UNIVERSITÄT WÜRZBURG

Graduate Schools
Life Sciences
Science & Technology

Guidelines for the evaluation of a doctoral thesis for the Graduate Schools (GS)

The written evaluation report by experts in the field is central to the evaluation process for doctoral theses/dissertations at the GS. We are therefore extremely thankful for your expertise and evaluation of the thesis included. As the evaluation process and grading can be quite different between different universities, we would like to provide some guidance on the evaluation procedure of doctoral theses at the GS.

- The dissertation may be submitted as a monograph or a compilation (manuscript/chapter-based) thesis. Both formats are considered equivalent and should not be used as an indicator for the quality of the submitted work. The doctoral researchers have received guidelines for the preparation of the thesis by the GS, which you can find here: Guidelines Thesis. The conformity with formal rules has already been checked by the GS office.

- Generally, the evaluation report should be 2 - 3 pages long. It should start with an introduction, which places the doctoral thesis in the context of the current state-of-understanding and briefly summarizes the thesis´ research question(s). The main body of the report should evaluate each section of the thesis focusing on both content and presentation.

- The main criterion for evaluation should be the scientific achievement of the thesis, i.e., the achieved advancement of scientific knowledge both in the experimental and written part, including the discussion section. The scientific evaluation should thus be based on the scale and scope of the thesis content, considering the amount and significance of the research included, and the nature of the discipline. Other factors (such as number of papers or perceived reputation of publishing outlets) can be used to support the conclusion based on the scientific achievement, but on their own do not represent reliable measures of the scientific quality of individual works.

- The evaluation of the written part should also take into account the demonstrated intellectual abilities, acquired expertise, and independence of the doctoral researcher. In compilation theses, such criteria should especially be addressed based on the framing sections "Introduction" and "summarising discussion". Those sections must go beyond the included articles and manuscripts and should provide an overarching frame for the presented research. The evaluation should take special consideration of these sections, and comment on whether the thesis as a whole constitutes a coherent piece of work.

- The evaluation report should conclude with an overall evaluation summary of the thesis and achievements, ending with the recommended grade. The recommended grade should become clear from the evaluation report. This is especially important for the final grade "summa cum laude", which should only be awarded for outstanding theses that are excellent in all parts and aspects. Please note that the recommended grade must be given both as a full number and in writing (e.g. "1 - magna cum laude").

- Many of our doctoral candidates already have prospective appointments in academia or industry, or may be strongly dependent on a timely evaluation process for financial or personal (e.g. residence permit) reasons. We are aware of your many obligations, yet for the sake of our doctoral researchers, we would like to ask you to submit your evaluation report within 4 weeks.

The use of generative AI during the review process

The GS follows the guideline of the German Science Foundation (DFG) on the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in the review process: www.dfg.de/en/basics-topics/digital-topics/ai/review#389620

- The expert assessment of qualified scientists is the foundation of the GS evaluation process and cannot be delegated to or replaced by generative AI. AI may be used to put the review into words, based on the reviewers own scientific assessment, notes or draft. In particular, AI must not be used to assign or recommend a grade or to make recommendations regarding the acceptance or rejection of a dissertation. The scientific judgement and responsibility for the evaluation remains entirely with the reviewers.
- Any use and support of AI during the review process must comply with the principles of good scientific practice:

Confidentiality: No confidential information is allowed to be entered into cloud-based AI systems, sensible data must stay internally on local systems. This appears in particular if the thesis contains:

  - Unpublished data that are not made public yet or may be relevant for patent applications.
  - Patient data or other personal information.
  - Confidential ideas or plans for future research projects.

Transparency: The use of AI in preparing the review must be fully disclosed within the review.

Responsibility and quality assurance: The reviewer retains full responsibility for the scientific content of the review and the final evaluation and grade.