements of the thesis, including comments regarding the significance of the results in relation to previous work. This exposé usually requires 15 - 30 minutes.
- For both presentations it should be kept in mind that the audience is of a very mixed background including specialists and generalists of the subject as well as relatives and friends of the Respondent.
- After the presentations the Opponent asks the Respondent whether she/he would like to make any complements to the thesis.
- The Opponent then initiates a more detailed discussion of the scientific content of the thesis with the Respondent. This discussion should preferably not be concerned with minor errors in the text, but instead with major issues such as for example the Respondent's conception of the field studied, the experimentally techniques employed, possible pitfalls and potential future developments. The Opponent should feel free to select various aspects for discussion entirely at her/his own discretion. However, all issues raised should be of relevance to the thesis. The Opponent as well as the Respondent may use slides or overhead transparencies of tables or figures during the discussions. This phase of the proceedings, during which the two discussants tend to ignore the audience, usually takes between one and two hours. The Opponent should stress the virtues as well as the weaknesses of the work.

- After completion of the debate the Opponent ends with a few (kind) remarks on a more personal note, usually involving some kind of congratulation; the Respondent answers by thanking the Opponent for the examination.
- The Chairman then invites the Evaluation Committee to take part in the discussion, as well as anyone in the audience who wishes to raise additional problems or questions. The Opponent may again participate at this point. After this additional discussion the Chairman ends the proceedings.
- Following the public dissertation the Evaluation Committee has a closed meeting. The Evaluation Committee among themselves appoint a chairman for the meeting. At the meeting the Opponent is present, to give a more informal opinion of the thesis, along with the Principal and sometimes also the Assistant Supervisor/s. The Supervisor/s usually comments on the role of the Respondent in the research project for example the extent of independent work. Additional questions regarding the thesis may be raised. The Evaluation Committee has the right to ask the Supervisor as well as the Opponent to leave the room during the final stage of the meeting. The Evaluation Committee formally decides on whether or not to accept the dissertation.