

# Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) related to Doctorates

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This document contains answers to frequently asked questions related to doctorates. It is not an official document! In principle, the requirements formulated in the official rules and regulations always apply.

**Please note that non-compliance with orders, rules and regulations can lead to a delay in your procedure or even to the failure of your doctorate, depending on the severity of the violation.**

## 1. Topic: Starting a doctorate

If you have a Master's degree from the Department of Physics at Goethe University Frankfurt or a Master's degree in physics from a German or recognised European university, acceptance as a doctoral candidate is quite straightforward.

If you have obtained your degree at a foreign university, please note the information in the file [Foreign Degree – Which documents do I have to submit to the Dean's Office?](#) (you can also find it in the download area).

If you have a different type of degree, please contact the chairperson of the doctoral committee of the Department of Physics.

### 1.1 Who can accept doctoral candidates and supervise doctorates?

It is the candidate's responsibility to find his/her own supervisor. All regular professors (i.e. appointed professors in the sense of § 61 Abs.1 HHG) at FB13 can supervise their own candidates as well as external candidates, i.e. those who are based in other working groups within and outside the university.

Apl. professors, honorary professors and private lecturers (PDs) as well as emeritus professors can also supervise doctoral candidates at FB13. Junior research group leaders can apply for the right to do a doctorate (more details can be obtained from the Physics dean's office).

One of the two supervisors who later act as reviewers can be external - i.e. outside FB13. However, one of the reviewers must be a regular (appointed) professor in the sense of § 61 Abs.1 HHG.

Co-supervisors are not necessarily the second reviewers, but can be persons - usually from your research group - who have at least a doctorate and who are your direct contacts for scientific questions during the doctorate.

### 1.2 What do I have to bear in mind when filling out the form "Application for Acceptance as a Doctoral Candidate"?

The "Application for Acceptance as a Doctoral Candidate" should be submitted to the dean's office **before** you start your doctorate (signed by you and the supervisor, if possible also by the second supervisor). For degrees obtained outside of FB13, please submit an officially certified copy of your **Diploma/Master's certificate** and **Transcripts and grade overviews of previous studies at a university** (only one copy). To save costs, you can alternatively submit the originals to the dean's office - we will then make a copy. For graduates of FB13, a simple, uncertified copy is sufficient.

In addition, the application for acceptance as a doctoral candidate must be accompanied by an **exposé**, the details of which you should discuss with your supervisor. The exposé is a brief

description of the doctoral project (e.g. a bullet-point plan of the first six months of the doctorate), which must be signed by the first supervisor.

The current acceptance form for doctorates also includes a **supervision agreement**, which is concluded between the doctoral candidate, the first supervisor and (if desired) a co-supervisor or mentor. A co-supervisor / mentor can (if desired) accompany the doctoral project and should be present at the supervision meetings, which are to be conducted at least once a year, documented by the doctoral candidate and archived in the working groups.

After acceptance by the doctoral committee, you will receive a **letter of acceptance** signed by the dean, which may also contain conditions. This acceptance letter serves as proof of your acceptance as a doctoral candidate.

Please use the [Application for Acceptance as a Doctoral Candidate](#), which you can find in the download area on our website.

### 1.3 Do I have to enrol as a doctoral student at Goethe University?

Regardless of the employment status at Goethe University, doctoral students can (but must not) enrol at the Study Service Centre (SSC) on the Westend Campus of Goethe University in accordance with § 3 Para. 3 No. 11 of the ImmaVO if they present the signed "Letter of Acceptance - Acceptance as a Doctoral Candidate".

If the doctoral committee has attached conditions to your acceptance as a doctoral candidate, you must enrol for the time until you have fulfilled the conditions.

There are currently no deadlines for doctoral students to enrol in the SSC. However, the fee for the current semester must be paid in full regardless of when you enrol. Please inform yourself about the procedure on the [SSC homepage](#).

### 1.4 What do I have to consider as a graduate of a foreign university?

Graduates of foreign universities must submit their application for acceptance as a doctoral candidate as early as possible; the documents to be submitted can be found in the file [Foreign Degree – Which documents do I have to submit to the Dean's Office?](#) in the download area. The International Office checks your degree for equivalence to the degrees of German universities. Candidates whose degrees do not correspond to those of German universities in terms of scope and quality are usually accepted as doctoral candidates provisionally and with conditions. These conditions must be fulfilled by the submission of the dissertation at the latest.

### 1.5 What do I have to do if the topic of my thesis has changed?

If it is only an editorial change or modification of the provisional thesis title stated in the application for acceptance as a doctoral candidate, you do not have to take action. However, if it is a substantive / thematic change, this must be communicated to the doctoral committee.

### 1.6 Can I change the supervisor?

According to § 4 (10) of the doctoral regulations of the mathematics and natural sciences departments at Goethe University Frankfurt, you can apply for a change of the supervisory relationship in writing without any formalities. The letter must be signed by the previous and the future supervisor as well as by you.

## 2. Topic: Dissertation

### 2.1 In which language can I write my dissertation?

In principle, dissertations can be submitted in German or English.

Regardless of the language of the dissertation, a detailed German abstract must be included.

### 2.2. Is a publication-based, cumulative dissertation possible?

According to decisions of the physics department, publication-based (cumulative) dissertations are generally not admitted. Exceptions must be clearly recognisable as such and are only possible in very well justified special cases. In this case, an application must be submitted to the doctoral committee in advance of writing the dissertation, which will examine the individual case.

The dissertation is usually monographic. See also the [implementation regulations for the preparation of the dissertation in physics](#) in our download area.

### 2.3 What are the requirements for formatting the dissertation?

At the end of the doctoral regulations you will find a sample for the title page. Beyond that, you are free in your design with regard to font etc., but should of course follow the advice of your supervisor and successful role models.

### 2.4 What must be considered when selecting the two reviewers?

The dissertation is reviewed by two persons. The following are eligible: the person responsible for the supervision (§ 4 Para. 2), emeritus or retired professors, honorary professors or other habilitated scientists. One of the two reviewers must be a professor of the Department of Physics within the meaning of § 61 Para.1 HHG, i.e. a regular (appointed) professor.

The names of the reviewers will be communicated to the doctoral candidate.

### 2.5 What must be observed when submitting the documents?

The doctoral office only accepts complete documents. Information on the required documents can be found on the [website of the doctoral office](#).

As a rule, the following is required for submission (information from a field report by two doctoral candidates in 2018):

- Two copies of the dissertation for the reviewers (stamped in the doctoral office and then ideally hand them over in person) and five additional copies = 7 copies in total.  
**Note:** For a dissertation in English, no additional forms are necessary, but the dissertation must then contain a summary of at least five pages in German! The submission of a dissertation in a foreign language - other than English - requires the prior approval of the doctoral committee.
- Electronic version of the dissertation (CD/DVD, USB stick or pdf of the dissertation by e-mail).
- An abstract of no more than two pages in German - not included in the dissertation, but extra.
- Declaration and assurance that the dissertation has been written independently and that no doctoral examination in the mathematical-scientific field has been taken so far.
- Application for the opening of the doctoral procedure ("Enclosed, I submit my dissertation [...]").

- Curriculum vitae with photo (extra, but must also be included in the dissertation). **Important:** Date and place of birth (required for the doctoral certificate). The curriculum vitae should show in particular the academic career and academic teachers; the year and place of the school-leaving examination should also be indicated.
- Copy of the Master's certificate with presentation of the original or a certified copy instead. In the case of foreign certificates, a German or English translation with grades must be submitted (already required for official acceptance as a doctoral candidate and forwarded by the dean's office to the doctoral office).
- A list of examiners for the disputation can already be submitted, but an appointment with them can only be made officially after the end of the circulation (see below).

Upon successful submission, you will receive a request to transfer the doctoral fee of currently 150 €.

### 3. Topic: Disputation (Defence)

#### 3.1 Who is eligible to be a member of the examination committee?

According to the doctoral regulations § 9: "The members of the examination board who belong to the doctoral department should have a majority in the board."

The examination committee consists of the two reviewers and two other professors (or: emeritus or retired professors or honorary professors or other habilitated academics belonging to the department), whereby at least three of the members must be professors within the meaning of § 61 HHG.

The candidate proposes a possible composition of the examination board to his/her first examiner. Professors from at least three institutes/research institutions as well as from experimental physics and theory should be represented in the examination board. The majority of the members of the examination board should belong to the physics department of the Goethe University Frankfurt.

A substitute proposal is required for each of the two members of the examination committee who are not reviewers. Care must be taken to ensure that the above criteria for composition are maintained.

The candidate must have the composition of the examination committee approved by the chair of the doctoral committee (currently Prof. Dr. Jens Müller, Institute of Physics) (Form [Examination Committee for the Disputation](#)). If he is not available, approval can be obtained from the dean of the Department of Physics. The approved proposal for the composition of the examination board must be submitted to the doctoral office when submitting the dissertation.

In all other respects, the regulations of the current doctoral regulations of the mathematics and natural sciences departments of the Goethe University Frankfurt apply.

#### 3.2 How much time do I have to plan from the submission of the dissertation to the disputation?

You should allow a total of at least three months between the submission of the dissertation and the disputation. This is made up as follows:

- **At least 4 weeks** for **obtaining the reviews** (done by the doctoral office). After a certain period of time, the reviewers will be reminded by the doctoral office. If the thesis is

evaluated "summa cum laude" by both reviewers, a third, usually external, review is obtained. This prolongs the entire process.

- After receipt of the reviews in the doctoral office, **the digital circulation** in the department begins for **4 weeks**, i.e. every professor can view the dissertation and the reviews.
- You will then receive a letter informing you of the end of the circulation. Now the doctoral office can be informed of a date for the disputation.

**Attention:** There is an invitation period of 10 days here!

### 3.3 What do I have to do to organise my disputation?

The candidate seeks the approval of the committee members for the date of the disputation; if necessary, the dean arranges for a disputation date to be set. The earliest date that can be considered as a disputation date is six weeks after the start of the circulation. The time and place of the disputation shall be proposed by the candidate to the doctoral office. The registration in the form [Examination Committee for the disputation](#) as well as the assignment of the chair are made by the chair of the doctoral committee and the doctoral office.

For information on [disputations under corona conditions](#), please refer to the information sheet in our download area.

### 3.4 How long should my presentation be?

The disputation lecture should last about 15 - 20 minutes. The presentation can be given in German or English. This is followed by a question and answer session lasting about one hour.

## 4. Topic: Handing over the certificate

### 4.1 Delivery of the obligatory copies

Before the certificate can be handed over, some obligatory copies have to be handed in and published. There are several ways to do this. The most common option is publication as an online document (PDF) in the university publication system. Details can be found on the [website of the University Library \(UB\)](#) (Library code for dissertations is D30). In addition to the upload, a declaration of consent, a CD/DVD and two bound paper copies must be handed in at the UB's university publications office. The UB will issue you with a certificate of submission of the deposit copies, which you need to receive your certificate.

### 4.2 What do I have to do to receive my certificate?

About ten days after the disputation, you can ask at the doctoral office whether your certificate is already available. As a rule, you will receive your certificate by post from the doctoral office (not from the dean's office as stipulated in the doctoral regulations) and only after presenting the certificate from the university library confirming that you have handed in your obligatory copies.