Guidelines of the Social Sciences Directorate of Doctoral Studies (Directorate of Studies 40) concerning doctoral theses

Last updated on 2 November 2026

1. General requirements

The requirements for doctoral theses are specified in the Universities Act, the section of the Statutes of the University of Vienna governing university studies and the Curriculum for the Doctoral Programme in Social Sciences. According to the Curriculum, a doctoral thesis "serves to demonstrate the candidate's ability to master academic topics independently" and is "expected to be of a quality to merit publication, at least in parts, in accordance with the standards in the field of research."

The Curriculum also makes clear that publishing results from the doctoral project is encouraged: "The publication of partial results of the doctoral project in academic journals and their presentation at academic conferences prior to the submission of the doctoral thesis is encouraged."

The formal rules for submitting a doctoral thesis must be observed; see University Gazette of 28 February 2024, number 62.

2. General guidelines (for monographs and collections of papers)

The Social Sciences Directorate of Doctoral Studies specifies the following additional quality guidelines for doctoral theses:

- **Length:** A doctoral thesis should be of a length that sufficiently demonstrates the candidate's substantial independent and original contribution to research in the relevant research area, in accordance with international standards.
- **Language:** The thesis can be written in any language. Doctoral candidates who intend to write their thesis in a foreign language have to obtain consent from their supervisor(s) when selecting a topic. Theses in English or German do not require the supervisors' consent. Papers included in the doctoral thesis may be written in different languages. Candidates should also consider the availability of qualified reviewers when considering the language of their thesis and the individual papers they intend to include.
- **Inclusion of material published during the doctoral programme:**
    - The doctoral thesis may contain material that has been submitted or accepted for publication or that has already been published.
    - The publication of results from research conducted as part of the doctoral thesis project is encouraged.
    - The previous publication or acceptance for publication of the thesis either in part or as a whole does not predetermine the assessment by the reviewers.
    - For publications and submitted papers that are included in a doctoral thesis (both in theses that take the form of a monograph or a collection of papers), please include the following information in a separate section at the beginning of the thesis:
        - Publications: comprehensive bibliographical information about the publication (incl. DOI)
        - Manuscripts accepted for publication: date of the letter of acceptance

  - Submitted manuscripts: date of the acknowledgement of receipt
- **Inclusion of material published before the start of the doctoral programme:** The doctoral degree at the University of Vienna serves to prepare doctoral candidates for academic work in their field of doctoral research as well as to educate and promote early stage researchers. The doctoral programme provides an academic education of international standard and entails independent academic work in the candidate's field of doctoral research. As a result, material accepted for publication before the start of doctoral studies cannot generally be included in the doctoral thesis. The following exceptions are possible:
  - Publications published as part of a research project conducted at the University of Vienna;
  - Papers written in close cooperation with the supervisor(s) of the thesis before the start of the doctoral programme.

  Other exceptions may be possible but have to be discussed with the Social Sciences Directorate of Doctoral Studies before the public presentation at the faculty (*Fakultätsöffentliche Präsentation, FÖP*). Doctoral theses cannot be based entirely on previously published material. This means that a thesis that takes the form of a collection of papers may not contain only papers that have been published before the start of the doctoral programme.
- **Format (monograph or collection of papers):** The University of Vienna does not formally distinguish between theses taking the form of a monograph or a collection of papers. Nevertheless, the Social Sciences Directorate of Doctoral Studies recommends that candidates decide on the format of their doctoral thesis early in the research process. This decision should be taken no later than at the public presentation at the faculty (*FÖP*) to help candidates plan the further research steps. Changes to this decision should be recorded in the annual annexes to the doctoral thesis agreement (annual progress reports).
- **Independent contribution:** Doctoral theses must demonstrate that a candidate is able to independently master academic topics. Therefore, the inclusion of papers and chapters that are single-authored or written without a supervisor are encouraged in doctoral theses.
- **Formal structure:** If a doctoral thesis includes published papers, the papers have to be included in the thesis in the published version. Candidates may either include a paper in its original publication layout or include the postprint of the paper. All pages, including publications, must be numbered consecutively. If you include the article in its original publication layout, all sections – irrespective of the printing format of the original publication – must be scaled to DIN A4 page format. If a doctoral thesis takes the form of a collection of papers and a film, the film must be made available with a permanent link on a repository such as Phaidra. The doctoral candidates are advised to consult with the Phaidra team about the required format of submission in an early stage. The permanent link to the film needs to be included in the doctoral thesis.

3. Specific guidelines for doctoral theses taking the form of a monograph

A doctoral thesis taking the form of a monograph must be an integrated whole and present a coherent argumentation based on the candidate's own research.

- **If individual chapters of the doctoral thesis or sections thereof are co-authored**, the doctoral candidate must specify their contribution to each chapter/section in the declaration of co-authorship (see Appendix). All co-authors have to confirm this contribution statement. The signed contribution statements should not be included in the doctoral thesis but have to be submitted to the StudiesServiceCentre (SSC). The statements are forwarded to the reviewers for assessment together with the doctoral thesis. For all co-authored work included in the thesis, the contribution of the doctoral candidate should be substantial and demonstrate independent mastery of the academic topic, in line with the requirements for doctoral theses according to the Statutes. In addition,

information about co-authorship should be included in a separate section at the beginning of the doctoral thesis.

- If a doctoral thesis taking the form of a monograph includes **published papers**, the papers have to be included in the thesis in the published version (please see the recommendations on the formal structure on page 2). If only parts of a paper are included, proper citation is required.

4. Specific guidelines for doctoral theses taking the form of a collection of papers

The guidelines below are based on the recommendations by the Studienpräses. For a positive assessment by reviewers, the Social Sciences Directorate of Doctoral Studies recommends that a doctoral thesis taking the form of a collection of papers:

- Consists of **at least three papers**.
- **If papers are co-authored**, the doctoral candidate must specify their contribution to the paper in the declaration of co-authorship (see Appendix). All co-authors have to confirm this contribution statement. The signed contribution statements should not be included in the doctoral thesis but have to be submitted to the SSC. The statements are forwarded to the reviewers for assessment together with the doctoral thesis. For every paper included in the thesis, the contribution of the doctoral candidate should be substantial and demonstrate independent mastery of the academic topic, in line with the requirements for doctoral theses according to the Statutes. In addition, information about co-authorship should be included in a separate section at the beginning of the doctoral thesis.
- Includes a **comprehensive discussion** of the contribution of the papers to existing research. This discussion of the state of the art and the papers' contribution to it must be written by the doctoral candidate and should show the candidate's ability to contextualise and reflect on the topics of the doctoral thesis. The comprehensive discussion should connect the individual papers and thereby document the coherent framework of the doctoral thesis project. This discussion should include the following points:
    - Presentation and analysis of the state of the art in the chosen field(s) of research;
    - Explanation and discussion of the research question(s) that connect the individual publications;
    - Description and critical discussion of the chosen research approach, including the theoretical foundations and framework as well as the methodological approach;
    - Discussion of the central research findings in the context of the overarching research question(s);
    - Contribution of the research to the academic debate in the relevant discipline(s);
    - Presentation of the papers included as well as the doctoral candidate's contribution to each paper.

  All the points mentioned above have to be discussed in detail. Doctoral theses taking the form of a collection of papers submitted to the doctoral programme in Social Sciences should aim for a discussion comprising between 8,000 and 16,000 words (excluding bibliographical references). The comprehensive discussion can be presented as an introduction to the papers or can be divided into an introduction and a conclusion.

5. Specific guidelines for doctoral theses taking the form of a collection of papers and a film

In some cases, and only after prior consultation and agreement with the supervisor(s), it is possible to include a film as part of the doctoral thesis. The Social Sciences Directorate of Doctoral Studies recommends that candidates also consult the Vienna Visual Anthropology Lab early in the process. The

guidelines below are based on the Guidelines for the Evaluation of Ethnographic Visual Media of the American Anthropological Association. For a positive assessment by reviewers, the Social Sciences Directorate of Doctoral Studies recommends that a doctoral thesis taking the form of a collection of papers and a film:

- Consists of **a film of at least 30 minutes** and **at least two papers**.
- **If the film and/or the articles are produced in collaboration**, the doctoral candidate must specify their contribution to the film or article (see Appendix). All collaborators have to confirm this contribution statement. The signed contribution statements should not be included in the doctoral thesis but have to be submitted to the SSC. The statements are forwarded to the reviewers for assessment together with the doctoral thesis. For every paper and the film included in the thesis, the contribution of the doctoral candidate should be substantial and demonstrate independent mastery of the academic topic, in line with the requirements for doctoral theses according to the Statutes. For the film, the doctoral candidate is the director and should demonstrate independent mastery of at least two of the following three tasks: camera work, audio recording and video editing. In addition, information about co-authorship should be included in a separate section at the beginning of the doctoral thesis.
- Includes a **comprehensive discussion** of the contribution of the film and the papers to existing research. This discussion of the state of the art and the thesis' contribution to it must be written by the doctoral candidate and should show the candidate's ability to contextualise and reflect on the topics of the doctoral thesis. The comprehensive discussion should connect the individual papers and the film and thereby document the coherent framework of the doctoral thesis project. This discussion should include the following points:
    - Presentation and analysis of the state of the art in the chosen field(s) of research;
    - Explanation and discussion of the research question(s) that connect the individual publications, including the papers and the film;
    - Description and critical discussion of the chosen research approach, including the theoretical foundations and framework as well as the methodological approach;
    - For the film, a specific reflection on the chosen cinematographic and aesthetic approach, in relation with the theoretical foundations and framework and the methodological approach;
    - Discussion of the central research findings in the context of the overarching research question(s);
    - Contribution of the research to the academic debate in the relevant discipline(s);
    - Presentation of the papers and the film included in the thesis as well as the doctoral candidate's contribution to each paper and the film.

  All the points mentioned above have to be discussed in detail. Doctoral theses taking the form of a collection of papers and a film submitted to the doctoral programme in Social Sciences should aim for a discussion comprising between 8,000 and 16,000 words (excluding bibliographical references). The comprehensive discussion can be presented as an introduction to the papers and the film or can be divided into an introduction and a conclusion.

6. Copyright and embargo periods: recommendations for the inclusion of published papers or films in doctoral theses

When uploading the thesis, the online embargo periods of journals and/or publishers have to be observed. Publishing houses and/or journals may require that the electronic version of a doctoral thesis is NOT published online and film festivals may require that a film is NOT published online. In addition, an embargo on the printed copies of the doctoral thesis may be required. In this case, the doctoral candidate

must apply for the embargo on the doctoral thesis when submitting it to the SSC. The duration of the embargo has to comply with the requirements of the publishing house or journal. Note: Most publishing houses or journals have embargo periods of twelve to 36 months in such cases. This guarantees that the publishing house's rights (commercial exploitation) are not violated. If a film is part of the doctoral thesis and if access to the film should be restricted to specific users, this restriction must be handled on the repository where the film is made available upon submission of the doctoral thesis, such as Phaidra.

7. Statement by the doctoral candidate

These guidelines will be forwarded to the reviewers of the doctoral thesis together with the thesis. If a doctoral thesis deviates from these guidelines and recommendations, the doctoral candidate can submit a formal statement to justify the deviations. This statement, if included, will be sent to the reviewers as well.

8. Appendix: Declaration of co-authorship

This statement specifies the doctoral candidate's contribution to papers, chapters, films or sections written in collaboration with co-authors. This form should be completed for every individual paper, chapter, film or section separately.

Title of the paper, chapter, film or section written in collaboration with co-authors

Doctoral candidate's contribution to the paper, chapter, or section	**A / B / C / D** A= primary contribution (100 %–70 %) B= main contribution (70 %–30 %) C= minor contribution (30 %–1 %) D= no contribution (0 %)
CONCEPT (the idea for the research or manuscript, framing the research question or hypothesis):	
DESIGN (planning the theoretical approach and methodology/ methods to generate results):	
SUPERVISION (oversight of and responsibility for the organisation and course of the project and the manuscript):	
DATA COLLECTION/PROCESSING (responsibility for gathering empirical material, organising and reporting data):	
ANALYSIS/INTERPRETATION (responsibility for interpreting and presenting the results):	
LITERATURE SEARCH:	
WRITING (responsibility for creating and revising all or a substantive part of the manuscript):	
CRITICAL REVIEW (reworking the content of the manuscript before submission, not just spelling and grammar checking):	
OTHER:	

Doctoral candidate's contribution to the film	**A / B / C / D** *A= primary contribution (100 %–70 %)* *B= main contribution (70 %–30 %)* *C= minor contribution (30 %–1 %)* *D= no contribution (0 %)*
CONCEPT (the idea for the film, including synopsis):	
DESIGN (planning the conceptual, cinematographic, aesthetic and collaborative approach and methodology/methods, including storyboard):	
DIRECTION (oversight of and responsibility for the organisation and course of the film project including coordination of collaborations):	
CAMERA WORK (responsibility for recording visual and video footage):	
AUDIO RECORDING:	

EDITING (responsibility for analysing, interpreting, selecting, framing, and presenting the visual, video, and audio footage):	
POSTPRODUCTION (reworking the film before submission, including colour and sound correction):	
OTHER (for example, responsibility for visualisation in case of use of drawings/animations):	

Names of the co-authors, signatures