

# Aalto University School of Arts, Design and Architecture

## DOCTORAL THESIS INSTRUCTIONS

*Academic Committee for Arts, Design and Architecture, 24.11.2021  
In effect from 1 January 2022*

These instructions shall be followed in the examination of thesis for the Doctor of Arts (Art and Design) degree, the Doctor of Science (Architecture) degree and the Doctor of Philosophy degree at Aalto University School of Arts, Design and Architecture. Any practices deviating from these instructions shall be dealt with case by case by the Doctoral Programme Committee (DPC).

The decrees forming the basis for the instructions:

- Universities Act 558/2009
- Government Decree on University Degrees 794/2004, including amendments 1039/2013
- Aalto University Bylaws
- School of Arts, Design and Architecture Bylaws
- Aalto University Degree Regulations on Doctoral Education
- Aalto University General Regulations on Teaching and Studying
- Regulations regarding doctoral thesis and advising approved by the University Academic Affairs Committee

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# 1. Quality requirements and forms of doctoral thesis

## 1.1 General quality requirements for doctoral thesis

The thesis shall contain new scientific knowledge in the field it represents. In the field of art and design, the thesis may also contain knowledge and skills for conceiving methods of artistic creation or for creating products, objects or works that meet high artistic demands.

The thesis shall clearly set forth the new findings. The student's own contribution to the research or to the artistic production must be sufficient and clearly stated. Research methods must meet the standards generally set for research.

The conduct of the research must conform to good scientific practice and ethical principles of research.

## 1.2 Various forms of doctoral thesis

An approved doctoral thesis may be a **single study (monograph)** that has not appeared before in full in published form. The monograph shall form a coherent entity and be the result of the researcher's independent work. It may contain references to other publications produced by the author dealing with the same problems.

Alternatively, the thesis may be an **article-based doctoral thesis**, which consists of a set of publications on a related set of problems, and a summary of the findings. The summary shall describe the research problem, the research goals and methods, and the key findings. The summary shall assess the significance of the study for the discipline. The summary shall contain a list of the publications included in the thesis and describe the independent contribution of the student in each publication separately.

The article thesis must include at least 3 full-length articles (e.g. JUFO 1–3). These articles must have been approved for publication in a peer-reviewed scientific journal, in a similarly peer-reviewed conference publication, or as a chapter in a peer-reviewed book. In addition to the three articles, the thesis may include other publications, shorter articles or artistic components. For one of these, the publication process may still be ongoing. For well-grounded reasons, the Doctoral Programme Committee may also approve other kinds of compilations of publications as a doctoral thesis.

The articles may also include co-authored publications if the student's substantial independent contribution to them can be demonstrated. If the contribution is not demonstrated in the publication, an account of the contribution of the student and of the other authors must be given in the summary. The student must ask and receive the approval of the other authors for the account given. The student must be the first author of at least two of the articles.

As a rule, the articles included in the thesis must have been published during the time the study right for the doctoral degree was valid. Articles that fulfil the academic criteria set for a doctoral thesis and were written during earlier doctoral studies, for instance, or during work for a research institute, may constitute an exception to this rule. The doctoral student must discuss any earlier published articles to be included in the thesis already at the start of the studies.

### *Artistic components as part of the thesis*

In the field of art and design, a thesis may also include an art production, a series of art productions meaningfully connected to each other, or a design or media project. In this document, the productions and projects will be referred to as artistic components. As a rule, the artistic components to be included in the thesis must have been created during the validity of the study right.

The artistic component(s) have to be in a dialogic and analytic relation with the written component of the thesis. The student has to present in the written component the targets, methods and findings of the artistic component(s).

The way in which the artistic component becomes part of the research can vary according to the methodological background employed. It is expected that the artistic component articulates or discloses its own research orientation—the capacity of the practice to engage with new kinds of insight, knowledge and content.

The artistic components can be joint productions or projects, provided that the independent contribution of the student is substantial and clearly indicated. The independent contribution of the student and that of the other authors must be explained in the written component. The doctoral student must ask and receive approval from the other authors in order to include this account.

The artistic components must either be presented in depth within the written thesis, or the thesis must contain information on how the reader may acquaint themselves with the artistic components or their documentation.

### *Other*

At its discretion and after due consideration, the School may also approve other kinds of work as thesis if they fulfil the quality requirements for doctoral thesis.

## **2. Supervision and advising**

Each doctoral student makes a doctoral personal study plan (DPSP) including a plan concerning the content, scope and duration of studies with credits, a research plan and a supervision plan, a financing plan and a career plan. The implementation of the doctoral personal study plan including all this is followed up yearly by the supervising professor.

If the plan concerning the content, scope and duration of studies with credits deviates from the approved curriculum of the programme, the student must obtain approval for their personal study plan from the supervising professor.

The supervising professor is also responsible for the supervision arrangements of the doctoral student. The supervision plan is an agreement by the supervising professor, the advisor(s) and the doctoral student regarding their respective responsibilities, rights and duties. The responsibilities are described in detail in the instructions, 'Supervision of doctoral students at Aalto University'.

The Doctoral Programme Committee appoints a supervising professor who represents the research field approved for the student. The supervising professor must be a tenure-track professor of the school, or a non-tenure track professor of the school approved by the dean to act as a supervising professor. Supervising professor has to have a doctoral degree and experience with doctoral education.

The Doctoral Programme Committee appoints at least one advisor who must hold a doctor's degree.

Supervising professor can be appointed also as an advisor. In case of an artistic or practice-based doctoral thesis, a second advisor, who does not hold a doctor's degree, can be appointed based on artistic merit or competence in the area of research. Advisors can be appointed for particular parts or phases of the thesis process. All appointed advisors are credited for their contribution.

In case an advisor who is external to Aalto University is appointed, the doctoral student should make short notes of their activities with the advisor. These notes should list each meeting and their general content and any activities expected of the advisor in between, such as reading and commenting the manuscript. These short notes are sent to the supervising professor at the end of the year.

### **3. Pre-examination and permission for defence**

The thesis may be published in Finnish, Swedish or English, or in some other language with the permission of the Doctoral Programme Committee. The language of the manuscript submitted for pre-examination must be the same as for the final publication. The Doctoral Programme Committee may, at its discretion, require that the language of the manuscript be proofread at any point of the process. In this case, a certificate that the language proofreading has been performed is to be submitted to the secretary of the Committee.

If the thesis includes an artistic component(s), the student shall also submit their documentation as stated in Section 4.4 of these instructions.

#### **3.1 Pre-examination of the thesis**

Doctoral Programme Committee decides on starting the pre-examination of doctoral thesis based on the supervising professor's proposal. Supervising professor's statement confirming that the manuscript is ready for preliminary examination is needed before the manuscript can be submitted for pre-examination. If necessary, the supervising professor discusses the statement with the advisor(s) of the doctoral student before giving it to the Doctoral Programme Committee and can require the advisor(s) to give their own additional statements.

The doctoral student must have completed all the required study credits for the doctoral degree before the pre-examination process can be started.

Upon proposal by supervising professor, the Doctoral Programme Committee appoints at least two pre-examiners for the thesis manuscript. The pre-examiners must hold a doctor's degree and possess sufficient scientific (and artistic, if necessary) competence and authority in the research field of the thesis and have a sufficient number of scientific publications. The pre-examiners are independent experts in the field, external to the school, and preferably also have gained expertise in the field of the thesis at the international level. It is possible to appoint a third pre-examiner on the basis of artistic merit only (without a doctor's degree).

A pre-examiner cannot have had significant collaboration, such as co-authored publications, with the student. Nor may a pre-examiner have had significant collaboration, such as co-authored publications with the student's supervising professor nor advisor, especially during the previous five years. A person who has earlier pre-examined one or several artistic components of the thesis may also pre-examine the completed work.

#### **4.2. Permission for public defence / publication**

Each pre-examiner shall submit their proposals and carefully considered written statement on the thesis within 1 and ½ months after receiving the manuscript of the doctoral thesis. The doctoral student has the opportunity to submit a reply to the statements. The Doctoral Programme Committee decides on granting permission for a public defence based on the statements and the possible reply of the student.

The statements may contain suggestions for corrections and improvements but should also explicitly indicate whether the pre-examiner recommends that the doctoral student be granted permission to defend the thesis in a public examination, or whether the student should be denied this permission.

#### *Minor or substantial corrections*

If the required changes or corrections are minor, the supervising professor is responsible for ensuring that the doctoral student makes the required corrections and changes. Minor changes may include, for instance, the need for additional material acquired with moderate effort or the need for further inclusion of research literature.

If the changes or corrections required by either of the pre-examiners are substantial, a second round of pre-examination is arranged after the doctoral student has made the required corrections and changes. Substantial changes and corrections may, in addition to those mentioned above, include revisions of research design and the development of the argument.

In this second pre-examination round, the manuscript can be examined either by one or both pre-examiners, depending on the statements in the first round. If a pre-examiner is proposing substantial revisions and is willing to pre-examine a revised version of the manuscript, it can be sent to this pre-examiner without a decision by the Doctoral Programme Committee. In this case, the supervising professor must agree that the revised version is ready, and it will be sent to the pre-examiners by the Secretary of the Committee. If new pre-examiners need to be appointed, the Doctoral Programme Committee decides how the second pre-examination round will be arranged, based on the proposal of the Department.

The second pre-examination round can usually be arranged at the earliest 3 months after the first round and at the latest 12 months after it. If the doctoral student needs more than 12 months to make the revisions, the matter expires and the pre-examination process will begin again from the appointing of the pre-examiners, unless the Committee decides otherwise due to unusual circumstances.

#### *Serious deficiencies*

If the manuscript has serious deficiencies with the quality of research and/or research integrity, the pre-examiner must propose that the permission for public defence is not granted. In case one or more pre-examiners propose that the permission is denied, the doctoral student has the right to stop the examination process. The stopping of the process means that the Doctoral Programme Committee will not handle the proposals of the pre-examiners, and the pre-examination process expires.

If the process is stopped but the doctoral student wishes to continue to work on the thesis, she or he needs to negotiate with the supervising professor and submit a new research plan to the Doctoral Programme Committee. A thesis based on the new research plan can be submitted for pre-examination at the earliest 6 months after the new research plan has been accepted.

In spite of a negative statement(s), the doctoral student has the right to request that the matter be processed by the Committee and to submit a reply to the statements before the Committee makes a decision.

#### *Second pre-examination round*

In cases where a second pre-examination round is needed (substantial revisions or completely new research plan), the supervising professor needs to give grounds for the selection of the pre-examiners in the second round, if they are not the same persons as in the first round. These grounds can be, e.g., that the same pre-examiners are not available for a second round, the topic has changed, or that a different kind of expertise is needed.

## *Changes of the permission for defence has been granted*

After the permission for public defence has been granted, only minor corrections (e.g., spelling errors) are allowed to be made.

If a submitted article that is included in the thesis gets accepted for publication after the permission for public defence has been granted, the doctoral student must discuss with the supervising professor which version will be included in the thesis.

## **4. Instructions for pre-examination of artistic components**

The artistic component can be pre-examined separately before the pre-examination of the written component, in case it needs to be pre-examined in situ (for example, in an exhibition hall) or for some other compelling reasons presented by the doctoral student and the Department and accepted by the Doctoral Programme Committee. If the component(s) has not be pre-examined separately, they will be pre-examined together with the written component. In the latter case the pre-examination takes place based on the documentation of the component(s), or the student shall provide the pre-examiners with an opportunity to view the original productions or projects.

The supervising professor assesses whether the production is ready for submission for a preliminary examination and deliver a written statement to the Doctoral Programme Committee. It is the responsibility of the supervising professor to ensure that no permission is granted for unfinished productions to be presented in public.

### **4.1 Arrangements of separately presented artistic component(s)**

The doctoral student must request from the Doctoral Programme Committee the pre-examination of an artistic component no later than two months before the event.

The presentations of the artistic component, such as exhibitions, must be public and must be arranged so that they are accessible. At the public presentation, the student shall state that the presentation is part of a doctoral thesis.

Before pre-examination, the doctoral student must provide an invitation to the presentation and a written report accompanying the artistic component for the pre-examiners and the members of the Doctoral Programme Committee.

In the written report, the doctoral student should clarify the place, role and stage of the artistic component within the intended whole of the research project. The report should address the dialogical relation of the artistic component to the written component and also discuss the choice and role of the venue and the various contexts of presentation. The length of the report should be 5-10 pages.

### **4.2 Pre-examination of the separately presented artistic component(s)**

Upon a proposal by the supervising professor, the Doctoral Programme Committee appoints at least two pre-examiners for the artistic component. The pre-examiners must possess sufficient research and artistic competence and authority in the research field of the thesis. At least one of them must hold a doctor's degree. The pre-examiners are independent experts in the field, external to the school, and preferably have also gained expertise in the field of the thesis at the international level.

The Department shall notify the doctoral student of the proposed pre-examiners when the proposal is submitted to the secretary of the Committee because before the pre-examiners are appointed, the student, if dissatisfied with the proposal, must be given the opportunity to make a statement explaining his or her reasons.

Each artistic component of the doctoral student is pre-examined separately. The same or different pre-examiners may be nominated for each component, and they are given the opportunity to read the previous statements.

#### 4.3 Evaluation Criteria for the Pre-Examination of Artistic Components

Pre-examiners are expected to consider the combination of three interrelated aspects:

- 1) relation and relevance of the work to the student's research topic
- 2) artistic implementation of the work
- 3) context of presentation

'Relevance to research' refers to the dialogical relation of the artistic component and the intended whole of the research project. 'Artistic implementation' includes the relation of the artistic component to the genre of practice, and its technical aspects of presentation. 'Context of presentation' refers to the venue or forum as well as to the social, professional and cultural discussions generated. The forum should be meaningful for the purpose of the project.

The pre-examination is part of the process whereby peers develop the community, practices and institutions responsible for research in the art and design fields. One aspect in the artistic component's evaluation can be how the work engages with and addresses the ongoing developments in the field and potentially establishes a new understanding among researchers.

It should be acknowledged that in the research context, artistic and design works often develop new and experimental forms and practices. The assessment should therefore take into account not only whether or not the artistic component adheres to particular artistic and/or research standards, but how possible non-compliance can be appropriate, given the particular practice or form of the artistic component. The artistic component can represent only partial completion of the research.

It is expected that the assessment is conducted in a critical but constructive way. The purpose of the pre-examination is not only to evaluate the work but to help in identifying the work's qualities and strengths in the context of the planned work. It is of value that the pre-examiner engages deeply with the work and clearly and dialogically explains his or her findings and suggestions.

After carefully taking into account the above factors, the pre-examiners shall submit their written statements to the Doctoral Programme Committee within one month after examining the production. The pre-examination statements submitted to the Doctoral Programme Committee should clarify whether or not the pre-examiner recommends approval of the artistic component's inclusion in the thesis. In addition, the statement can include suggestions that assist the doctoral student in developing his or her research.

The doctoral student is offered an opportunity to reply to the statements before a final decision is made by the Doctoral Programme Committee.

#### 4.4. Documentation of the artistic components

The doctoral student is always responsible for recording or documenting the production. The Department must help the doctoral student in organising to ensure that the documentation is of high quality. The documentation must give a clear picture of the content and exhibition of the production or project.

The documentation must be delivered to the secretary of the Doctoral Programme Committee within one month of the pre-examination and before the Committee decides on approving the artistic component's inclusion in the thesis. In the case of components not pre-examined separately, the documentation must be delivered together with the written component submitted for pre-examination. In the case of exhibitions, 10–30 photos showing the works and how they were displayed are required. For performances, a video of 2–5 minutes as well as 5–10 photos are required.

## **5. Public defence and approval of the thesis**

### **5.1 Public defence**

The thesis will be examined in a public doctoral thesis defence. Instructions on this procedure are given in a separate manual.

The Doctoral Programme Committee decides on the date and time of the defence upon a proposal by the supervising professor. The defences at the school are coordinated to avoid overlapping. The student makes all the arrangements for the defence together with the Department. The public defence takes place at Aalto University. In the event that productions or other material essential to the thesis cannot be presented on campus or with the university's own equipment, the public defence may take place at other premises by the decision of the Doctoral Programme Committee. Public defence can be also organised allowing remote participation.

The language to be used in the public defence is Finnish, Swedish or English, or some other language with permission by the Doctoral Programme Committee.

### **5.2. The opponent**

On the proposal of the Department, the Doctoral Programme Committee appoints one or two opponents who, if possible, have the title of docent (*dosentti*) or equivalent merits. The opponent must hold a doctor's degree and possess sufficient scientific (and artistic, if necessary) competence and authority in the research field of the thesis and have a sufficient number of scientific publications. The opponents are independent experts in the field, external to the school, and preferably have also gained expertise in the field of the thesis at the international level.

The advisor of the thesis may not be appointed as the opponent; however, one of the pre-examiners may be appointed. The doctoral student has the right to lodge a complaint about the selection of the opponent before a final decision is made.

### **5.3 The custos**

The Doctoral Programme Committee appoints the supervising professor as the custos of the public defence. On the proposal of the Department, another professor at the School with a doctor's degree in the same research field may also be appointed as the custos. The custos is responsible for guiding the opponent in matters concerning the procedures followed at the School of Arts, Design and Architecture in the examination of thesis and public defences. It is the role of the custos to discuss the grade with the opponent(s) and familiarise them with the grading scale used at the School and the principles of grading to be observed.

### **5.4 Publication and distribution of the thesis**

The public defence shall be announced on the official website of the University ten (10) days prior to the event. At the same time, the thesis must be electronically displayed at the university, Learning Services take care of the public notice.

thesis Four copies of the published, printed thesis are to be submitted to the School, these include the copies for the opponent, custos (and supervising professor) and the Department of the student. In addition, three copies are submitted to the Aalto University Learning Centre. The Committee decides case by case on the distribution of theses published in some other way.

A title sheet shall be attached to the copies of the printed thesis distributed before the defence, stating that the permission for public defence has been granted by the Doctoral Programme Committee of the Aalto University School of Arts, Design and Architecture, the time and place of the public defence, and the name of the opponent.

## 5.5 Approval and grading of the thesis

Within two weeks of the public examination, the (two) opponent(s) shall, either individually or jointly, submit to the Doctoral Programme Committee a written statement concerning the thesis and its defence. Any written comments announced as forthcoming at the public examination of the thesis shall be submitted to the Committee within two weeks of the examination.

A demand for rejecting the thesis must be made in writing, and the reasons for rejecting it must be included. A demand for rejecting the thesis may be made by the opponent or by a member of the Doctoral Programme Committee who is entitled to take part in decision-making concerning the study attainment in question.

The doctoral student shall be given an opportunity to reply to the statements and comments and other documents related to the evaluation in writing within 5 days.

After this, the Doctoral Programme Committee decides on the approval and grading of the doctoral thesis.

**The following scale is used in grading the thesis:** failed, pass, and pass with distinction.

Earning a pass with distinction requires that the thesis be among the top 20% of the theses published internationally in its field. The criteria include the following:

- the doctoral thesis is written clearly and with correct usage, and the referencing is faultless;
- the articles of an article-based thesis is published in international series of reputable standing in the field, or in similar peer-reviewed works;
- the author has made a significant independent contribution to the findings of the thesis;
- the findings are exceptionally significant for the research field;
- the thesis has particular scientific merit, and any included artistic components or product development projects meet particularly high artistic demands;
- the thesis is defended excellently at the public examination.

## 5.6 Appeal against the grading of the thesis

The doctoral student may submit a written claim for rectification of the grading of the thesis to the University Board of Examiners, in writing within 14 days of receiving the decision.