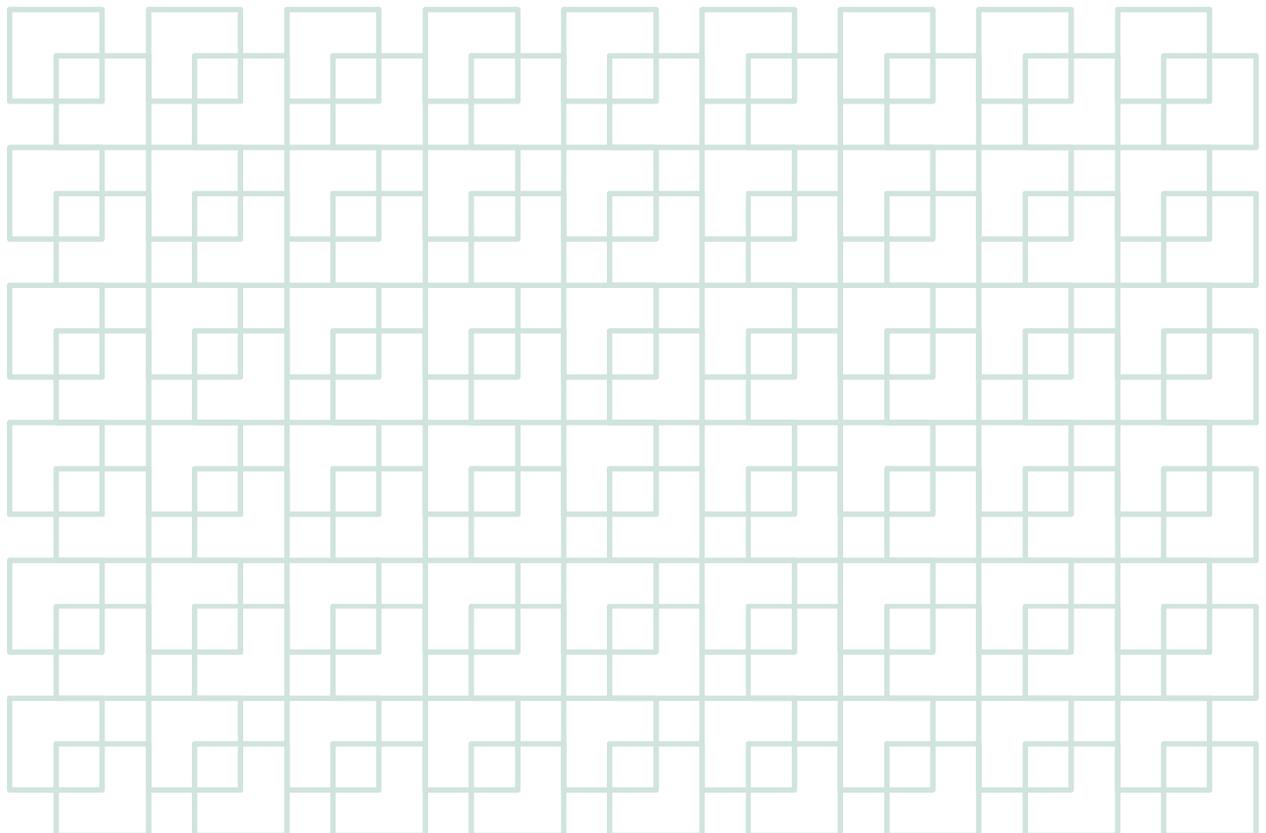


**Norwegian University of Life Sciences**  
Faculty of Veterinary Medicine

# **Guide for opponents in the assessment committee for doctoral degrees**

**Version: 1**

**Approved: May 20, 2020 by the PhD Program Committee VET**



## Contact information

Questions may be directed to the committee's coordinator or the PhD advisors.

Email for the PhD advisors: [phd.radgiver.vet@nmbu.no](mailto:phd.radgiver.vet@nmbu.no)

## Terms

The assessment committee (hereafter called the committee) is normally composed of three expert members: two external and one internal. The internal member is the committee's leader and coordinator.

The committee's two external members are the first and second opponents.

The committee's coordinator is also called the third opponent.

## Important deadlines

The committee's recommendation shall be made within three months of receiving all parts of the dissertation for evaluation, and within 25 working days before the planned disputation. The committee should have a minimum of six weeks to form their expert opinion. If the dissertation is handed in right before vacation time, then delivery of the dissertation can be delayed until after vacation.

The committee must quickly set a tentative date for the disputation and trial lecture. The coordinator is responsible for setting the committee to work in finding a date. Please note that the committee is expected to participate at the committee's pre-disputation dinner the night before the disputation, and to be present the whole day of the disputation.

When the committee has suggested one or several tentative disputation dates, the coordinator must contact the PhD advisors to finalize the date. The PhD advisors will confirm if the date works for the candidate, the advisors, the disputation leader, and that the venue and facilities are available. The date is considered tentative until the dissertation has been approved by the committee. The date cannot be changed once it is confirmed by the PhD advisors.

When a tentative date is set, the coordinator must create a work plan with deadlines for the assessment committee.

Important deadlines:

- Deadline for completing the evaluation report
- Deadline for the trial lecture's suggested title

The date is confirmed when the committee concludes in its evaluation report that it recommends approving the dissertation for disputation.

## Making recommendations

The committee makes two evaluations at different times: 1) Evaluates whether the dissertation qualifies to be defended for the PhD degree, 2) Evaluates whether the PhD exam was passed. The PhD exam consists of two parts: the trial lecture and the disputation. Each of the two parts are

evaluated on a pass-fail basis, and it is expected that the candidate will pass the exam. In practice, it is therefore the first evaluation – the evaluation of the dissertation – that is critical, and dissertations that are too weak should be exposed in this process.

The coordinator must send in the recommendation for approval 25 working days before the disputation date, at the latest. The committee must agree on an internal deadline, so that the coordinator has time to quality check and edit the recommendation using the form “Evaluation of the dissertation” (Form 4.4).

The committee gives a joint and justified recommendation to the faculty as to whether the dissertation is worthy of defending for the doctoral degree. All members of the committee will evaluate the dissertation in its entirety, but it is recommended that the two opponents with expert competency within the theme of the dissertation formulate the recommendation.

Please note that all parts of a dissertation, both the extended abstract and accompanying articles, shall be evaluated, and discussed during the disputation. Both opponents can discuss the same parts and/or same articles. The coordinator should ensure that the committee discusses and determines early on which parts of the dissertation will be the main responsibilities of the first and second opponents. From a practical standpoint, the opponents might write the recommendations for the corresponding parts of the dissertation that they are responsible for.

### Chosen topic for the trial lecture

The title of the trial lecture must be approved by the faculty before the candidate receives the title ten (10) working days before the lecture will take place. The coordinator must therefore send in a suggested topic for the trial lecture to the PhD advisors no later than 15 working days before the disputation date, so that there is enough time to approve and change the title (if necessary).

Please note that the trial lecture must not be directly related to the specific theme for the dissertation; normally it should lead to a larger overview of the subject field. When the committee’s suggested title is not approved, it is often because the title is too closely related to the theme of the dissertation.

### Disputation

Normally, no more than three months should pass between handing in the dissertation and the disputation. The disputation is held at the earliest 25 working days after the committee’s recommendation is delivered, and within two months after the institution has decided that the dissertation is worthy of defense.

### Trial lecture

The trial lecture is held on the same day as the disputation.

## Evaluation of the dissertation

### Assessment of the dissertation

A Norwegian doctoral degree certifies research competency at a specific level. The candidates will complete training in addition to research work. Taken together, the training and research work will provide the candidates with a high professional level and learning outcome.

Training will encompass a minimum of 30 credits at the master's or PhD level, tailored to the candidate's doctoral work. The committee will receive an overview of the training completed, together with the dissertation, and can use this when preparing questions.

Special emphasis must be placed on the dissertation as an independent and complete scientific work at the highest level when it comes to evaluating:

- Formulation of the problem(s)
- Clarification of concepts
- Methodological, theoretical and empirical basis
- Documentation
- Treatment of literature and presentation

The committee will evaluate if the materials and methods are appropriate for the questions raised in the dissertation. The dissertation should also contribute towards new professional knowledge at a level that could lead to its publication in the field's scientific literature.

The dissertation can either be a monograph or a collection of several scientific works in article format. If the candidate chooses the article format, then the dissertation must have an introductory chapter (extended abstract). The extended abstract's function is to give an all-encompassing perspective, which summarizes and compiles approaches to problems and conclusions presented in the articles.

If the dissertation includes collaborative work, then the doctoral student must receive statements from any co-author(s) and their consent for the work to be used in the doctoral dissertation. The committee shall evaluate if the doctoral student's effort can be identified and if the doctoral student is solely responsible for a large amount of the dissertation. If the doctoral student's documentation is not adequate, then the committee can obtain further information.

Dissertation requirements are outlined in Regulations for the PhD degree under Section 10.

### Content of the recommendation

Each opponent delivers his or her recommendation to the coordinator, and the coordinator writes a collective evaluation in the form "Evaluation of the dissertation" (Form 4.4). The recommendation should include:

- A short description of the dissertation's format (monograph/collection of articles), type and length
- Opinions on the dissertation's scientific significance
- Key moments regarding theory, hypotheses, materials, methods, and conclusions
- The dissertation's strengths and weaknesses
- The committee's conclusion

### The committee's recommendation

The recommendation is a joint and justified statement as to whether the dissertation is worthy of defense for the doctoral degree. The statement should normally be available no later than 25 working days before the planned disputation.

- *Positive recommendation*: If the committee unilaterally recommends approving the dissertation for defense, then the trial lecture and disputation can proceed as planned.

- *Revisions*: The committee can, based on the dissertation, recommend that the faculty permit minor revisions before the final statement is made. In this case the committee must present in writing a concrete overview of what the candidate must revise. See Section 15-2 in the Regulations for the PhD degree at NMBU for further information on revisions.

- *Non-approval*: The dissertation should not be approved for disputation if the committee discovers that profound changes to the theory, hypotheses, materials, or methods must be made. See Section 15-3 in the Regulations for the PhD degree at NMBU for further information on non-approval.

### Errata

A dissertation must be printed exactly as it was delivered. Only formal corrections that do not impact the scientific content can be made after the dissertation is approved and before the final printing or publication.

## Trial lecture and disputation

In Norway, the trial lecture and disputation are public. It is a ceremonious occasion, and an audience will be present. The audience normally consists of the advisor, professional colleagues, friends, and family. The number of people who normally attend ranges from 10-40. The candidate and the opponent asking questions stand during the disputation.

The candidate, committee and disputation leader should dress smartly (business/business casual).

The disputation leader, committee, and candidate process in and out of the locale for both the trial lecture and the disputation.

### Trial lecture

The trial lecture is an independent part of the doctoral degree examination. The candidate must pass the trial lecture before the disputation can be held. Therefore, the committee must immediately evaluate the trial lecture after it is held to decide if the candidate has passed.

The point of the trial lecture is to demonstrate the candidate's ability to acquire knowledge beyond the theme of the dissertation and to communicate this knowledge in a lecture situation. The trial lecture is 45 minutes long. The professional level of the trial lecture should be adapted to master's students or students towards the end of a 5-year professional education.

The evaluation committee will evaluate the trial lecture using the following criteria:

- How the PhD candidate narrows and angles the theme
- Structure and organization of the lecture
- Understandability and maturity
- Presentation technique, including the use of visual aids (e.g., figures and pictures)
- Timeframe

The evaluation committee will evaluate the trial lecture using the form "Evaluation of the trial lecture and disputation" (Form 4.5), with the disputation leader's assistance.

If the committee decides that the trial lecture is not approved, then reasons must be given for this decision. For further information, see Section 17-1 and 17-3 in the Regulations for the PhD degree at

NMBU.

The committee and disputation leader do not actively participate during the trial lecture.

## Disputation

The disputation shall occur after the trial lecture has been held and approved.

The disputation follows a procedure that normally encompasses the disputation leader, candidate, first opponent, second opponent and the committee's coordinator. Please note that the opponents are given the opportunity to ask questions in turn. There is no time limit for disputations, but the recommended time is 2-2.5 hours in total (including a 30-minute presentation by the candidate). It is expected that the first opponent will use slightly longer time than the second opponent.

Collectively, the two opponents will discuss the whole dissertation. It is important that all parts of the dissertation are discussed (the extended abstract as well as all articles), but both opponents can discuss the same parts.

The disputation begins with the disputation leader welcoming everyone and giving a brief account of the delivery and evaluation of the dissertation, and the evaluation of the trial lecture. After that the floor is turned over to the candidate's presentation of his or her work.

The candidate presents the purpose and results of the scientific work. The presentation should last about 30 minutes.

The disputation leader gives the floor to the first opponent. After the first opponent is finished, the disputation leader normally allows for a 10-15-minute break before the disputation continues.

After the break, the disputation leader gives the floor to the second opponent.

After both opponents have finished their discussions, the public is given the opportunity to comment *ex auditorio*. This seldom happens.

The disputation should be a professional discussion between the committee and candidate with regards to problem formulations, the methodical, empirical, and theoretical basis, documentation, and dissemination. Special weight should be placed on testing the durability of important conclusions that the candidate has arrived at in his or her work.

The problems that the committee pursues do not need to be limited to the ones mentioned in the statement on the dissertation.

The evaluation committee delivers a statement to the faculty that explains how the committee has evaluated the defense of the dissertation. This will evaluate the dissertation's level according to international standards in the field and conclude whether the disputation is approved or not. If the disputation is not approved, this decision must be justified.

The evaluation committee documents its evaluation of the disputation using the form "Evaluation of the trial lecture and disputation" (Form 4.5).

Section 19 (3) in the Regulations for the PhD degree at NMBU applies if the disputation is not approved.

## Practical information

### Travel, hotel, and honorary fees

Once the dissertation is approved for defense, the committee will receive a welcome email shortly thereafter. This email will contain practical information regarding the trip to Oslo and what is covered. The expense form, honorary fee form and agenda for the disputation day are attached.

The faculty will book lodgings and send a booking confirmation. NMBU will cover 2 nights at a hotel for the opponents. The hotel stay is paid directly by the faculty. Get in touch if you intend to stay for a shorter or longer period or bring extra guests.

Air travel (economy class) or other roundtrip travel to Oslo is booked by the opponents. You should register this on your expense form to be reimbursed.

The day before the trial lecture and disputation a pre-disputation dinner is arranged so that the committee can meet each other as well as the main advisor and co-advisor.

Please deliver your expense form and honorary fee form on the disputation day. If you have any questions about filling out these forms, we can help you at that point.

## Regulations

You must familiarize yourselves with the following regulations regarding the evaluation of a dissertation at NMBU:

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

[“Regulations for the Doctor Philosophiae \(PhD\) degree at NMBU”](#)

## Forms

[Evaluation of the dissertation \(Form 4.4\)](#)

[Evaluation of the trial lecture and disputation \(Form 4.5\)](#)

Expense Form – to be sent by email

Honorary fee Form – to be sent by email