

Information on the review of a doctoral thesis and the oral defence

Dear colleague,

The Directorate of Doctoral Studies for Social Sciences would like to thank you for taking the time to undertake the task of reviewing a doctoral thesis. In doing so, you are making an important contribution to maintaining and improving the standards of quality of academic writing at the University of Vienna.

At the University of Vienna, theses are reviewed by two academics from the relevant discipline. The University generally appoints external academics, although in exceptional cases internal academics may be appointed. Both reviewers receive a bound copy of the thesis (a copy in electronic format can be supplied on request) at the same time.¹ In accordance with the Statutes of the University of Vienna, you are allowed a maximum of four months for the review. In the interests of the candidate, you are kindly requested to complete the review as quickly as possible.

The thesis you receive is one of three copies submitted, which will be published in the University Library following the conclusion of the review procedure. Once the thesis has been reviewed for publication in the Library, it can no longer be corrected. Amendments for a (non-mandatory) publication are permitted. You are requested to return the specimen copy of the thesis sent to you.

At the University of Vienna, there are two options for the submission of a thesis: the thesis may either be in the form of a monograph or a thesis by publication. The requirements for a thesis by publication can be found here:

<http://doktorat-sowi.univie.ac.at/kumulative-dissertation/> (in German only)

Information on the review of a thesis as well as the arrangements for the public defence is provided in the following section.

I. Reviewing a doctoral thesis

Thesis reviews in the Faculty of Social Sciences generally comprise between 5 and 10 pages. Your review must justify the grade you award. We request that you cover the following points and key issues in your review:

1. Research question, integration of the research question into the current state of research, originality and objective of research

- Are the research question and the objective of the thesis clearly formulated?

¹ If you would like to receive the thesis in electronic format (PDF), please contact the StudiesServiceCenter of the Faculty of Social Sciences listed below.

- To what extent is the current state of research in the relevant subject area presented in a comprehensive, focused and problem-oriented manner?
- Does the thesis project cover the current state of specialist and thematic debate (state-of-the-art) to an appropriate extent?
- Was research work relevant to the subject ignored?
- Does the project make a new and original contribution to the state-of-the-art?

2. Theory, methodology and research design

- Methods – are these stated clearly?
- Does the methodology correspond with the objective of the thesis?
- Are the research question, theories, research approach, methodology and methods consistent and were appropriate methods used?
- Are the methods of data collection and analysis compatible?

3. Significance and quality of the source-based research or the empirical research, data corpus and choice of sources/data/materials

- Is the material basis of the research question commensurate with the research design?
- How comprehensive and consistent is the material and data analysis?

4. Structure of the thesis

- Does the thesis have a logical and coherent structure?
- Is the thesis concise or broad-ranging and digressive; does it pursue the research question and objective effectively?

5. Findings: What constitutes the innovative contribution to research? Relevance to the relevant research area?

- Were the findings derived coherently, checked correctly, described, analysed and interpreted in accordance with the academic standard enabling them to be published in international peer-reviewed journals?
- Are the findings and conclusions compatible with current debates in the subject area? Do they represent an original contribution to these current academic debates?

6. Format of the thesis: Citation style, style, presentation

- Are the references correctly cited?
- How would you evaluate the candidate's writing?

7. Summary: Strengths and weaknesses in terms of content, method, format and language; the degree to which the thesis is innovative; grading

- Does the thesis augment existing knowledge in this area of research?
- Does the thesis demonstrate that the candidate can conduct independent academic research?
- What is your overall evaluation of the thesis?

The thesis should be assessed on a scale of 1 to 5 in accordance with the Austrian grading system (where 1=excellent, 2=good, 3=satisfactory, 4=sufficient, 5=insufficient).

In line with the recommendations of the Bologna Follow-Up Group, these grades are defined as follows:

Austrian grading scale	Definition
1	EXCELLENT: above-average level of achievement with only a few mistakes
2	GOOD: generally good, solid piece of work
3	SATISFACTORY: corresponds in all respects to average requirements
4	SUFFICIENT: still meets minimum requirements despite any flaws
5	INSUFFICIENT: major improvements are required

Please send your review report to the StudiesServiceCenter (SSC). Please send your review report to the doctoral candidate as well.

II. Arrangements for the public defence

The Director of Studies is responsible for the nomination of the members of the examination committee. However, the candidate also has the right to suggest appropriate members for this committee.

Examination committees must be made up of at least three people, usually the two reviewers and a chairperson. In most cases, the Director of Studies serves as chairperson, but this role can be delegated if required.

It is the candidate's responsibility to arrange a suitable date for the public defence with all parties, in consultation with the StudiesServiceCenter (SSC).

A public defence lasts about an hour. It starts with a 20-minute presentation by the doctoral candidate. The presentation must clearly define and justify the thesis project and must specifically tackle the comments in the reviews, thereby defending the thesis in the solid academic sense. The colloquium then commences and is usually opened by the person chairing the examination committee. The reviewers should then put more in-depth and advanced questions to the candidate.

Travel expenses

The University of Vienna actively supports and encourages the participation of external reviewers in a public defence and allocates a maximum of € 500 per public defence for this purpose to cover travel expenses incurred. This figure is intended as a maximum amount and should, as far as possible, not be exceeded. Similarly, it should not be necessary to claim the full amount in all cases.

The University of Vienna is subject to monitoring by the Austrian Court of Audit, and the guidelines regarding the submission of travel expense claims must be adhered to in all cases.

Further information on travel expenses and accommodation close to the University can be found here:

http://studienpraeses.univie.ac.at/fileadmin/user_upload/studienpraesis/SL.002_Information_on_Doctoral_Studies_for_External_Reviewers_101011.pdf

Further information on the doctoral programme is available on the website of the StudiesServiceCenter for the doctoral programme in Social Sciences.

<http://doktorat-sowi.univie.ac.at/home/>

Do not hesitate to contact the StudiesServiceCenter if you have any queries:

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