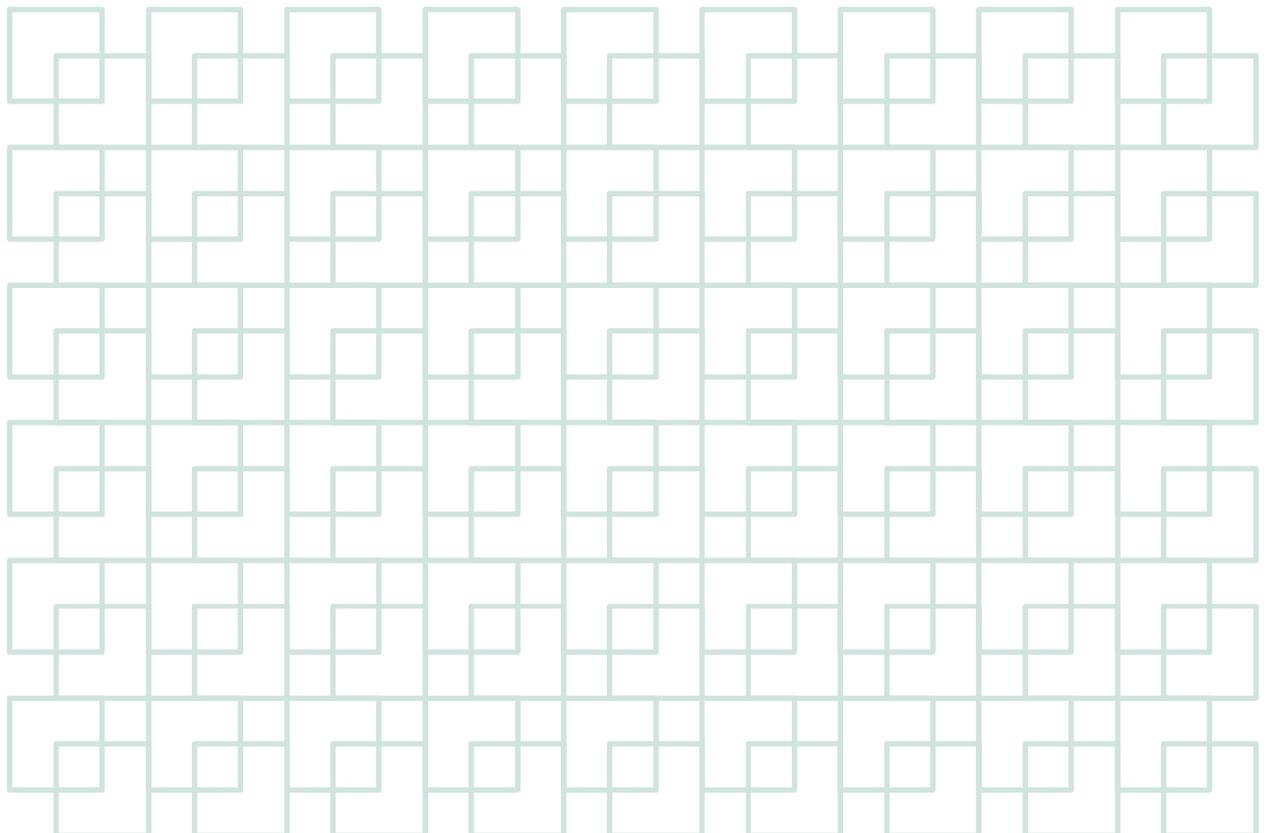


Norwegian University of Life Sciences
Faculty of Veterinary Medicine

Guide for opponents in doctoral degree evaluation committees

Version 2

Adopted: 26 August 2021 by the PhD programme council VET



Contact information

If you have any questions, please contact the committee's coordinator or the PhD advisers (email: phd.radgiver.vet@nmbu.no).

Terminology

An evaluation committee (hereinafter referred to as the committee) normally consists of three expert members, two of whom are external members and one of whom is an internal member. The internal member is the chair of the committee, and also its coordinator.

The two external members are the first and second opponents.

The committee's coordinator is also referred to as the third opponent.

Important deadlines

The committee's recommendation shall be available within three months of the committee receiving all parts of the thesis for evaluation, and no later than 25 working days before the planned public defence. The committee should be allowed at least six weeks to conduct its academic assessment. If a thesis is submitted shortly before a holiday, the distribution of the thesis to the committee may be delayed until after the holiday. If the committee receives the thesis shortly before a holiday, the deadline for submitting its evaluation may be extended.

The committee must quickly begin work to find a tentative date for the public defence and trial lecture. It is the coordinator's responsibility to prompt the committee to set a date. Please note that the committee members are expected to attend the committee's pre-disputation dinner the day before the public defence of the thesis and be present for the entire day of the public defence.

The committee is asked to suggest three or four possible dates to the PhD advisor (avoid Wednesdays due to management meeting). The PhD advisor will contact the candidate, the main supervisor and the chairperson for the public defence and find an available venue (Auditorium Hippocampus or Festsalen U215). The date cannot be changed once it has been confirmed by the PhD advisor. The date is considered tentative until the committee has approved the thesis.

Once a tentative date has been set, the coordinator must draw up a schedule with deadlines for the evaluation committee's work.

Important deadlines:

- Deadline for submission of the evaluation report (within three months of the committee receiving all parts of the thesis for evaluation, and no later than 25 working days before the planned public defence)
- Deadline for proposing a title for the trial lecture (no later than 15 working days before the date of the public defence)

The date is confirmed when the committee concludes in its evaluation report that it recommends that the thesis be approved for public defence.

Submission of the recommendation

The committee will make two evaluations at different times: 1) an evaluation of whether the thesis is worthy of a public defence for the PhD degree, 2) an evaluation of whether the candidate has passed the doctoral exam. The doctoral exam comprises two parts: the trial lecture and the public defence of the thesis. The two parts of the doctoral exam are assessed as passed or failed, and candidates are expected to pass. In practice, this means that the first of the two evaluation – the evaluation of the thesis – is the crucial step, and that theses of insufficient quality should be rejected at this stage.

The coordinator must submit the recommendation for approval no later than 25 working days before the planned public defence. The committee must agree on an internal deadline to allow the coordinator sufficient time for quality-assurance and editing of the recommendation in the form *NMBU 4.4 Assessment of the thesis*.

The committee submits a joint reasoned recommendation to the Faculty (phd.radgiver.vet@nmbu.no) on whether the thesis is worthy of a public defence for the doctoral degree. All members of the committee shall evaluate the entire thesis, but it is recommended that the two opponents with special expertise on the topic formulate the recommendation.

Please note that all parts of the thesis, both the introductory chapter ('kappe') and the accompanying articles, shall be evaluated and covered in the academic discussion during the public defence. Both opponents can discuss the same part and/or article, however. It is recommended that the coordinator make sure, at an early stage of the process, that the committee discusses and decides which parts of the thesis the first and second opponent, respectively, shall have chief responsibility for. It may be most practical for the opponents to take chief responsibility for writing the recommendation for the same parts for which they will be responsible during the public defence.

Given topic for the trial lecture

The title of the trial lecture must be approved by the Faculty before being communicated to the candidate ten (10) working days before the lecture is to be held. The coordinator must therefore submit the proposed topic no later than 15 working days before the date set for the public defence to allow sufficient time to approve and, if relevant, change the title.

Please note that the topic of the lecture should not be directly linked to the specific topic of the thesis, but should usually aim to provide a broader overview of the discipline. In cases where the title proposed by the committee is rejected, the reason is usually that the title is too closely linked to the topic of the thesis.

Public defence

Normally, no more than four months should pass between the submission of the thesis and the public defence. The public defence shall take place no earlier than 25 working days after the recommendation was submitted.

Trial lecture

The trial lecture takes place on the same day as the public defence of the thesis.

Evaluation of the thesis

Evaluation of the thesis

A Norwegian doctoral degree is awarded as proof that the candidate's research qualifications are of a certain standard. The candidates must complete a coursework component in addition to their research work. Together, the coursework component and research work shall provide an education at a high academic level and learning outcomes.

The minimum scope of the coursework component at master's degree or PhD level is 30 credits, and it will be adapted to the candidate's doctorate work. The committee will receive an overview of the coursework component with the thesis and can make use of this overview when preparing their questions.

When evaluating the thesis, particular emphasis shall be placed on whether the thesis is an independent and complete piece of scientific work of high academic standard in terms of:

- formulation of research questions
- conceptual precision
- methodological, theoretical and empirical basis
- documentation
- use of literature and form of presentation

The committee shall consider whether the material and methods are appropriate to the questions raised in the thesis. The thesis shall also contribute to new scholarly knowledge and maintain an academic standard that can justify publication as part of the literature in the field.

The thesis can consist of a monograph or a compilation of several pieces of work in the form of scholarly articles. If the candidate has chosen the article format, the thesis must contain an introductory chapter ('kappe'). The function of the introductory chapter is to provide an overall perspective that summarises and collates the research questions and conclusions presented in the part-works.

If the thesis contains joint publications, the PhD candidate must obtain declarations from his/her co-author(s) and their consent to use the work as part of the thesis (signed by the most important co-authors, maximum 5 co-authors per article/manuscript). The committee must consider to what extent the candidate's contribution to the joint publication can be identified and whether the candidate is responsible for a sufficient portion of the thesis. If the documentation submitted by the candidate is insufficient, the committee may take steps to obtain further information.

The requirements that apply to the thesis are described in Section 10 of the Regulations for the Doctor Philosophiae (PhD) degree.

The content of the recommendation

The committee submits a joint reasoned recommendation to the Faculty on whether the thesis is worthy of a public defence for the doctoral degree (by completing the form NMBU 4.4 Assessment of the thesis). The recommendation must contain:

- A brief description of the format (monograph/article-based), type and length of the thesis
- Description of the scientific significance of the thesis
- Key aspects concerning theory, hypotheses, material, methods and findings

- The thesis' strengths and weaknesses
- Conclusion on recommendation

The committee's recommendation

The committee shall submit a joint reasoned recommendation to the Faculty on whether the thesis is worthy of a public defence for the doctoral degree. The recommendation shall normally be available no later than 25 working days before the planned public defence.

- **Positive recommendation:** If the committee unanimously recommends that the thesis be approved for public defence of the PhD degree, the trial lecture and public defence can proceed according to plan. In this case, it will not be possible for the PhD candidate to make revisions to the thesis after the committee has evaluated it.

- **Revision:** The committee can recommend that the Faculty permits minor revisions. For example, revision may be an option if there are material errors or shortcomings in the introductory chapter ('kappe') that should be corrected, or if it leaves an imbalanced impression or the structure lacks a clear thread. Even if the committee has suggestions and input on how the thesis could be improved, minor revisions shall not be requested if the thesis meets the requirements for a Norwegian doctoral degree. If the committee recommends minor revisions, it must provide a concrete written list of what the candidate needs to revise. If the Faculty permits such revisions, the PhD candidate will be given a deadline for revision that will normally not be longer than three months. The evaluation committee will be given a deadline of up to six weeks from receiving the revised thesis to submit its final recommendation.

See the Regulations for the Doctor Philosophiae (PhD) degree at the Norwegian University of Life Sciences Section 15-2 for more detailed information about revisions.

- **Rejection:** If the committee finds that fundamental changes with respect to theory, hypothesis, material or methods are necessary before a thesis can be recommended for public defence, the thesis shall be rejected.

See the Regulations for the Doctor Philosophiae (PhD) degree at the Norwegian University of Life Sciences Section 15-3 for more detailed information about rejections.

Errata

A thesis must be printed exactly as it was submitted. After the thesis has been approved, only formal corrections that do not affect the academic content may be made before the final printing or publication (Errata list).

Trial lecture and public defence of the thesis

In Norway, the trial lecture and public defence are open to the public. This is a formal setting, and there will be an audience. The audience is usually made up of the academic supervisors, colleagues from the field, friends and family. There are usually between 10 and 40 people present. The candidate and the opponent asking questions both stand during the public defence.

The candidate, committee and chairperson for the public defence dress smartly (business/business casual style).

The chairperson, committee and candidate will enter and leave the room in procession for both the trial lecture and the public defence.

Trial lecture

The trial lecture is an independent part of the doctoral exam. The candidate must pass the trial lecture before the public defence of the thesis can take place. The committee must therefore evaluate the trial lecture immediately after it has been held and state whether or not the candidate has passed.

The purpose of the trial lecture is to test the candidate's ability to acquire knowledge over and above the topic of the thesis, and his/her ability to communicate this knowledge in a lecture setting. The trial lecture shall last for 45 minutes. The academic level of the lecture shall be adapted to suit master's degree students or students in the final phase of a five-year programme of professional study.

The evaluation committee evaluates the trial lecture using the following criteria:

- The PhD candidate's approach and delimitation of the topic
- How the lecture was structured/organised
- Understanding and maturity
- Presentation technique, including the use of visual aids (such as figures and photos)
- Time frame

The evaluation committee evaluates the trial lecture using the form *NMBU 4.5c Evaluation of the trial lecture and public defence* with guidance from the chairperson.

If the committee decides that the trial lecture does not merit a pass, the grounds for the decision must be stated. See Regulations for the Doctor Philosophiae (PhD) degree at the Norwegian University of Life Sciences Sections 17-1 and 17-3.

The committee and chairperson have no active part to play during the trial lecture.

Public defence

The public defence shall take place after the trial lecture has been held and a recommendation to approve it has been made.

Note that each of the opponents will have one opportunity to speak. There is no time limit for the public defence, but the recommended duration is 2–2.5 hours in total (including a 30-minute presentation by the candidate). The first opponent is expected to take slightly longer than the second opponent.

Together, the two opponents should discuss the entire thesis. It is important that all parts of the thesis are discussed (the introductory chapter and all the articles), but both opponents can discuss the same parts.

The public defence starts with the chairperson welcoming the audience and giving a brief account of the submission, the evaluation of the thesis and the assessment of the trial lecture. The PhD candidate is then called on to present his or her work.

The candidate explains the purpose and results of the doctoral work. The presentation takes approximately 30 minutes.

The chairperson then calls upon the first opponent. Once the first opponent has finished, the chairperson will normally announce an informal break of 10-15 minutes before the public defence continues.

After the break, the chairperson calls upon the second opponent.

After both opponents have concluded their questioning, members of the audience will have an opportunity to comment *ex auditorio*. There are rarely any comments.

The public defence shall be a scholarly discussion between the opponents and the PhD candidate on the formulation of research questions, the methodological, empirical and theoretical basis of the thesis, and the documentation and form of presentation. Particular emphasis should be placed on testing the tenability of important conclusions drawn by the candidate in his/her thesis.

The questions the opponents choose to pursue need not be limited to those discussed in the committee's statement on the thesis.

The committee submits a recommendation to the Faculty in which it evaluates the level of the thesis in relation to the international standard in the field and concludes on the question of whether the public defence is approved or not approved. If the public defence is not approved, grounds must be given for the decision.

The committee shall submit its evaluation of the public defence using form *NMBU 4.5c Evaluation of the trial lecture and public defence*.

Section 19(3) of the Regulations for the Doctor Philosophiae (PhD) degree at the Norwegian University of Life Sciences Section applies if the public defence is not approved.

Digital trial lecture and public defence

The trial lecture and public defence may take place digitally in whole or in part (hybrid solution) if physical presence is not a possibility. If a hybrid solution is chosen, the candidate, the chairperson of the public defence and the third opponent will usually be present in person along with a small audience and technical support staff for the digital transfer (streaming). The audience will also be given an opportunity to participate via a digital platform. The digital Zoom room consists of the public defence room and the discussion room.

A technical rehearsal will be organised no later than one week before the date of the public defence.

Digital trial lecture

The chairperson informs the audience about the rules for participating. The chairperson then introduces the candidate, who gives his/her trial lecture (45 minutes).

After the trial lecture, there will be a break of about 30 minutes. The committee must evaluate the trial lecture and approve it before the public defence can go ahead.

Digital defence of the thesis

The candidate presents his/her thesis (30 minutes). The chairperson then calls on the first and second opponent, respectively. When the second opponent has finished, the chairperson concludes the digital public defence.

The evaluation committee evaluates the public defence.

Practical information

Travel, hotel and fees

Shortly after a thesis has been approved for defence, the committee will receive a welcome email. This email contains practical information about travelling to Ås and what expenses will be covered. The travel expense form, fee form and agenda for the day of the public defence will be attached to the email.

The Faculty will make the accommodation arrangements and send a booking confirmation, NMBU will cover two (2) nights in a hotel for the opponents. The stay will be paid for directly by the Faculty. Please contact us if you want a shorter or longer stay or if you will be bringing additional guests.

Air travel (economy class) or other transport to and from Ås must be booked by the opponents themselves. The expenses are entered in the travel expense form and will be reimbursed.

The day before the trial lecture and public defence of the thesis, there will be a pre-disputation dinner where the committee, principal supervisor and co-supervisors can meet each other.

Please bring the travel expense form and fee form with you so that you can submit them on the day of the public defence. If you have any questions about how to fill in these forms, help will be available on the day.

Rules and regulations

You are obliged to familiarise yourself with the following rules and regulations when evaluating a thesis for NMBU:

[Guidelines for the Evaluation of Candidates for Norwegian Doctoral Degrees](#)

[Regulations for the Doctor Philosophiae \(PhD\) degree at the Norwegian University of Life Sciences](#)

[Supplementary provisions to NMBU's regulations for the degree of Philosophiae Doctor \(PhD\) for the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine \(VET\)](#)

Forms

[NMBU 4.4 Assessment of the thesis](#)

[NMBU 4.5c Evaluation of the trial lecture and public defence](#)

Travel expense form – to be sent by email

Fee form – to be sent by email