General conditions

In Sweden, doctoral dissertations must be publicly defended at a “disputation”, or public defence. All interested individuals are welcome to attend. The public defence should be no longer than two hours.

Prior to the public defence, the dean appoints an external reviewer and an examination committee consisting of 3 or 5 selected researchers.

It is not the external reviewer’s duty to state whether a dissertation should pass or fail.

Public defence ceremony

The public defence of the dissertation plays an important role in the final assessment of the doctoral student and the external reviewer is expected to discuss both the strengths and weaknesses of the dissertation with the respondent.

• The chair opens the public defence ceremony, introduces the external reviewer and examination committee members, explains the public defence procedure to the audience and gives the respondent the opportunity to state any corrections to the text.

• The external reviewer begins by summarising the primary contents of the dissertation (max. 20 minutes) and then asks the respondent questions. Thereafter, the actual defence commences. It may vary in form and scope, but shall comprise a critical review and examination of the academic findings of the dissertation at hand. It shall consist of a dialogue between the external reviewer and the respondent in which the external reviewer critiques the dissertation and the respondent responds to the criticism. The defence concludes with the external reviewer giving an overall assessment of the dissertation. However, the external reviewer does not participate in the matter of the dissertation’s grade. That decision is made by the examination committee.

• The chair addresses the examination committee and the audience and opens the floor for them to ask the respondent questions and present opinions on the dissertation. The chair then declares the public defence to be completed.

Meeting of the examination committee

Upon completion of the public defence, the examination committee convenes in a special room with the external reviewer and the principal supervisor. The examination committee may call the assistant supervisor in to this meeting. His or her participation must be noted in the examination committee protocol. The respondent’s defence of the dissertation is discussed at this meeting and all individuals present are entitled to express themselves.
Finally, the examination committee decides to pass or fail the dissertation. The supervisors and external reviewer must leave the room when the examination committee makes its decision.

The members determine the grade and any written motivation, sign the protocol and submit it to the chair of the public defence ceremony. A dissertation may be graded as pass or fail. The respondent is informed of the decision.