

Thesis defense policies & procedures at the University of Geneva

This document provides the necessary steps to complete a doctoral thesis in the Lemanic Neuroscience Doctoral School (LNDS) for students enrolled at the University of Geneva. In brief, a doctoral candidate must write his/her thesis, defend its introduction in an “oral exam” session in front of a selected jury, and then present the thesis in a format more accessible for non-scientists in front of a public audience. At this point, the jury will give the final evaluation considering these four points:

- 1) The research work (skills and autonomy of the PhD candidate; originality of the PhD project)
- 2) The format and writing style of the thesis
- 3) The oral or introductory exam
- 4) The public defense (defense publique)

1. Is the student ready to defend?

Students who have completed all **coursework (18 ECTS)** and successfully passed their **mid-term evaluation** can begin to write their doctoral thesis comprising original research that meets the standard for publication. The thesis defense can take place in the **3rd, 4th or 5th year** after enrollment in the program. It is the responsibility of the PhD student together with the thesis director to determine when the student has completed enough publication quality research to enter the end-of-thesis process.

2. Thesis format

Consult the Thesis Formatting Section (below) to properly organize and format the thesis document.

3. What to do before and at the oral exam

At the oral exam the PhD candidate presents the introduction of the thesis. The goal of this exam is to test his/her knowledge in the field of research in which thesis work was performed.

- a) The **exam committee** includes at least 3 people: the thesis director, the thesis co-director (for those who have one), and 2 independent experts, not involved in the thesis research project. The experts must have an academic position as professor, MER, or “chef de clinique scientifique” or “collaborateur scientifique”.

- b) The **exam committee** and **date of the exam** is announced to the secretary of the PhD candidate's faculty and to the [LNDS coordinator](#) at least **3 weeks before the exam**. If you are affiliated with the Faculty of Science, this may not be necessary, but please check if uncertain. Usually they do not need to be informed about the date, but only want to receive the exam's result.
- c) The **introduction** of the thesis includes a review of the literature (about 100-150 references, 20 pages minimum) and it is **sent to the members of the exam committee** at least **3 weeks before the exam**.
- d) This introduction will be the same as in the final thesis, except from corrections based on the input from the jury during the oral exam. The **introduction** should start with the aim of the study and its importance, followed by a comprehensive review of all the relevant literature on the topic of the thesis, e.g. previous empirical work and relevant theoretical models. At the end, the main research questions and hypotheses of the thesis should be outlined.
- e) The oral exam starts with a 30-min presentation by the PhD candidate on the introduction of the thesis, summarizing the main findings in the field. After the presentation, the members of the exam committee ask questions to the PhD candidate in order to test his/her knowledge on the subject, mainly focusing on the literature. The grade is given based on the written introduction, the presentation, and the knowledge on the literature. The form (process verbal or "PV") that needs to be filled out after the exam is available on the LNDS website ([UNIGE Oral exam.doc](#)). All members of the committee must sign it after the exam (only forms with original signatures are accepted by the secretary's office), and it should clearly state the final grade. Please consider printing this document in color to clearly show that it is an original, not a copy.
- f) After the exam, the thesis director has to send the **original** of the PV (and it needs to be clearly visible that it is NOT a copy) must be sent to the **secretary of the student's faculty of enrollment** ([Medicine](#), [Sciences](#) or [Psychology and Educational Sciences](#) FPSE). A copy of the PV must be sent to the LNDS coordinator.

4. Before, during and after the public defense

- a) The thesis defense (soutenance publique) takes place **at least 6 week after the oral exam**.
- b) The names of the jury members must be submitted for approval to the LNDS committee. The committee consists of 4-5 members, including:
 - The thesis director (and co-directors, if any)
 - Two-three independent experts, at least one external to the University of Geneva, and at least one must be a professor. None of them can have collaborated on the thesis project, or be a co-author of one of the student's thesis publications.
 - A jury president, who is a professor in one of the partner institutions and not related with the thesis project.

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c) Before the public defense:

- The student registers for the public defense in his/her faculty **at least 6 weeks before the defense**, by providing the following:
 - i. Date, time and place
 - ii. Attestation of the successful oral exam (if not already sent immediately after the exam) and of the obtained LNDS credits
 - iii. Copy of the thesis' first page
 - iv. Composition of the jury, including the professional addresses of each member
- **At least 6 weeks before the public defense**, the student sends a printed version of the thesis to all members of the jury.
- Within the next three weeks, each expert sends an evaluation to the thesis director stating whether the thesis is acceptable to be defended and whether modifications are required. Based on these evaluations, the thesis director writes a report signed by the jury members, authorizing the defense of the thesis.
- This report must be sent to the PhD candidate, to the LNDS Coordinator, and the secretary of the candidate's faculty, **at least 3 weeks before the defense**. If there are modifications to do, these must be mentioned in the report and need to be done before the defense. Also ask the LNDS coordinator for the number of your thesis since it has to be included at least in the final thesis version.

In parallel, a printed version of the thesis has to be sent to the secretary of the candidate's faculty of enrollment **at least 3 weeks before the defense**.

d) For the public defense, the student is asked to give a presentation on his/her work done for the thesis that is accessible to the public and lasts ~30min. During the defense, 3 grades (1 to 6, average is 4, half-points allowed) are given by the jury, evaluating:

- the thesis document
- the presentation
- the quality of the research

e) These 3 grades appear on the form (procès verbal, PV) for the public defense, available on the LNDS website ([Unige_soutenance_de_these.doc](#)). The form has to be signed by all members of the jury and sent to the secretary of the candidate's faculty (only forms with original signatures are accepted). At the end of the public defense, the members of the jury announce whether the thesis is accepted ("réussi") or not ("pas réussi").
**If you are enrolled at the Science faculty, you might receive an additional green form from the secretary's office which is sent out automatically. Please return only the filled out LNDS form ([Unige_soutenance_de_these.doc](#)) with the grades in order to avoid confusion.*

f) The PhD candidate gets the "imprimatur" page from the dean of his/her faculty of enrollment. This page is to be included into the final thesis version. Furthermore, get the number of your thesis from the LNDS coordinator (if you haven't done so before) and insert it on your thesis' title page. The candidate sends a final version of the thesis, with the imprimatur page, to the

LNDS coordinator. The candidate's faculty of enrollment will receive as many samples as required by the faculty rules.

- g) The faculty dean's office then orders the thesis diploma at the university rectorate.
- h) The public defense can be organized during the summer break, those weeks being considered as normal weeks.

Thesis Formatting Section

- The thesis needs to be printed in A4 format. With the dean's authorization, the thesis can exceptionally be printed in a different format.
- The thesis front page must be the one provided on the LNDS website ([UNIGE_Thesis_title_page.doc](#)).
- The legal names need to be printed first. Married candidates must show their maiden name if they are registered at the University under that name.
- The country of origin is printed under the family name. Swiss citizens must provide the city of origin, with the name of the "canton" in brackets.
- The final version of the thesis needs to show the thesis number, provided by the [LNDS coordinator](#), under the place of origin. This number will be provided after a successful oral exam and after scheduling the date for the public defense. In a preliminary title page (i.e. produced before the number has been provided) "XXX" replaces the thesis number.
- The place where the thesis was published, the name of the editor (optional), and the year of publication are indicated at the bottom of the front page.
- The "imprimatur" page provided by the dean of your faculty should be inserted after the title page (A scan is allowed)
- If the thesis consists of published articles, the references for these publications have to be mentioned on a separate page, immediately after the imprimatur page.
- The text shown in the title page and the imprimatur must be written in French. If the thesis is written in English, a two-page summary in French has to be included.

How to organize a thesis with published articles:

To write a thesis with articles one needs to have **at least two articles published**, accepted for publication or at least accepted for review, in peer-reviewed journals. Only if the student's contribution is significant, the article will be considered as part of the thesis. The chapters of the results section can be composed of the articles.

A thesis with articles should be structured as follows:

- Official title page, to download from the [LN website](#).
- Imprimatur page (provided by the dean after the public defense)
- Acknowledgements
- Abstract (in English & French)
- Introduction (20 pages minimum)
- Brief summary of the results, indicating precisely the student's contribution to each article
- Discussion (10-20 pages)
- References
- Articles

How to organize a thesis without published articles:

- Official title page, to download from the [LN website](#)
- Imprimatur page (provided by the dean after the public defense)
- Acknowledgements
- Abstract (in English & French)
- List of Abbreviations
- Table of Contents
- List of Figures
- List of Tables
- Introduction (10-20 pages)
- Materials and Methods
- Results
- Discussion (10-20 pages)
- References

The following points need to be kept in mind when writing a thesis with or without articles:

- The **thesis official title page** can be downloaded from the [school's website](#).
- The Imprimatur page has to immediately follow the title page in the final thesis version. This can be a high-quality scan of the original Imprimatur page (please note that the quality of a jpg-image is often not sufficient).
- A good *introduction* should show that the student has acquired a broad knowledge of the previous and ongoing research in the field. Appropriate referencing is required.

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- A good *discussion* should express critical thinking and incorporate the acquired knowledge:
 - The results should be discussed in light of others'/previous results.
 - It provides an overall analysis of the publications reviewed.
 - It should analyze the quality and limitations of the results.
 - It formulates conclusions and addresses future perspectives.
- Students registered at the FPSE can get partially reimbursed for the thesis printing expenses. Please contact Sonia Sturm (secretary of the Dean's office at the FPSE - 022 379 90 02) and send her the original bill.

If you have questions regarding the format of your thesis or the procedure do not hesitate to contact the [LN coordinator](#).