

## **EXAMINATION OF A DEGREE THESIS AT A SEMINAR**

When the degree thesis is ready in manuscript form, it is usually presented at a seminar. The final version of the degree thesis is usually submitted in a revised form shortly after the seminar has taken place. At the seminar the work is thoroughly examined (opposed), a process which requires a good deal of preparation and engagement by the opponent and other seminar participants. The goal is an open and productive discussion that can lead to a deeper understanding for all seminar participants and further development of working-life related knowledge.

### **The order of proceedings of the seminar**

1. The seminar leader (teacher) opens the seminar with a presentation of the degree thesis title, the author and the opponent.
2. Thereafter the floor is given to the author who briefly (about 20 min.) presents the main points of the written work. The author has the opportunity to comment on the work and correct possible inaccuracies in the work (i.e. words that have been omitted and that are needed for understanding the content of the text, figures that are wrongly numbered, references that have not been included in the list of references, and such like).
3. Thereafter the floor is given to the opponent who thoroughly examines the written work i.e. questions the author's work in a constructive way (about 15 min).
4. The seminar is concluded with a general discussion (about 10 min.) Everybody, student and teacher alike, actively takes part in the discussion with questions, opinions and constructive suggestions so as to further develop knowledge.

### **The spirit of opposition**

The opposition should be imbued with a constructive attitude that, among other things, is shown in an examination that is factually and not personally based, that shows mutual respect, as well as a willingness to learn, i.e. that all who take part together in the seminar will learn from the work's merits and shortcomings.

Constructive thinking and engagement are also important. This involves, among other things, questioning choices made, e.g., the choice of research problem, the choice of methodology, and the conclusions drawn (critical thinking), finding new perspectives on the treaded problem (creative thinking) as well as seeing the strengths and possibilities in the work (positive thinking).

### **Preparing the examination**

The opponent should read through the degree thesis a number of times. Only after this is done does the opponent gain a proper overview of the written work and is able to appraise the arrangement of the work as a whole and see how it hangs together (or perhaps does not hang together). Numerous details first emerge after the second or third reading.

The opponent shall also study all important source material upon which the work is based. When doing so, the literature references are of considerable help. At the request of the opponent, the author places accessible source material at the opponent's disposal. The opponent can also find other relevant material that the writer has not used and can also consult experts.

In order to remember all the points that one intends to raise in the examination, it is helpful to note them down before the seminar is held. The degree thesis is opposed both orally and in writing. The written report of the opponent is submitted to the supervisor of the degree thesis beforehand. After the seminar, the written report of the opponent is also given to the author. The examiner assesses the opposition on the scale pass/fail.

## **The examination**

The time allocated to the seminar itself is often tight. It is thus important that the opponent allocates a good deal of the available time to essential issues in his/her examination. Small matters should only be named in passing (spelling mistakes are only interesting if they lead to misconceptions or are so numerous that they distract the reader).

The opponent at the seminar gives an account of how the opposition is arranged. He or she can, e.g., write the arrangement on the board. This makes it possible for all participants to know when they can come in with their inputs if the opponent permits discussion during the proceedings.

## **Important points to treat during the seminar**

The opponent begins his/her contribution by pointing out the written work's merits and then goes on to critically analyse the work's different parts. The following points can be seen as a suggested guide as to what can be raised during the examination:

**Title.** Does the title correspond to the work's content? Is it well formulated? Should it be formulated more concisely and be complemented by a subtitle? The opponent here can by all means suggest an improvement if the title needs revision.

**The arrangement.** Is the work well structured? Is it clearly and logically developed? Are the chapter divisions in the work clear and well-reasoned? Is there a well-functioning transition from one chapter to another? Are the titles meaningful? Are the titles and the text in accord? Are all the essential parts included (e.g. abstract, literature, appendices) in the list of contents? If the opponent considers that the written work should be rearranged, he or she can bring that up and explain why it would benefit the work.

**Abstract (summary).** Does the abstract constitute a short summary of the core content of the thesis? Is it done according to a given model? Does the abstract include the problem, purpose and issues, methods, respondents as well as the important results and conclusions? Does it contain new information (an abstract should not include new information!)? Is the content of the English language abstract the same as that of the one in Swedish? Is the text in the English language version of the abstract free of distracting language mistakes?

**Introduction.** Does the introduction provide a good background and overview of the content of the thesis? Is the introduction informative? Does it lead the reader directly to the problem area? Does the work deliver what is promised in the introduction? Does the introduction contain irrelevant information?

**Problem, purpose and questions at issue.** Is the research problem clearly presented? Is a justification given for the choice of the research problem (the relevance and significance of the research problem for working-life)? Is the purpose stated and the questions clearly posed? Are they well defined? Are the questions clear and meaningful? Is it easy for the reader to understand what it is the writer wants to study and get answers to? Are the questions at issue answered in the work? If now, how could they be answered? How could

the questions be changed so as to be more amenable to achieving answers? This part of the opposition is very important and should take a good portion of the opponent's time.

**Theories, concepts and previous research.** Does the author exhibit a good knowledge of theory and previous research? What concepts are used in the work? Are they clearly defined and elucidated? Are the definitions correct? Are there concepts that have not been defined in the work?

**Choice of methodology.** What research methods and data collection and analytical techniques have been used? Have they been used in a correct way? Are they suitable in terms of the purpose and the questions posed in the thesis? Could other methods and techniques have been used to advantage? Does the problem touch upon matters concerning reliability, validity and ethics? Does the author justify all methodological choices?

**Material.** Has the writer shown a critical capacity when it comes to choosing and selecting respondents? How have they been chosen? How has the author dealt with the possibility of respondents dropping out?

**Carrying out the analysis.** How has the author analysed the collected material? What data collection methods have been used in the analysis?

**The results.** What research results are given? Are they logically related to the work's research problem, purpose and the questions posed? Does the author present the results in a clear manner? Are possible figures and tables used necessary? Are the results interpreted reasonably?

**Discussion.** Does the discussion appear as a unified whole (is there a unifying theme running through the work, i.e. is a connection established between the title, purpose, questions posed, the theory section, and the results)? Does the author discuss what he or she has come up with? Is an assessment made by the author of his/her own work? Is there a discussion of the general applicability, usefulness and relevance of the results for the author's profession? Are suggestions made for improvement and for continued research and development of working life?

**Source references in the text.** Are they correctly done? Are the references in the text and in the list of references in accord? Do a random check of the literature to determine whether the source references listed accord with the literature used!

**Source literature.** Is the literature relevant in terms of the purpose of the work and the questions posed? Is important literature lacking? Is the literature out of date? Are all the sources included in the list of references and does it include only those which the author has referred to? Is the list of references correctly compiled?

**Language.** Is the text comprehensible, logical, factual and free of distracting language errors?

## Some general advice to you as an opponent

- Be well prepared before the oral presentation. Write down the format of the opposition so that you remember what points you intend to raise and the order in which you have thought best to raise them.
- Always be responsive to the other seminar participants. Important points can emerge that you as an opponent have not considered.
- Ask the author about things you have not understood or that you think are strange in the text.
- Adopt a soft tone when you address the author. If the atmosphere becomes heated it will only lead to deadlock and reduced learning.
- Don't remark only on obvious writing mistakes or spelling errors.
- Comment on the merits you have noticed when treating different parts of the work. As the opponent, you should be able to see both the merits and shortcomings in the work. At the same time the seminar should not be too pleasant and uncritical.

## A final correction of the degree thesis

A correction phase often follows the seminar which leads to a final degree thesis. Only small corrections (language errors, corrections of faults in the referencing, and such like) are made in the final version of the work. The author decides in collaboration with the supervisor what measures shall be taken. The corrected version is submitted for binding shortly after it is presented at the seminar.

## Coda

The foregoing suggestions and guidelines are not only for the opponent. The suggestions can be used as a **checklist for your own work** before you submit it for examination. And one last good piece of advice: **Review your own thesis work before the opponent does it!**