



Thesis Submission & Defence at the UoC

Disclaimer

This guide refers to the submission and defence process under the Doctoral Regulations of the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences of the University of Cologne of March 12, 2020. Please contact the [PhD Office](#) if you need plan to graduate according to the Doctoral Regulations of the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences of the University of Cologne of February 2, 2006.

Please consider yourself to include the [PhD Office](#) in all emails throughout the process. By optionally and transparently including the [PhD Office](#) into the process this might help solve issues that might arise throughout the process.

Before you start

Most importantly, make sure to visit the [homepage of the doctoral office of the Faculty for Mathematics and Natural Sciences \(MNF\) at the University of Cologne \(UoC\)](#). You will find

- a summary of the doctoral procedure in the [Doctoral Procedure](#) section
- potential dates for your thesis submission and defence in the [Deadlines and Dates](#) section
- necessary documents in the [Forms/Guidelines](#) section
- please inform the [PhD Office](#) if you want to schedule an appointment in advance and as soon as you have a fixed timeline.

Assemble an examination committee (well before thesis submission)

Typically, your defence examination committee consists of four people: two reviewers, one chair and one assessor (*Beisitzer*). See § 8 of the [Doctoral Regulations](#). A third, external, reviewer must be nominated if the conventional reviewers have proposed your thesis for a distinction (*summa cum laude*). A third reviewer can be proposed in justified cases, e.g. when the project was carried out in cooperation with another European university. The regulations for the examination committee are summarised below. Please discuss the examination committee with the [PhD Office](#) and the [MNF's doctoral office](#) as soon as possible and at least several weeks before you submit your thesis.

Reviewer 1 & 2: the reviewers read and evaluate your thesis and your defence. The first reviewer is typically your formal supervisor at the UoC. Note that not all group leaders can formally supervise students at the UoC. In addition to all UoC professors, that can formally supervise students from their and other groups, G. Coupland, R. Mercier, J. Parker, P. Schulze-Lefert, M. Tsiantis, can officially supervise students from their and other groups and R. Garrido-Oter, A. Hancock, S. Hacquard, A. Hay, A. Marques, H. Nakagami and P. Novikova can formally supervise students from their groups.

The second reviewer can be anyone who is either (1) eligible to formally supervise students at the UoC (see above), (2) a professor at a German university/research institution or (3) a professor (or equivalent) at any international university/research institution.

Importantly, one of the reviewers must be a full professor of the MNF at the UoC. Thus, if your first reviewer is, for instance, an MPIPZ group leader, your second reviewer must be a full professor at the UoC. Commonly, the second reviewer is a professor from the UoC's Institute for Plant Sciences and you can find a list [here](#). Depending on your project, other UoC professors from the MNF can make more sense, though. The second reviewer should not have cooperated or published with the doctoral student and must be from a different group than the doctoral student and the first reviewer.

Chair: the chair does not evaluate your thesis. It is still recommendable to send him or her a copy of your thesis so that the chair has the chance to familiarise him or herself with your work. The chair introduces you and the defence procedure at the beginning of your defence. The chair can ask questions during your defence

and will, jointly with the reviewers, evaluate your defence. The chair must be a professor of the MNF at the UoC. See § 9 of the [Doctoral Regulations](#).

The **chair** must, to a large extent, be independent. He or she must either

- hold the right to supervise PhD students in a different doctoral subject than your doctoral subject. If you graduate in *Biology*, the chair could for instance hold supervision rights in *Biochemistry* or *Biophysics*.
- or
- belong to a different institute than your formal supervisor. If your formal supervisor works at the MPIPZ, the chair could be from any Department of the UoC.

Assessor (*Beisitzer*): this can be anyone with a PhD in a related subject. The assessor takes the minutes of your defence. He or she does neither evaluate your thesis nor your defence. The chair can allow the assessor to ask questions during your defence.

Schedule your defence (well before thesis submission)

At the UoC, your examination period is linked to the submission date of your thesis. It is thus important to make sure that your examination committee is able to attend your defence and you should accordingly schedule it well before you submit your thesis. You can find the deadlines for thesis submission and the corresponding examination periods on the [homepage of the MNF's doctoral office](#). A physical defence typically takes place at the UoC and you can find details on room reservations and contact persons [here](#).

You should aim for

- Lecture Hall of the Cologne Biocenter (*Hörsaal* 0.024, code: 304/EG/0.024), Zülpicher Str. 47b, 50674 Köln, room 0.024, ground floor, contact ✉ [Ann-Katrin Ullrich](#) and ✉ [Jan Weber](#)
- Lecture Hall of the Center of Molecular Biology COMB (*Hörsaal* 0.40, code: 301/EG/0.40), Zülpicher Str. 47a, 50674 Köln, room 0.40, ground floor, contact ✉ comb-rooms@uni-koeln.de
- Lecture Hall COPT building (*Hörsaal* 0.10, code: 315/EG/0.10), Luxemburger Str. 90, 50674 Köln, room 0.10, ground floor, contact ✉ lehrraum54@verw.uni-koeln.de

If the defence takes place online, the doctoral student remains responsible for planning the defence.

Once you have booked a room or arranged the online meeting, text your examination committee to confirm the date and place of your defence. You can now fill in the *Terminbogen (Form for scheduling the thesis defense)* which you need to submit at a later stage (see below) and which you can find [here](#).

Prepare thesis submission (at least two weeks before thesis submission)

Please make sure to update all relevant information in your [Docfile](#) account before you contact the MNF's doctoral office. Note that these documents must be uploaded in the *postgraduate record* (D) section and not in the *graduate school* (G) section, see [here](#). These documents must be deposited in Docfile in order to be admitted to the examination process:

- **Current Curriculum Vitae with photograph**
- **Course of study certificate (download from [KLIPS](#)) as proof of enrolment in the doctoral program**
- **The fully signed [Application for Admission to Doctoral Examinations](#) (see below)**
 - **Please note: deadline to inquire the signatures from the GSfBS coordinator for your applications is on Friday 12:00 (noon) before the Monday deadline indicated on the [website of the Doctoral Office](#)**
 - ✉ [Isabell Witt](#) is responsible for if your surname starts with A through L.
 - ✉ [Katerina Vlantis](#) is responsible for if your surname starts with M through Z.
- **Copy of an identification document (identity card, passport)**

Please note that you should have uploaded some of these documents before, i.e. when you registered as doctoral student at the UoC. It is not necessary to upload the documents twice.

Once you have fully updated your Docfile record and deposited the fully signed *Application for Admission to Doctoral Examinations*, send an email to the [MNF's doctoral office](#). Please include "Admission to examinations, Department", e.g. "Admission to examinations, Biology" in the subject line and indicate that

you have uploaded all documents in Docfile and that you want to become admitted to the doctoral examinations. You will typically hear back from the MNF's doctoral office within 7 to 10 days.

Thesis format

There is a template available [here](#). Some general remarks to the structure of the thesis you can find below:

- A title page embedded in the [template for dissertation](#)
- An abstract
- An overarching introduction that starts with a bigger picture and quickly narrows down to the specific background which is relevant for the thesis. The introduction should end with a statement of the thesis aims
- Presentations of the results. The results section can be written in chapters. The section should include own results while results of others must be clearly marked as such and should be described in the preface(s)/acknowledgement. Publications (accepted or submitted) as well as unpublished manuscripts can be integrated into the thesis and the details are described below
- A concluding overarching discussion
- A list of the resources and literature used
- **A Declaration for the doctoral thesis embedded in the [template for dissertation](#) (remove for publication)**

A thesis often also includes:

- A table of content
- A list of abbreviations
- A material and method section that refers to standard protocols where possible. Deviations from standard protocols must be carefully described
- An appendix
- **CV (optional, remove for publication)**
- **Acknowledgements (optional, possibly remove for publication)**

The thesis format should be discussed with the Thesis Advisory Committee and the supervisor. This is particularly important if you want to integrate publications or manuscripts from your doctorate in the thesis. According to § 7 of the [Doctoral Regulations](#), any number of publications or unpublished manuscripts (research articles and reviews) can be integrated into your thesis as long as they have been the result of your doctoral research. They can be included as individual chapters and a conclusive text needs to accompany each chapter that describes the relevance of the integrated publication for the thesis. For all integrated multi-author publications, this text must make clear how exactly the doctoral student contributed to the research in, and writing of, a publication or manuscript. A thesis with less than three integrated publications (not including reviews) is deemed monography. A thesis with three or more integrated publications (not including reviews) is deemed cumulative thesis.

To get a better idea of how a thesis looks like, you can search the [Kölner UniversitätsPublikationsServer \(KUPS\)](#) and use, for instance, the name of your official UoC supervisor as search query.

In general, reviewers appreciate a thesis that:

- is well written, in clear and correct language
- provides relevant information about the scientific field/topic
- is well structured in a logical way: scientific question, experimental approach, description of experiments and results, concluding statement, next set of experiments...
- is illustrated with clear figures. All necessary information is available in the figure legends
- discusses the results in the context of the scientific question and the field of research
- provides correct references and clear statements of what are own results, figures, written sections and which are taken or provided from or by others

Thesis submission

Please note that you can make only minor changes (e.g. spelling, formatting) to the thesis once you have submitted. The freely available thesis after thesis publication, see section below, is thus typically a copy of the initially submitted thesis.

Deposit the final version of your thesis as well as the signed [Declaration for Admission to the Doctoral Examinations](#) (see above) as PDF files in Docfile. Additionally, send the final version of your thesis as a PDF document to your reviewers, the chair (see above) and the [MNF's doctoral office](#). Alternatively, e.g. if the thesis PDF file is too large, deposit the thesis on a data server and provide a link to the file.

Thesis evaluation

Your reviewers typically have about five weeks to evaluate your thesis and the deadline for the submission of reviews can be found in the [Deadlines and Dates](#) section of the MNF's doctoral office's homepage.

Prepare thesis defence

Assuming that you have already scheduled your defence (see above) and that you have informed your examination committee accordingly, you need to upload the *Terminbogen (Form for scheduling the thesis defense)*, which you can find [here](#), to Docfile. Send an email to the [MNF's doctoral office](#). Please include "Disputation Date, Department", e.g. "Disputation Date, Biology" in the subject line and indicate that you have uploaded the thesis scheduling form in Docfile. Make sure to send this email at least one week before the examination period (i.e. the period in which you can theoretically have your defence, see [here](#)) starts—not one week before your defence takes place! Please remember that you, your first reviewer and your chair need to sign this form and prepare it sufficiently well in advance.

Please make sure that your assessor (*Beisitzer*) is well prepared for the defence. He or she will need to use a minute form to document the defence which is available in [here](#). Some of this form can be prepared up front and you or your assessor can contact the [PhD Office](#) if you have any questions.

PhD defences should be announced via the institute's screens using the official template (template can be found [here](#) → Link). Please send the completed template to the [PhD Office](#) as soon as you have scheduled your defence, so it can be uploaded to the screens in time. If you would like to invite the whole institute to attend, you are welcome to use the same information via [mail](#).

Thesis defence and what comes after

The defence is open to all members of the university but only the examination committee is allowed to address questions to the doctoral student. See § 9 of the [Doctoral Regulations](#). The chair introduces the thesis procedure as well as the doctoral student before the student gives a presentation of 20 minutes. Make sure to stay on time! The examination committee then addresses questions to the student that cover the content of the presentation, the thesis but can also touch on more general topic of the doctoral student's subject, e.g. Biology. The thesis defence must take at least one hour and must not exceed one-and-a-half hours.

After the discussion, the examination committee evaluates the thesis in a private session and then informs the doctoral student about their assessment. The details are superficially summarised below.

Once you have successfully defended your thesis (C-O-N-G-R-A-T-S-!), please make sure that either the chair or the assessor send the defence minute form to the MNF's doctoral office and inform the Faculty about the outcome of your defence.

Evaluation of the thesis and defence

The thesis and the defence can be evaluated using these grades:

- 0 = with distinction (*summa cum laude*)*
- 1 = very good (*magna cum laude*)
- 2 = good (*cum laude*)
- 3 = sufficient (*rite*)
- 4 = insufficient (*insufficiens*)**

All grades can be modified in incremental steps, e.g. 0.7, 1.3, 1.5, 1.7, 2.0, 2.3... The grade for the thesis and for the defence is the average (first decimal) of the individual grades of all examiners. The doctorate grade is a weighted average (first decimal) of the thesis (counts twice) and the defence grade and is summarised as:

- With distinction (*summa cum laude*) for a weighted average of 0.0*
- Very good (*magna cum laude*) for a weighted average between 0.1 and 1.4
- Good (*cum laude*) for a weighted average between 1.5 and 2.4
- Sufficient (*rite*) for a weighted average between 2.5 and 3.4
- Insufficient (*insufficiens*) for a weighted average between 3.5 and 4.0**

*A distinction (*summa cum laude*) can only be awarded if all reviewers (including the external reviewer for the thesis, see above) agree on an average grade of 0.0 for the thesis and the defence.

**If one of the reviewers considers the thesis insufficient, the doctoral degree commission of the UoC will involve another reviewer. If at least half, e.g. two out of three, reviewers agree that the thesis is insufficient, they propose that the thesis cannot be accepted. The doctoral degree commission of the UoC must approve this decision and inform the doctoral student accordingly. A defence is considered a fail if either at least half of all reviewers consider the defence insufficient or if the average grade for the defence is ≥ 3.5 . The doctoral student can repeat the defence within six months but only once. If the reviewers then conclude that the doctoral student failed to defend the thesis, the doctorate is terminated.

Publication of the thesis

After you successfully defended your thesis, you must publish your thesis, typically within exactly one year. In justified cases, the deadline for thesis publication can be extended by one additional year or more (up to 5 years). This must be actively discussed with the [MNF's doctoral office](#). Please make sure to visit the [homepage of the Kölner UniversitätsPublikationsServer](#) (KUPS) where you can find news and relevant details on the [publication process in KUPS](#).

To publish the thesis, you must upload a PDF file of the published thesis as well as the *Approval of publication of the doctoral thesis* (*Druckfreigabe*), which you can find [here](#), to Docfile.

On the *Approval* (*Druckfreigabe*) form, you can choose the way in which you want to publish your thesis. There are two popular ways:

- Publication in electronic form will make your full thesis available online immediately after you complete the submission to KUPS.
- Publication in non-electronic form will only make the summary (must then be in English and German) of your thesis available online. You will need to print 9 copies of the thesis and submit these to the UoC Library. **Printed versions for the doctoral office are no longer required.**

Make sure that the published version of the thesis contains a title page (see above) that states the place where the thesis was printed (typically *Köln*) and the publication year (find an example of a title page below).

Doctoral certificate

You will receive the doctoral certificate, which is usually issued after your dissertation was positively assessed and after passing the disputation and publishing of your thesis. Usually this takes approximately 6 to 10 weeks, from the MNF's doctoral office. It can only be sent within Germany to you or to an authorized person. Contact the [PhD Office](#) if you need the certificate to be delivered to a place outside Germany.

This certificate contains the title of the dissertation, the overall grades of the dissertation and the thesis defence as well as the overall grade of the doctorate, the names of the reviewers and the members of the examination committee, as well as the date of admission to the doctoral program and the date of the thesis defence. The certificate does not entitle you to use the doctoral degree, see below.

After the certificate has been issued, you may request to inspect the evaluation reports of the dissertation.

You will then need to submit all necessary documents to the UoC Library and need to set up a [KUPS](#) account to do so. If you plan to publish electronically, you will need to upload a PDF file of your entire thesis to KUPS and send the (digitally) signed *Authors's Agreement*, available on the [KUPS homepage](#), to the [Hochschulschriftenstelle](#) by email. If you plan to publish non-electronically, you will need to upload a PDF file of your thesis abstract to KUPS and send the signed *Authors's Agreement* and the printed copies of your thesis to the library:

Universitäts- und Stadtbibliothek Köln
Medienbearbeitung Monografien (Hochschulschriften, Tausch, Geschenk)
Universitätsstr. 33
50931 Köln

by post. Upon approval, the library automatically informs the [MNF's doctoral office](#). To be on the safe side, we recommend to inform the [MNF's doctoral office](#) by email about your library submission.

Upon publication of the thesis, the MNF's doctoral office will issue a final certificate which entitles you to use the doctoral degree. Please note that the MNF's doctoral office cannot send these certificates to places outside of Germany. If you want to receive the certificates abroad, please contact the [PhD Office](#) to obtain your documents.

Congratulations, Dr. X!

In justified cases where an important reason prevents publication of your thesis according to § 13 of the [Doctoral Regulations](#), you can apply to be authorized to temporarily bear the doctoral degree. To do so, please deposit an informal letter with the corresponding justification to Docfile. This letter must be co-signed by your formal UoC supervisor. Please send an email to the [MNF's doctoral office](#) and include "Provisional title, Department", e.g. "Provisional title, Biology" in the subject line and indicate that you seek to apply to bear the doctoral degree before publication of the thesis.