

Short instruction for pre-reviewers and opponents of PhD theses

Institute of Computer Science, University of Tartu

Important contacts

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Pre-review

A pre-review is an evaluation of the thesis content, where the reviewer provides a clear and motivated statement on whether the thesis is worthy of being defended. Pre-reviewers are encouraged to recommend improvements to the thesis in their review. In some cases, important changes may be required before the thesis can be accepted for defense. The University of Tartu's [Regulations for Doctoral Studies](#) (III.4. in particular) provide a detailed list of requirements for PhD theses.

Each pre-reviewer independently writes a review of the thesis, which must be written in English and sent via email to the secretary of the Institute's Defense Council.

Opponent's report

An opponent's report should be 2-3 pages in length and comment on the scientific significance and technical qualities of the thesis. It should discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the thesis, highlighting significant theoretical or experimental details of the work. The report should conclude with a clear and motivated statement on whether the author deserves a PhD degree in computer science upon successful defense.

It is customary for opponents to have previously served as pre-reviewers for the thesis. In that case, the opponent's report is an updated version of the pre-review, considering the final thesis.

The report should also include the main questions and concerns that the opponent plans to raise during the defense.

Each opponent independently writes a report, which must be written in English and sent via email to the secretary of the Defense Council at least three days before the defense date. The early deadline allows opponents to raise questions that require the doctoral candidate to prepare, such as consulting relevant literature to provide informed answers. The opponent's report should be signed.

The official version of the thesis

Pre-reviewers first receive a preliminary version of a thesis such that they can form an opinion and suggest improvements. The author must finalize the thesis before the defence time is fixed. Minor changes can be made until the thesis goes to print.

The secretary of the Defence Council will send a link to the official electronic copy of the thesis by e-mail to opponents. The theses are usually printed by the University of Tartu Press. Once the hard copies are ready, each opponent is eligible to get one by normal mail.

Remunerations and reimbursements

The institute covers the travel and accommodation costs for opponents. Opponents receive a salary for their work, including the pre-review. Once the Council officially nominates opponents, the secretary will contact them to arrange these matters.

Procedure of the defence

The defence takes place at a meeting of the Defence Council. An academic discussion between opponents and a doctoral candidate is the main part of the defence. The defence is normally open to the general public which means that close relatives, fellow students and colleagues are usually present. Formal dress is not required. The procedure for the defence is the following:

- 1) An opening statement by the Head of the Defence Council. The secretary of the Defence Council introduces the academic CV of the doctoral candidate.
- 2) A presentation by the doctoral candidate (*lectio praecursoria*) to introduce the main results of the thesis (30 min), possibly followed by a short session of questions about the presentation.
- 3) Statements by opponents and an academic debate between them and the doctoral candidate.
- 4) A general academic debate with the participation of the Council and the audience, including speech(es) by the supervisor(s).
- 5) A closed discussion between Council members, the secretary, opponents and supervisors which results with the decision of the Council as to whether to award the doctoral degree or not.
- 6) The announcement of the decision.
- 7) Final remarks by the doctoral candidate.

The defence is held in English.

There is no official limit as to the duration of the academic debate with opponents. However, the whole procedure, including the candidate's presentation and the closed session, should normally take less than three hours.

The decision is made by the Defence Council of the Institute. The opponents are not officially members of the Defence Council. Their role during the decision-making procedure is to give their motivated recommendation to the Council.