



# THE PROCEDURE FOR PUBLIC DEFENCE OF A DOCTORAL THESIS

This is an overview of the procedure for public defence of a doctoral thesis at the IT Faculty at the University of Gothenburg.

## The thesis

The thesis may be presented either as a monograph, or as a number of published papers preceded by a summary. In the latter case (which is most common), both the summary and the papers should be fully discussed.

## The participants

**The opponent** is a distinguished scholar with research accomplishments related to the topics of the thesis. The task of the opponent is to critically examine the thesis at the public defence. He or she is expected to read the thesis carefully and prepare a set of questions intended as a basis for his/her discussion with the respondent during the thesis defence.

**The respondent** is the PhD-student that is author of the thesis. You can address the respondent with her or his first name, or as the respondent.

**The supervisor(s)** is the scholar(s) that has been supervising the PhD-student through the process. Typically, there is one main supervisor and one or several co-supervisors. They do not play any formal role in the public defence.

**The chair** of the public defence is most often a senior colleague from the hosting department. The chair introduces the participants in the defence and distributes the word among them.

**The grading committee** is appointed by the Dean on behalf of the Faculty board and consists of three members on the level of professor or associate professor. In exceptional cases five members can be appointed to the committee. At least two members of the committee must be external to the hosting department. They may be from other faculties of the University of Gothenburg, and/or from other universities. After the closure of the public defence, the grading committee will meet to discuss the merits of the thesis and the matter of approval or not.

**The examiner** is a senior scholar in the respondent's research discipline who takes part in a pre-assessment of the thesis before it is submitted for defence. The examiner may also be the chair of the public defence but plays no other formal role in the thesis defence or in the grading of the thesis.

**The audience:** a Swedish thesis defence is a public event. A typical audience will consist of the respondent's friends, relatives and colleagues. The audience can be addressed simply as Ladies and Gentlemen and no other ranking is necessary.

## The Disputation

Below is a description of the sequence of the main events in the disputation. More detailed instructions and suggestions for approximate time frames for the events will be communicated to the opponent and the grading committee by the department arranging the disputation.

**Chairman's introduction:** The chairman opens the proceedings and introduces the opponent, the respondent and the grading committee.

**Respondent's opening remarks:** The respondent is given an opportunity to address any major errors discovered after print and distribute a list of errata.

**Summary of the thesis:** The summary sets the scene for the critical discussion that will follow. As the audience consists partly of laymen it is appreciated if at least the first part of the summary can be kept on a popular level. Depending on local practice, the summary can be presented either by the opponent or the respondent, or a combination of the two. If the opponent does the summary, the respondent gets an opportunity to give a brief comment on the summary. The main supervisor will inform the opponent of the local procedure well in advance.

**Opponent's questions to the respondent:** Ideally the opponent and the respondent will engage in a critical dialogue. A good opposition will generate a scientific discussion that is both interesting to the audience and informative for the grading committee. Above all the opponent's role is to stimulate and maintain a discussion with the respondent while forcing the respondent to defend the thesis. To stimulate an intellectually productive discussion where both parties feel relaxed, it is recommended that the discussion is kept constructive.

**Questions from the grading committee:** When the opponent's questioning is complete, the chairman invites questions from the grading committee, who is expected to ask complementary questions.

**Questions from the audience:** When the grading committee's questioning is complete, the chairman invites questions to the respondent from the audience.

**Closure of the public session:** When the discussion is finished, the chairman formally closes the public session, and the members of the grading committee withdraw for their meeting.

**The grading committee meeting:** The chair of the disputation attends the committee meeting, but in the beginning of the meeting the word is handed over to the committee member that is chosen by the other members to chair the meeting. Formally the committee decides whether the opponent and supervisor(s) are allowed to attend. The committee discusses the work presented in the thesis and its significance, together with the respondent's defence, in order to decide whether it should pass. Although the opponent does not have a vote, his or her opinion is considered an important contribution to the committee discussion. It is also common to let the supervisor(s) attend the meeting. Besides giving additional background information to the committee, the committee discussion will provide important feedback to the supervisors and may also relate the thesis to the standards of their home institutions.

## **Practical details**

Opponent and committee can expect to receive all the material in the thesis in manuscript form well ahead of the defence.

The opponent will receive a small reimbursement for his or her work, and the opponent and committee member's travel and subsistence expenses will be refunded. The department organising the disputation will help with practical details like travel and accommodation arrangements.