



# GÖTEBORG UNIVERSITY

## FACULTY OF SCIENCE

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To the Opponent

### To the Opponent

- A Guide to the Procedure for the Public Defence of a Doctoral Thesis

#### Background

The Ph.D. programme corresponds to the third cycle of the Bologna framework, and is preceded by four years of study in the first and second cycles (Bachelor and Master levels). Although a Ph.D. corresponds to four years of full-time study, many Ph.D students also work part-time as teaching assistants and thus take five years or more to complete their doctorate. The Ph.D programme combines graduate courses with an individual research programme leading to publishable results. Graduate courses normally comprise between 25 and 50 % of the Ph.D. programme. The research programme culminates in the submission of a thesis which is defended in public. The thesis defence is a formal event for which the procedure is outlined below.

#### The thesis

Theses in the Faculty of Science are normally presented as a number of published papers preceded by a summary: monograph theses are permitted but are very unusual.

#### The participants

**The opponent** is a researcher selected to oppose the thesis at the public defence.

**The candidate** is the author of the thesis. During the defence the candidate (in Swedish "respondent") may be addressed either by his or her first name, or more formally as Mr. X, Ms. X.

**The chairman** is usually a professor from the candidate's department.

**The examination board** is appointed by the Faculty, and consists of three or five members. At least one board member will be from another Faculty of Göteborg University, or from outside the University. Both the opponent and the candidate's

supervisor attend the examination board meeting and take part in its deliberations, but do not have a vote.

**Note:** There is also a professor responsible for graduate education in the candidate's research discipline, the examiner, who assesses the graduate courses read by the candidate. The examiner plays no formal role in the thesis defence.

## The audience

A Swedish thesis defence is a public event. The audience will include the candidate's friends, relatives and colleagues, and can be addressed simply as "Ladies and Gentlemen".

## Sequence of events

An approximate time schedule for the defence is as follows:

Chairman's introduction (4-5 min.)

Candidate's opening remarks (2-3 min.)

Summary of the thesis (20 min.)

Opponent's questions to the candidate (60-90 min.)

Questions from the audience (0-20 min.)

Meeting of the examination board (15-30 min.)

**Chairman's introduction:** the chairman opens the proceedings and introduces the opponent, the candidate and the examination board.

**Candidate's opening remarks:** the candidate is given an opportunity to speak and/or distribute a list of errata.

**Summary of the thesis:** this summary sets the scene for the discussion to follow. Traditionally this summary was presented by the opponent, but nowadays the summary is more commonly presented by the candidate, or by the opponent and the candidate in combination. In the latter case, the opponent will normally discuss the value of the thesis in a wider context, while the candidate will focus on the content of the thesis. As the audience consists partly of laymen it is appreciated if at least the first part of the summary can be kept at the level of "popular science".

**Opponent's questions to the candidate:** this is the hardest part for both the opponent and the candidate. A good opposition will generate a scientific discussion which is both interesting to the audience and informative for the examination board. While this is often best achieved by focusing on the scientific principles and concepts applied and on the wider significance of the work, detailed examination of selected aspects of the thesis can also be very valuable. Questions relating to other parts of the discipline or adjacent subjects not included in the thesis are not normally raised. Above all the opponent's role is to stimulate and maintain a discussion with the candidate while forcing the candidate to defend the thesis. The opponent may wish to conclude by thanking the candidate for the discussion and/or offering congratulations on a good defence, as appropriate. Opponent and candidate will often shake hands at this stage.

**Questions from the audience:** when the opponent's questioning is complete, the chairman invites questions to the candidate from the examination board and the audience.

**Closure of the public session:** when the discussion is finished, the chairman formally closes the public session and the members of the examination board withdraw for their meeting.

**The examination board meeting:** this meeting is held behind closed doors. The board discusses the work presented in the thesis and its significance, together with the candidate's defence. The candidate's contribution to multi-author papers in the thesis will be discussed, usually based on a written contribution report. Although the opponent does not have a vote, his or her opinion is considered an important contribution to the board's discussion. The opponent will often be asked how the standard of the thesis and its defence compare with those in his or her home country.

It is very rare for a Swedish thesis to be rejected after the formal defence. The content of the thesis will already have been reviewed internally, and also externally in the case of published papers. However, if as opponent you find that the thesis is not of the standard required for a Ph.D. degree, please contact the supervisor or examiner well in advance so that the public defence can be called off.

### **Practical details**

You can expect to receive all the material in the thesis in manuscript or preprint form at least three weeks before the defence; the final bound version will generally arrive a little later. If you would like slides or overheads of figures in the thesis to use in your opposition please let us know.

You will receive a small fee for your work, and your travel and subsistence expenses will be refunded. We can arrange accommodation in a University guest room or in a hotel according to your preference.

Although there are no formal dress requirements for the defence, if you come from a university with formal academic dress it is appreciated if you wear this since it adds to the sense of the occasion.