

Doctoral Thesis/PhD Defence Protocol

Stages and procedures

1. The public defence: An overview

1. Theses defences at our universities are public, hence they involve the PhD Student, his/her supervisors, the examining board and a potential audience. Their goal is for the PhD candidate to present their work and to display adequate knowledge of their field of enquiry when answering the board members suggestions or criticisms (if any).

Roles:

- a) The president conducts the entire defence, both the private deliberations and the public defence.
- b) The secretary is in charge of: i) the documentation which the Department's Secretary office will either deliver to him/her in person in the defence room in the case of in situ defences; or, in case of virtual defences, will receive the documentation by mail or private repositories (Drive; Dropbox); ii) documents include a defence act/form to be signed by all board members with a statement concerning the language used during the defence, the grade obtained and the time at which the defence has ended; iii) a TESEO¹ form to be signed by the secretary only. These documents need to be delivered back to the Secretary office once the defence is over.
- c) The vocal fulfills the same academic role as the rest of the members of the committee, i.e. judging the quality of the PhD: its content (theory, methods, results, discussion and conclusions; its originality and contribution to the field) and form. PhDs can be either in the form of a monograph, or as a compendium of research articles (see regulations <https://www.upf.edu/documents/4067287/4072527/ENG-TesiCompendiArticles.pdf/60a675a4-45ef-c622-2a65-3e0ac2439e94>).

The public defence takes an average of 2:30 hours (anything between 2 and 3 hours) and includes the following stages in chronological order:

2. Half an hour prior to the defence starting time, the board meets in a closed room under the chair's initiative, they get to know each other, organize the session, and become acquainted with the documentation to be filled in. If the defence is virtual, the examining board should also access the virtual session also twenty minutes in advance, so that the Department's Secretary, who has a support role during the entire defence, can organize the break out room for deliberation, and the board can meet there privately to deal with the above procedure (a). Once ready, they can go back into the

¹ TESEO is a virtual interface within the SIGMA platform for managing student grades at undergraduate and graduate level, shared by all Catalan universities.

main room where the Department's Secretary will have allowed both the student and the audience in, in order to start the public academic event proper.

- For the in situ defence, sitting arrangements at the examination table should be as follows:
 - Typically the chair sits in the middle of the table, with the secretary and vocal to his/her sides.
 - The PhD student sits facing the board.
 - The audience is seated where the room allows it.
 - No other expert or student should sit at the table.
- 3. Once the committee is ready to start the session, the chair asks the secretary to open the door and allow the student, supervisor(s) and potential audience in. In the virtual defence this will not be the case.
- 4. The chair of the board formally opens the session by welcoming the candidate and the audience and establishing the procedure, which includes the format followed for the discussion with the candidate (see verbatim transcription of formulas below).
- 5. The student presents (his/her) work to the examination board during 30'- 45'.
- 6. The board takes it in turns to give comments and suggestions and ask questions.
 - It is customary to set the order of members' interventions during the session based on age or experience or their role on the board, so that the examining board chair (president) speaks last and the vocal or the secretary member/s speak/s first based on academic experience (date when they defended their PhD thesis). Each board member slot should be no longer than 20'.
- 7. The student answers, either to each member in turn, in order to organize a 1 to 1 discussion, more agile and accountable, or after all members have had the floor.
- 8. The chair asks whether there is a Doctor in Philosophy in the audience wishing to say something (typically the supervisor(s) takes the floor).
- 9. The chair asks everyone to leave the room for deliberation.
 - In the case of virtual defences, the examination board goes into their original break out room.
- 10. Once the mark decided, and the secret vote on the (possible) distinction cast, the secretary again opens the door and asks the student, supervisor(s) and audience to come in the room. In case of virtual defences, the board goes back into the main room.

2. The public defence session opening

Once the board has met privately and organized themselves, the examining board chair (president) decides when the public defence session begins by asking the board's secretary to open the door and ask the PhD candidate, supervisors and the public to enter the room, or, in virtual defences, the committee enters the room back from their break out room.

The public defence session starts when the chair of the board welcomes the candidate and the public, declares the session open and describes the procedure followed to the candidate with the following words:

"It is my pleasure to open the public session for the defence of the doctoral dissertation presented by Mr/Mrs XXXXXXX XXXXXXX XXXXXXX, entitled XXXXXXX XXXXXXX XXXXXXX XXXXXXX XXXXXXX XXXXXXX XXXXXXX, which is being presented as a requirement for the degree of Doctor by the Pompeu Fabra University (UPF).

On behalf of the Department of Translation and Linguistic Science of the UPF, and the Official Research Group XXXXX; I would like to welcome all attendants to this defence session, and, in particular I would like to welcome the examining board members that have agreed to be on this board:

Dr. XXXXXXX XXXXXXX XXXXXXX

from the University of XXXXXXX XXXXXXX XXXXXXX

AND

Dr. XXXXXXX XXXXXXX XXXXXXX

from the University of XXXXXXX XXXXXXX XXXXXXX

This session is going to be organized in the following way: i) oral presentation of the doctoral dissertation, by the candidate, who can make use of the time he/she deems necessary (30- 45 minutes); be sure to present the original contributions of the study within its field of research; ii) questions and suggestions by each board member; iii) respective answers by the candidate; iv) final discussion.

There are two options for this step, and we would like to know which one you choose, YOU (the candidate) may choose to react to OUR comments and questions by answering each one of US in turn after each of our interventions, or YOU can choose to address the comments and questions together at the end. In any case we would like you to address all the questions and suggestions you receive."

(The candidate should decide at this point whether he/she will reply to comments and questions after each board member has spoken or at the end of all interventions)

Consequently, I would like to give the floor to the PhD candidate, Mr/Mrs XXXXXXX XXXXXXX XXXXXXX.

3. The oral presentation of the doctoral thesis

The students should present the research aim and objectives, a summary of the theory(ies) and model(s) adopted for the PhD, the literature review of existing knowledge on the topic examined, the methodology used, results and discussion and conclusions, with an emphasis on the specific original contribution that the PhD makes to the field of study.

4. Comments and questions from the doctoral thesis' examining board

The board chair gives the floor to the board members as follows:

“Now the members of this examining board will make comments and observations and may ask questions about the contents of the Dissertation or the oral presentation.”

Dr., from the University of, the floor is yours.

If the candidate has chosen to reply to the board members’ comments at the end, or considering any other circumstances, the board chair may propose a short break (10-15’ in in situ defences, 5-10’ in virtual defences) before the candidate replies to the comments and questions. During this time only the candidate and the board members can stay in the room. When the break is over the session is resumed by giving the floor to the candidate.

5. The board members’ discussion with the candidate

After the candidate has replied to the comments and questions posed by the board members, they react to the candidate’s explanations and may engage in a discussion of the issues raised. This stage shouldn’t last for more than 15-20’.

6. Intervention of the Doctors present

Once all interventions are over, the board chair gives the floor to any Doctors of Philosophy in the room wishing to speak:

“I would like now to give the floor to the doctors of Philosophy in this room. If there are any doctors in the room that would like to speak they can do so now.”

7. The board’s deliberations

After the intervention of the doctors in the room, the board chair, if the defence is in situ, asks those present to leave the room, including the candidate, so that the examining board can deliberate privately. If the defence is virtual, the board will go back to the break out room. Technical support from the Secretary’s office will always be guaranteed.

8. Thesis’ grades

The examining board must issue a grade. A doctoral thesis can receive the following possible grades:

Fail
Pass
Good
Excellent

Those PhDs obtaining an Excellent are candidates for a possible *Cum Laude* distinction, granted by secret vote.

The documentation needed to close the event includes: i) a report written by each of the board members (members who were asked to produce a report before the defence as external reviewers of the dissertation, can use the same one); ii) the form stating the place where the defence occurs and its finishing time) and the final grade, duly signed by the three board members, and the TESEO form duly filled in and signed by the board secretary.

9. Thesis' distinction (*Cum Laude*)

Theses may be granted an extra distinction or *Cum Laude* in case that three members of the board granted the thesis with the highest grade (Excellent). Following the UPF procedures, this distinction must be granted as a joint decision taken by the entire board (unanimously) and independently (without consultation). Hence, candidates decisions are secret and written on the vote document.

In the case of in situ defences, each member of the board will receive a document, within the documentation the board secretary has, for their individual vote, and an envelope. He/she should mark the vote on the document, introduce it in the envelope, and close it.

In case of virtual defences, prior to the date of the defence, each board member will be sent a link to send their secret vote back. The votes must be cast right after the deliberation. Once the 3 votes have reached the Secretary's office, both the student, the supervisor(s) and the board will be informed of the resulting decision within a few days.

10. Closure

Once the deliberation is over, the secretary of the board calls the PhD candidate back into the room, as well as the audience, or, in the event of a virtual event the board simply goes back into the main room.

At this point the board chair (while standing up) will give the decision of the examining board public, as follows:

*"This examining board, after having deliberated on the contents of the Thesis and the candidate's oral defence has agreed to award Mr/Mrs **XXXXXXXX** the following grade: **XXXXXX XXXXXX XXXXXX**, for the doctoral dissertation entitled **XXXXXX XXXXXX XXXXXX XXXXXX XXXXXX XXXXXX XXXXXX XXXXXX XXXXXX**, the degree of Doctor by the Pompeu Fabra University.*

Congratulations!"

Everyone applauds!!! And the candidate thanks the board.