

## **Wageningen University thesis evaluation form with rubric**

### **Aim of a thesis evaluation with rubric**

Quality standards for PhD theses differ worldwide, and so do quality grades (such as 'cum laude') and evaluation procedures. Therefore, we provide here information about the evaluation procedure and a rubric for the evaluation of the thesis. This is not only useful for the opponents who evaluate the thesis, it may also help PhD candidates and their supervisors by making the Wageningen University thesis requirements transparent.

### **Thesis evaluation form as sent to the opponents**

Dear members of the examining committee,

Thank you for your willingness to evaluate this PhD thesis.

Your thesis evaluation will be made available to the Dean of Research and will be used:

- to decide whether the PhD candidate can be allowed to defend the thesis;
- to decide whether the PhD thesis should be considered for 'cum laude' ('with distinction') in which case two extra reviewers will be asked for advice;
- by the rector or her replacement after the thesis defence, when the examining committee discusses the final grading of thesis and defence.

Your thesis evaluation will only be shared with the other examiners when the PhD thesis would be considered for 'cum laude' grading.

Also, the promotor will receive your anonymised thesis evaluation for two purposes:

- in the case when the thesis is marked 'unacceptable', to let the candidate improve the thesis;
- otherwise immediately after the defence, as feedback to the promotor about the quality of this particular thesis and to clarify the expectations for possible next PhD theses under her/his supervision.

An important note on your possible suggestions for revision:

- if you would mark the thesis 'unacceptable', your suggestions for a major revision are very welcome and will be forwarded to the promotor;
- if you propose that the candidate can be allowed to defend the thesis, the timeframe does not allow for major revisions anymore; however, if you would spot some errors or inconsistencies, your suggestions for textual corrections will be forwarded to the promotor, who has the right to decide, together with the PhD candidate, whether or not to follow your suggestions.

### **Requirements for the degree of doctor awarded by Wageningen University**

In order to be awarded the degree of doctor, the candidate must have demonstrated the capability of:

1. functioning as an independent practitioner of science who is able to:
  - a. formulate scientific questions, either based on social issues or scientific progress;
  - b. conduct original scientific research;
  - c. publish articles in peer-reviewed scientific journals, publish books with scientific publishers or make a technical design;
2. integrating her research in, or placing it within the framework of, the own scientific discipline and against the background of a broader scientific area;
3. placing the research aims and research results in a societal context;
4. postulating concisely worded propositions in scientific and societal areas, formulated in such a way that they are subject to opposition and defence.

## **User instructions**

Please evaluate the PhD thesis on four criteria using the rubric at the end of this form:

- each row represents one criterion, e.g. originality of the research;
- each column represents a level for the grading, e.g. 'good';
- and each cell describes the level for that criterion.

The aim of using a rubric is to enhance homogeneity of assessments and the ability to discuss assessments with other examiners and the promotor. Also, it clarifies to PhD candidates the expectations for a PhD thesis.

Use of the comment fields on the evaluation form is highly recommended. It provides extra feedback to both promotor and candidate.

Keep in mind that each row (criterion) in the rubric should be read independently. It could be that the PhD thesis scores 'unacceptable' on one criterion and 'good' on another. Always start at the lowest mark in the rubric and test whether the PhD thesis should be awarded the next higher mark. Achievements at lower levels are implicit at higher levels and not again included in the criteria.

You are kindly asked to describe in 25 – 100 words your evaluation of each criterion. You could do this by comparing representative examples from the thesis to the descriptors from the rubric.

## **Reference**

Barbara E. Lovitts: Making the Implicit Explicit: creating performance expectations for the dissertation. Stylus, Sterling, Virginia, USA, 2007.

# Your evaluation of the PhD thesis

Name of the PhD candidate : .....

Planned date of the public defence : .....

Title of the PhD thesis : .....

## 1. Originality of the research

Grade: unacceptable / acceptable / satisfactory / good / very good / excellent

Reason for evaluation (25-100 words):

## 2. Scientific quality of the research chapters

Grade: unacceptable / acceptable / satisfactory / good / very good / excellent

Reason for evaluation (25-100 words):

## 3. Reflection on the research as shown in the Introduction and General discussion

Grade: unacceptable / acceptable / satisfactory / good / very good / excellent

Reason for evaluation (25-100 words):

## 4. Quality of written presentation

Grade: unacceptable / acceptable / satisfactory / good / very good / excellent

Reason for evaluation (25-100 words):

## 5. Overall Assessment (based on the above evaluation categories 1 – 4)

Grade: unacceptable / acceptable / satisfactory / good / very good / excellent

Reason for evaluation (25-100 words):

**Your conclusion (1) - should the candidate be allowed to defend the thesis?**

The PhD candidate will only be allowed to defend the thesis if none of the above criteria is marked as 'unacceptable' by any of the examiners. In the case of a negative ('no') decision, please provide your arguments for that qualification in the box below. The anonymized evaluation form will be forwarded to the candidate's promotor with the request to let the candidate improve the manuscript. The revised version of the manuscript, with a letter explaining the modifications made, will be evaluated by the examiner. Unless changes in the manuscript have been substantial, other members of the examining committee will only be informed about the changes and will not be asked to re-evaluate the thesis.

**"I propose that the PhD candidate can defend the thesis:"** **yes / no**  
**Note: this question must be answered!**

Reason for negative evaluation (25-100 words):

**Your conclusion (2) - should the thesis be considered for 'cum laude'?**

The qualification of 'excellent' for all or nearly all of the above criteria indicates that this PhD thesis belongs to the top of your scientific field. This may be a reason for awarding 'cum laude' ('with distinction'). After the oral defence, the committee will be asked to comment on the quality of the defence. At that point the final decision whether or not to award 'cum laude' is made by voting.

**"I propose to have this PhD thesis considered for 'cum laude':"** **yes / no**  
**Note: not answering this question will be interpreted as neither yes nor no.**

Reason for cum laude proposal (25-100 words):

Keep on separate page so that the form can be anonymised easily

Name of committee member : .....

Chair / Function / Affiliation : .....

Date : .....

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Please e-mail the completed form to the Doctorate's Secretariat: [promovendi@wur.nl](mailto:promovendi@wur.nl)

## Rubric for evaluation of a PhD thesis

Criteria	Unacceptable	Acceptable	Satisfactory	Good	Very good	Excellent
<b>1. Originality of the research *</b>	Does not make a contribution, either because it is a copy, or nearly so, of work done before by others, or because the research question is trivial.	Makes a small and not very original contribution, uses a cookbook approach, is not really interesting but shows the ability to do research.	Makes a modest contribution by addressing a relevant, but small and traditional question that is interesting for those who work on the same subject.	Makes a substantial contribution by addressing a relevant question that is interesting for others within the field. Is a solid part of normal science, but does not open up the field.	Makes an important contribution by solving an old problem in a new way, or by addressing a new and relevant question, however without completely exploring and solving that new question.	Makes an exciting, major contribution, either by solving an old problem in a brilliant, innovative way or by asking and answering a new and intriguing question.
<b>2. Scientific quality of the research chapters **</b>	Chapters lack the scientific quality to be publishable in any reputable journal or by any reputable book publisher.	Chapters lack clear cohesion and/or show variable quality. One or two chapters have the quality to be publishable in low-ranking journals or as part of a larger book, but will probably remain uncited.	Chapters have sufficient cohesion and quality to address the research question. Most chapters are publishable in low-ranking journals or by a low-ranking book publisher and may be get cited a few times.	Most chapters are published or likely to be published in reputable journals, and may become cited within the field. If a monograph, the thesis may be interesting for a reputable publisher.	All or most chapters are published or likely to be published in the upper range of journals in the field, likely to become well cited within the field. If a monograph, the thesis will certainly evoke interest from reputable publishers.	All or most chapters are published or likely to be published in top journals in the field, likely to become well cited within and outside the own field. If a monograph, top publishers will like to publish it.
<b>3. Reflection on the research as shown in Introduction and General discussion</b>	<p>Candidate cannot show clearly what s/he has done and why s/he did it.</p> <p>Candidate cannot show how the results fit in the existing knowledge, or what the social impact is.</p> <p>Possible weaknesses in the research are not discussed.</p>	<p>Candidate describes in a simple way what s/he has done, but not why s/he did it.</p> <p>Trivial reflection on how results fit in the existing knowledge and what the social impact is.</p> <p>The most obvious weaknesses in the research are indicated, but not how they affect the conclusions.</p>	<p>Candidate describes adequately what s/he has done, but hardly, or unclear, why s/he did it.</p> <p>Narrow view on how results fit in the existing knowledge and what the social impact is.</p> <p>Most weaknesses in the research are indicated, but less clearly how they affect the conclusions.</p>	<p>Candidate describes clearly what s/he has done, but less clearly why s/he did it.</p> <p>Obvious correspondences and conflicts with existing knowledge are identified. Most obvious social impact is indicated.</p> <p>Most weaknesses in the research are indicated, and how they affect the main conclusions.</p>	<p>Candidate describes clearly what s/he has done and why s/he did it.</p> <p>Most correspondences and conflicts with existing knowledge are identified. Most social impact is indicated.</p> <p>All weaknesses in the research are indicated, and how they affect the main conclusions.</p>	<p>Candidate shows clearly, compellingly and critically what s/he has done and why s/he did it.</p> <p>Results are critically confronted with existing knowledge. Possible social impact is addressed in full.</p> <p>All weaknesses in the research are indicated, and how they affect each of the conclusions.</p>

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Unacceptable</b>	<b>Acceptable</b>	<b>Satisfactory</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Very good</b>	<b>Excellent</b>
<b>4. Quality of written presentation</b>	<p>Writing, figures and lay-out are so poor that it is hard to understand what the candidate wants to say. Reading is very difficult.</p> <p>Thesis is badly structured, often information is missing or appearing at the wrong spot.</p>	<p>Writing, figures and lay-out are not always correct and clear, level of detail varies widely, but with effort the text is understandable. Reading is difficult.</p> <p>Main structure of the thesis is adequate, but placement and structure of sections are often not logical.</p>	<p>Writing, figures and lay-out are mostly adequate, but level of detail varies and text could be more concise. Reading is laborious.</p> <p>Main structure of the thesis is correct, placement and structure of sections are not logical in places.</p>	<p>Writing is correct and mostly clear, but text could be more concise. Figures and lay-out are mostly clear, with few flaws. Reading is effortless.</p> <p>Main structure of the thesis is correct, but some sections are less well placed or less well structured.</p>	<p>Writing is clear and concise, figures and lay-out are functional and flawless. Reading is a joy.</p> <p>Main structure of the thesis is clear and correct, most sections are well structured and well placed.</p>	<p>Writing is crystal clear and compelling, concise but balanced with sufficient detail, with attractive, functional figures and lay-out. Reading is exciting.</p> <p>Thesis is very well structured with each chapter and section having a clear function and sitting at the right spot.</p>

\* In the case of a thesis on interdisciplinary or applied research, please consider the contribution to the interdisciplinary or applied field rather than to each of the underlying disciplines.

In the case of a design, please consider the originality of the design and the contribution to technology. Consider the candidate's technological competence, application of design methodologies, and analytical and integrative skills.

\*\* If the research chapters are multi-authored, it is important to consider the candidate's contribution to each chapter, in particular when s/he is not the first author. To this end, an authorship statement by the candidate has been added to the thesis manuscript. Also, it's good to check whether the research chapters show a level of written presentation similar to the Introduction and General discussion. If the research chapters are written in a better way, this may result in a higher grade for the criterion 'research chapters' but it suggests an important contribution of co-authors. Thus, a higher grade for the research chapters alone should perhaps not be reflected in the overall grade of the thesis.