

The Universities will send official guidelines for dissertations, but I have prepared my own, in the form of a play in three Acts. (It's a lot of show anyway!)

DISSERTATION

Actors:

The Chair (an official appointed by the faculty, sometimes main advisor)

The Candidate (the Ph.D. student)

The Opponent (a wise, and hopefully kind, scientist from abroad)

The Committee (five persons with docent degrees, usually Swedish, with at most one from the Candidate's department (UU insists that at least one is XX))

The People (friends, enemies, family, colleagues, and anybody who happens to wander in - dissertations are open to all)

Act 1 - the lecture hall:

Scene 1: Chair welcomes everybody and presents the principal actors.

Scene 2: Candidate gives a 15 min. popular overview of her/his work in Swedish (if Swedish) or English. This is an extra for family and friends.

Scene 3: Opponent gives a scientific presentation of her/his understanding of what the Thesis is about. This should take 30-45 min. The purpose is to determine if the quality and quantity of the thesis is good enough and to get an outside view of the work. Internationally, it is unusual that the Opponent, not the Candidate, gives this presentation, but that is how it is traditionally done in Sweden. Of course, figures and other stuff from the thesis can be provided by the candidate.

Scene 4: Opponent asks the candidate questions on the thesis. These can range from "should not the 2.45 be 2.47 on the third row of page 89?" to "How will your work change the lives of people in Farawayistan in 30 years?", but somewhere in between is preferable. There should be questions both on some details and on the "big picture". The purpose of this questioning period is to determine that the candidate actually wrote the thesis, knows her/his subject, and to point to strengths and weaknesses and possible future work. This questioning period should again occupy 30-45 min.

Scene 5: Committee asks a few questions, usually the ones they think the opponent forgot to ask (and to show they actually read the thesis!).

Scene 6: The People ask all the questions they would like to have answered. Usually there is none or one or two questions from the audience, but you never know. (Just my luck that at my own dissertation the public was thick with professors who wanted to put my work into *their* perspective. Only case I ever came across where this Scene took almost an hour!)

Act 2 - a small room and a big room

Scene 1a: The committee, Advisors and Opponent withdraws to a closed room to determine the result of the dissertation: passed or failed (the only two possibilities). Only the committee members can vote, but the Opponent is always asked her/his opinion. This meeting usually takes 20-30 minutes, which is mostly used for telling the Advisors everything she/he should have done differently (this can be really tough on the Advisors). However, if anyone in the Committee (or the Opponent) has *serious* reservations they are supposed to tell the main Advisor after reading the thesis before the dissertation. The only reason to fail the candidate *at* the dissertation is if she/he can not answer any questions and thus gives the impression that the thesis was written by someone else.

Scene 1b: After the discussion, the Opponent and Advisors withdraw, and the Committee takes the actual vote.

Scene 1c: At the same time, in another room, the rest of the actors are chewing canapés, while waiting for the committee's decision.

Scene 2: The committee emerges and its Chair tells the candidate the results. Bubbly wine is served and cheers happen.

Act 3. - a glittering ballroom in evening

Scene 1: Big celebratory dinner with lots of speeches and singing and probably some entertainment from the remaining PhD students.

So – that's how it is done in principle. Of course there are some variations due to personalities, but not much.

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