

Advice for the public presentation (aka 'fakultätsöffentliche Präsentation' – 'FÖP') for doctoral researchers in philosophy

The director of the doctoral study program (aka 'DSPL') is answering a repeated call for evaluation criteria for the public presentation ('FÖP'), in order to make the evaluation process of the doctoral advisory board (aka 'Doktoratsbeirat' – 'DB') transparent to all parties involved.

Compiling such criteria is not easy: different philosophical traditions can have quite different approaches to the development of philosophical work. Each dimension discussed below can be understood as a scale. A weakness in one dimension can sometimes, though not always, be compensated for by strengths in another dimension. In general, the overall assessment is almost never composed atomically from partial evaluations of individual dimensions, but rather has a certain holistic quality. It should also be noted that the membership of the doctoral advisory board changes over time and new members may bring new evaluation criteria into play. The following advice should always be read in light of these caveats, which apply to advice about the research proposal (aka 'Exposé'), the oral presentation, and the discussion between the doctoral researcher and members of the doctoral advisory board.

(1) Claim, question, topic

It is important that the research proposal states clearly what you are planning to do. This desideratum can be fulfilled in different ways:

- (a) You can formulate one or more claims to defend or dispute in your doctoral thesis.
- (b) You can characterize your project by way of one or more questions that you want to answer.
- (c) Or you can characterize the topic you want to deal with more generally. However, you should then be able explain why specific claims or questions cannot be formulated for your project.

The thesis can be written in the form of a monograph or as a cumulative thesis. The format you choose may affect how you present the research proposal.

(2) Knowledge of the relevant literature and other relevant materials

You must demonstrate convincingly that you are acquainted with the relevant primary and secondary literature and have already acquired an overview of the current state of research. You should also be familiar with any other materials that are important to your research (e.g. artwork, languages, instruments). Of course, even after a year of working on your topic, you may not have

read all of the relevant work. However, you should be acquainted with the central works and be able to discuss them with at least basic competence.

(3) Research gap

Building on (1) and (2) you should explain which research gap you are aiming to fill with your thesis. It is important to discuss this point with your supervisor(s), since not every gap is worth filling and not every gap can be filled within three years.

(4) Timeframe

Make sure your PhD project is really deliverable in the available timeframe. The research proposal should make it clear how the work on the thesis will be structured over time. Different phases (e.g. for data collection or manuscript review, familiarization, study of secondary literature, work on different chapters etc.) should be distinguished and allotted realistic amounts of time.

(5) Method and interdisciplinarity

In science subjects the presentation of project methods is the centerpiece of a research proposal. In philosophy this often seems difficult. In many cases, though, methodological questions also arise for philosophical research proposals. These are particularly central if the project is interdisciplinary, as one wants to know e.g. how the methods of the disciplines can be connected, and whether they ultimately fit together. (That applies, of course, not only to methods but also to concepts and theories in each discipline.)

(6) Coherence

Make sure your reasoning and claims, concepts and authors fit together. (That is not an absolute 'must' – sometimes incoherence can be desired and philosophically productive or provocative. But then you must be able to convincingly defend such an approach.)

(7) Clarity of presentation

Every philosophical work stands within a certain philosophical tradition that is not necessarily immediately comprehensible to outsiders. At the same time, though, there is something like a 'philosophical public' with shared philosophical concepts, questions and ideas, which enables comprehension across the boundaries of different philosophical traditions (even if only with considerable effort). Your research proposal should be written for this philosophical public and

correspondingly transparently and clearly. You should therefore avoid or explain the jargon of your particular philosophical tradition.

(8) Supervision

The success of your doctoral project depends greatly on finding a suitable supervisor (or suitable supervisors). Make sure they are either already familiar with your field of research or willing to familiarize themselves with the topic in parallel with your work. It is important that supervisors understand the requirements of the PhD and are actively engaged in research at an international level. After all, they should be able to help you develop this competence too.

It can also be advisable to have more than one supervisor. This is especially important if you are trying to connect different philosophical approaches or disciplines and your supervisor is only familiar with one of them.

(9) Information about you

Check whether your biography demonstrates the competence required for pursuing your project. Any prizes or awards, prior published work, successful qualifying papers on similar topics etc. can be helpful additions to your research profile. However, this is not to say that you may not tackle completely new topics.

(10) Oral presentation of your project

There are currently ten minutes provided for the presentation. When preparing your presentation, bear in mind that the members of the doctoral advisory board have already read your research proposal. It is therefore mainly a matter of summarizing the most important points once again in a clear and concise manner. Consider whether tools like Power Point, table presentations etc. are appropriate for conveying what you want to in this short time.

A recommendation: Do a practice run of your talk in front of colleagues. And come along to other FÖP sessions, to familiarize yourself with the format of the event.

(11) Questions from members of the doctoral advisory board

After the oral presentation of your project there will be a twenty minute question-and-answer session with the members of the doctoral advisory board. The purpose of this is to ensure that you are pursuing an exciting and promising project. In comparison with most other situations in an academic career, this one is particularly challenging, since questions will be asked by a large

number of people who are not close to your topic. However, it also offers the chance for interesting and wide-ranging feedback.

(12) *Decision-making process of the director of the doctoral study program*

The director of the doctoral study program – after discussion with the doctoral advisory board – can take the following decisions:

- (a) The project is approved.
- (b) The project must be revised with regard to individual aspects (and presented a second time).
- (c) The project is rejected.

In the event of decision (b) a list of suggested improvements will be relayed to you orally and in writing. Please be reassured that this is in line with standard academic review procedures and in no way reflects on your suitability for philosophical research.

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[Lightly updated by Hans Bernhard Schmid and translated into English by Sarah Fisher 12.7.2021]