

Guidelines for
Doctoral Candidates

Shaping the Doctorate Together



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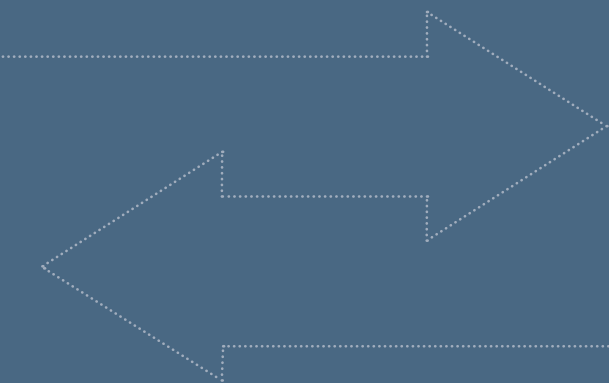
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Preamble



Shaping the Doctorate Together

Guidelines for Supervisors and Doctoral Candidates

Thanks to the development of a wide range of support, funding and training measures within structured doctoral programmes or comprehensive graduate institutions, the conditions for pursuing a doctorate have improved significantly at many universities throughout Germany and Europe. This structural development aims to create an attractive research environment for early career researchers. It is accompanied by a change in academic culture and management practices at universities, shifting responsibility for doctoral support to multiple actors. Additional services have been created, and new actors are involved, such as the management and staff of graduate institutions, professional trainers and mentors. Early career researchers receive special support, particularly in the areas of management and transferable skills as well as career development, which also benefits concentrated research activities.

The focal point of the entire doctoral process remains the quality of research and the relationship between the doctoral candidate and the supervisor. The supportive measures provided by the graduate institutions relieve supervisors of some of their advisory tasks, allowing them to concentrate more intensively on their core tasks of supervising and promoting research and on the professional qualification of their doctoral candidates. The transparency of the supervisory relationship contributes significantly to the success of the doctorate by preventing difficulties and ensuring quality throughout the doctoral process.

These guidelines are intended to support a more efficient structure for the supervisory relationship by providing suggestions for the preparatory, research and completion stages of the doctorate in the form of a biographical overview, and by giving all those involved a better understanding of organisational issues, challenges, practical details and support measures for the individual stages.

The aim of doctoral supervision is to provide researchers in the early stages of their careers with optimal support on their path to becoming highly qualified academics who are fully integrated into the scientific community. This is best achieved when the requirements of this process are equally transparent and understandable for both sides, and when they define, communicate and document their mutual expectations.

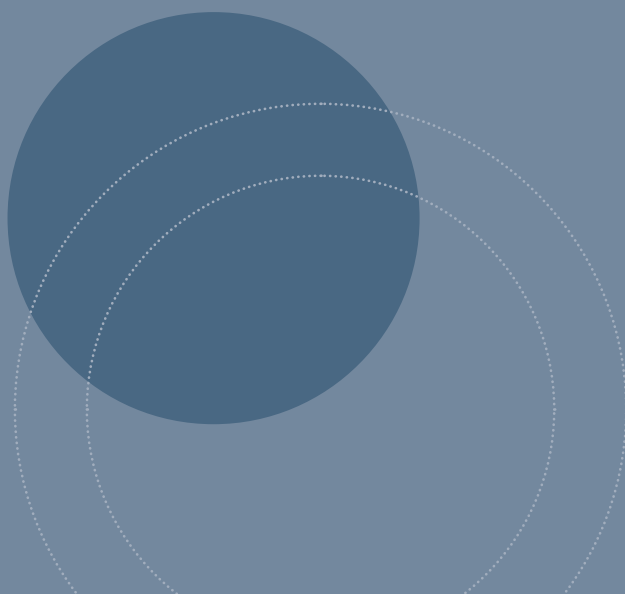
QualitätsZirkel Promotion (Quality Circle for the Doctorate)

This booklet is the result of a joint project by the QualitätsZirkel Promotion, a cross-state network of graduate institutions from several universities and research institutes. The project is an initiative for the discussion and further development of recommendations for action and materials, and so ultimately aims to establish quality standards for doctoral supervision.

We are aware that our recommendations for action must be adapted to the respective research institutes and the current situation of the specifics of individual academic disciplines. They cannot therefore be a panacea but are intended to provide food for thought and suggestions and to serve as a basis for joint discussion and further development.

We are sharing our recommendations with the international community in both a German and in an English version. We would be pleased to see many of you using our guidelines to further improve the doctoral supervision process at your research institutes. We welcome your feedback, which we will then share further in national and international networks and use to revise our guidelines.

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Orientation and Initial Phase



„Should I pursue a doctorate?“ The decision for or against a doctorate is not an easy one, because a doctorate has career implications and takes up a significant amount of time and resources. Doctoral candidates should therefore clarify their own expectations at the beginning of their doctorate and ask themselves some fundamental questions. But the decision to supervise a doctoral candidate is also complex for supervisors. Supervisors commit themselves to investing time and other resources in a doctoral candidate's research project over a long period of time. We therefore believe that it is the responsibility of both doctoral candidates and supervisors to address these questions. The list of questions that we have provided at the end of this document serves as a useful tool for consideration.

Doctoral candidates should question their motivation, as the decision to pursue a doctorate will have an impact on their professional and personal development and thus shape the next few years of their lives. If you want to pursue a doctorate, you are making a long-term commitment that may involve a significant change in your lifestyle. Writing a dissertation requires considerable dedication. Early consideration should also be given to possible career prospects after completing a doctorate.

Supervisors can use their experience to provide a better overview of the prospects and opportunities offered by an academic career. They should discuss with prospective doctoral candidates why they want to pursue a doctorate; in some cases, it may be advisable not to accept a doctoral application.

The following guide is intended for doctoral candidates. It also includes a checklist in the form of questions that can be used in the decision-making process and as a short “self-assessment”. The recommendations formulated below are in no way intended as an endorsement of previous or current framework conditions. Rather, they are intended to help you assess your own situation in the most self-reflective, realistic and concrete way possible, given the specific circumstances of your particular case, and thus serve as a guide to actively shaping your own doctoral path in the best possible way. The second part of the guide contains the version for supervisors – the content is tailored to the respective target group and is transparent for all involved in a single edition, so as to support decision-making and prepare for discussions between doctoral candidates and supervisors.

1. Why do I want to pursue a doctorate?

To establish a common basis for discussion, we have defined possible motives for pursuing a doctorate. This classification should not be regarded as exhaustive or exclusive, but rather as an idealised approximation. Depending on the goals you wish to achieve with a doctoral degree, different aspects should be considered.

Reasons for pursuing a doctorate may include:

- a. Intrinsic interest in research
 - b. Academic career
 - c. Non-academic career
 - d. Career in science and research management
 - e. Offer to pursue a doctorate
 - f. Unclear career plans/lack of direction
-
- a. **Intrinsic interest in research: Are you passionate about your topic/subject and determined to work on it or conduct further research in this field?**
 - You need an optimal research environment. Is this provided by the professorship, the working group, the research institute, etc.?
 - Is a graduate school, a research training group or a doctoral programme an option? Inform yourself about what options are available.
 - Is your prospective supervisor a specialist in the field? Find out about their publications, lectures, research interests, etc.
 - How does your prospective supervisor act as a supervisor? Ask doctoral candidates who are already being supervised by him/her/them about their experiences.
 - Are mentors or networks available?
 - What compromises are you willing to make in order to work on your topic?
 - What are the career opportunities after completing your doctorate?
 - b. **Academic career: Are you aiming for a career in academia/a professorship?**
 - You need an optimal research environment. Is this provided by the professorship, the working group, the research institute, etc.?
 - Is a graduate school, a research training group or a doctoral programme an option? Inform yourself about what options are available.
 - If you are aiming for a professorship, you will need teaching experience. Is there an opportunity for you to gain teaching experience and take advantage of further training in university teaching?

- Are there opportunities for you to publish academic papers during your doctoral studies?
- Does your prospective supervisor have relevant expertise? Find out about their publications, lectures, research interests, etc.
- How does your prospective supervisor act as a supervisor? Ask doctoral candidates who are already being supervised by him/her/them about their experiences.
- Are mentors or networks available?
- Are you willing to engage with the scientific community (the social norms and culture of open debate)?
- Will you have opportunities to take on tasks in scientific self-administration/committee work during the doctoral process to gain insight into university policy and organisational structures?
- What compromises are you willing to make in order to work on your topic?
- What are the career opportunities after completing your doctorate?
- Are you aware that an academic career involves a degree of uncertainty? Are you prepared to deal with this uncertainty?
- Would you also have a 'Plan B' if your career in academia does not work out?

c. Non-academic career: Do you need academic qualifications to be successful outside academia, e.g. in business?

- Would it make sense to take a pragmatic approach in terms of the time and resources you invest in your doctorate, as opposed to work geared towards a career in academia?
- What specific professional qualifications do you need to obtain during your doctoral studies?
- Would a job related to your field be a better strategic move than one related to academia?
- Can you use your doctoral studies to build a professional network for your future career?
- Can you tailor your dissertation topic to your career goals?

d. Career in science and research management: Are you seeking a career connected to science and research?

- Would it make sense to take a pragmatic approach in terms of the time and resources you invest in your doctoral studies, as opposed to work geared towards a career in academia?
- What specific professional qualifications do you need to obtain during your doctoral studies?
- Can you tailor your dissertation topic to your career goals?
- Is there funding available for your doctoral studies that would allow you to gain professional experience and build up a network that would be beneficial for your future career?
- Would you have the opportunity to take on coordination tasks during your doctoral studies, gain insight into university policy and academic structures, and collect experience in committee work?

e. Offer to pursue a doctorate: Have you been encouraged by a prospective supervisor to take up a doctorate?

- Does the offer (e.g. programme, position, subject) align with your own career goals?
- Are you interested in the subject area of the professorship? Can you imagine working on a research question in this field?
- Would the environment at the professorship, in the working group, and at the research institute be conducive to your doctoral project?
- Are you expected to take on additional tasks at the professorship (e.g. teaching, administration) in addition to writing your dissertation? If so, to what extent?
- Are you sufficiently motivated to pursue a doctorate, which requires years of commitment?

f. Unclear career plans/lack of direction: Are you still unsure about your career goals and therefore want to remain at university?

- Could it be beneficial to conduct a personal assessment of your personal situation and plans?
- Are there any (professional) alternatives to a doctorate?
- Are you sufficiently motivated to pursue a doctorate, which requires years of commitment?
- What career prospects will you pursue afterwards?
- Could it be helpful to seek (career) advice?
- Could postponing your career choice prove to be disadvantageous?

Reflecting on motivation is linked to other areas and questions (see below). This applies to doctoral candidates, but also to supervisors, because the reasons for deciding to pursue a doctorate (or accepting a doctoral candidate) have an impact on the supervisory relationship.

Depending on the motivation, supervisors may decide to manage their own resources differently and so allow doctoral candidates to use them.

This may apply to the following:

- Financial resources
- Time for supervision
- Non-financial support/career advancement
- Scope and focus of the topic
- Contacts/networks

Based on these points and in interaction with them, we recommend that you consider the following:

2. Do I meet the formal requirements for pursuing a doctorate in my chosen field at my chosen university?

- Are the formal requirements specified in the doctoral regulations met?
- Based on my previous degree(s) am I permitted to pursue a doctorate in my chosen field?
- Am I required or is it advisable to matriculate?
- If available, have I looked at the advice and/or checklists from departments/faculties or graduate institutions?

3. How will I finance my doctorate?

- Position as a research assistant financed by university funds
- Position as a research assistant financed by third-party funds
- Position in science and research management
- External position
- Scholarship
- Family support
- Other

Consider the advantages and disadvantages of each type of financing!

Consider the advantages and disadvantages of each type of financing!

- Will I have enough time for my doctoral research?
- How might working impact my proposed research time plan?
- How long will the financial support last?
- Do I need research stays and how can I finance them?
- Can I bridge any periods without financing?
- Does my family and/or partner support me?
- Where can I find advice and/or checklists from the departments/faculties or graduate institutions?

4. What do I need to consider about my personal circumstances and expectations?

- What are my life and family plans?
- What work style do I have?
- How do I manage my time and myself?
- Am I sufficiently motivated?
- Do I require a significant amount of free time, e.g. for time-consuming hobbies or social activities? How would I cope with any restrictions in this regard?
- Do my personal circumstances allow for any necessary research-related travel or stays abroad?

- Could I get by with less income if necessary?
- How would I cope with a potentially precarious employment situation, which is often typical of academic careers?

5. Which form(s) of dissertation can be written in my subject at my chosen university?

The form of the dissertation can significantly influence the course of the doctorate. Depending on how you decide, it may have an impact on the time plan. The writing and publication processes may differ as well.

Forms of dissertation:

- Writing a monograph and publishing it after successfully completing the doctorate
- Writing a cumulative dissertation with the stipulation that the progress of the work must be documented during the doctoral phase by publishing journal articles; submission of a collection of these articles framed by an introduction, conclusion and transitions as a dissertation

6. What do I need to consider when selecting the second reviewer?

- When is the appropriate time to select the second reviewer?
- Should and can the second reviewer be involved in the supervision at an early stage?

7. Entering into a supervision agreement

Entering into a supervision agreement helps doctoral candidates and supervisors clarify mutual expectations and document them in writing. The higher education laws of some federal states or the doctoral regulations of universities make it mandatory to enter into a supervision agreement. It differs significantly from a mere commitment to supervise, particularly in terms of scope and depth of content.

Universities or faculties/departments or graduate institutions usually provide templates for this purpose.

The following points are typically included in a supervision agreement:

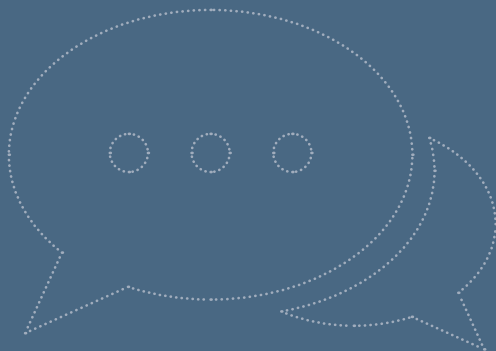
- Formal details of the names of the participating parties, title of the project, department/faculty, institution awarding the doctorate
- Commitment to maintaining good research practice
- Frequency and framework conditions of supervision meetings
- Agreements on supervision services provided by the supervisors
- Agreements on the academic work of the doctoral candidate
- Work plan for the entire duration of the doctorate
- If applicable, information on the financing of the doctorate
- Special measures or arrangements for balancing family life and academic work
- Contact persons and procedure in the event of conflict

Further details on the supervision agreement can be found in the QZP booklet
“Doing your doctorate - Making conscious decisions and getting off to a good start”.



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Research Phase



Once the fundamental questions of whether to pursue a doctorate, who will supervise it and how it should be structured have been clarified, it is advisable to consider a few important intermediate steps before beginning the research phase.

These practical issues need to be considered:

- Firstly, determining the administrative steps that need to be taken in the coming years to obtain a doctorate (e.g. the procedure for registering and submitting the dissertation).
- Secondly, clarifying with the primary supervisor how and by when a second supervisor should be found and integrated into the work and supervision process.
- Thirdly, considering whether the dissertation should or can be written cumulatively; here, you should discuss the advantages and disadvantages from a work efficiency and career perspective with your supervisors.
- Fourthly, it is important to discuss at an early stage what costs are to be expected throughout the course of the doctorate. Publication cost should also be taken into account.
- Fifthly, it must be clarified whether the dissertation should be written in a foreign language for subject-specific or strategic reasons. Please note the applicable doctoral regulations that must be observed.

If you are pursuing a doctorate that involves external partners (e.g. bi-national doctoral degrees/cotutelle, industry-sponsored doctorate, cooperative doctorate with a university of applied sciences, etc.), you should contact the partner institution and the relevant administrative bodies at an early stage to negotiate any necessary contracts.

Once the supervisory relationship has been established and the formal questions arising from the preparatory phase have been settled, the research phase begins. During this phase, the following aspects are relevant to the supervision:

1. Supervision instruments
2. Framework conditions
3. Work on the topic
4. Personal relationship

1. Supervision instruments during the research phase

Various instruments have proven effective in the context of doctoral supervisions. The main instrument is the individual supervision meeting. This meeting should take place at least once per semester, or more frequently if necessary or desired. In addition, it is advisable to participate in working group meetings and doctoral colloquia, if these are offered. There, project progress can be presented to supervisors and other early career researchers. These events make it possible to exchange ideas on research and work-related topics. In addition, you will learn to give and receive feedback in a protected environment. It has proven useful to combine colloquia and supervision meetings and, if possible, to hold the meeting after a presentation of your own work progress in the colloquium. In this way, the supervisor can supplement the previous group discussion; in addition, both the supervisor and the doctoral candidate are given a clear picture of the current status of the project.

In any case, it should be ensured that transparent agreements are made between doctoral candidates and supervisors, thereby avoiding misunderstandings from the outset.

It is therefore important to clarify at the beginning of the research phase

- how often meetings will take place,
- what is expected of the doctoral candidate at these meetings,
- what standard is expected of the drafted chapters or articles being submitted for feedback or how comprehensive the text sections should be,
- whether the submitted drafts/sections will be commented on in writing,
- how the interim or partial results, work plans, experimental strategies will be discussed and regularly subjected to critical examination.

The following measures are a suitable way of ensuring that agreements are transparent:

Supervision agreement: The initial arrangements can be formalised in a supervision agreement, as is already the case in numerous departments/faculties and graduate institutions (see chapter on orientation and initial phase).

Supervision protocol: In addition to the measures taken to ensure transparency in the supervisory relationship, it is advisable to keep record of all points agreed upon and so also document the progress of the project. As a rule, doctoral candidates summarise the key points of the meeting and submit them to their supervisors for review and confirmation. This not only helps to clear up any misunderstandings in communication during the supervision meeting but also provides both sides with better documentation and greater commitment to the joint agreements. This can be particularly important in intercultural supervisory relationships.

2. Create the necessary framework conditions

The term 'framework' refers to activities and tasks that are related to creating the best possible conditions for the success of your doctorate. These should be discussed with your supervisors and include the following:

Financing the doctorate: Although financing should be clarified in the initial phase, new challenges may arise throughout the course of the doctorate.

In such cases, you should discuss with your supervisor whether

- and how third-party funding can be obtained,
- you should apply for a scholarship to finance your doctorate,
- local advisory services (career services, graduate institutions, etc.) can provide further assistance.

Securing the necessary resources: If it is foreseeable that you will incur significant costs in carrying out the research (travel expenses, laboratory materials, usage fees, printing and publication costs, etc.), you should enquire well in advance about the available financing options and the steps that may need to be taken to secure funding.

Ensuring there is sufficient time for research: In cases where the supervisor is also the doctoral candidate's superior, it is important that the doctoral candidate has sufficient time to carry out and complete their research project, while still fulfilling their work obligations for the institute or professorship. If necessary, it may be helpful to define specific research time in advance (e.g. time periods, days of the week, home office hours).

Further qualification requirements and opportunities: During the doctoral process, candidates should pursue further qualifications so to expand their skills set (specialised skills, key competencies, etc.). Use the existing structures for further qualification at the university (e.g. graduate institutions, equal opportunities offices, university teaching institutions). The qualification strategy accompanying the doctoral project should be discussed regularly between supervisors and doctoral candidates and be documented in the supervision protocol or supervision agreement. In connection with this, you should also take into consideration the career-related goal of your doctorate.

3. Work on the topic: Discussing content

In addition to organisational support, the supervisory relationship should provide a forum for regular discussions about the content of the work. Ideally, supervisors should have a high level of expertise in the field of your research question. However, the role of supervisors can also be to provide a competent external perspective on the project. Specifically, the following areas of content-related advice can be provided:

Research plan: The work and time plan should be realistic and structured by clearly defined milestones. This facilitates continuous monitoring of work progress for both doctoral candidates and supervisors. Overall, it is advisable to keep work and time plans open to necessary modifications, as doctoral projects can develop dynamically, but to only make drastic changes in exceptional cases.

Monitoring progress: In every doctoral project, the research question, structure and theses must be continuously revised so to adapt them to the progress of your own work or current research results and unforeseen developments. Discuss the basic structure of the project with your supervisors on a regular basis and discuss any current shifts or readjustments. Make sure you stay up to date with the latest research findings and publications. Take advantage of the support offered by graduate institutions, e.g. on project and time management or academic writing.

Broadening your horizons – integration into the academic community: Contact with other academics and productive discussion networks are important for the successful completion of a doctorate

and can also support your career after graduation. To actively promote this, other academics should be involved in the supervision process at an early stage of the doctorate (second supervisors, supervision teams). You should also endeavour to give presentations and publish at national and international level at an early stage (which will provide inspiration in terms of content as well as benefit your academic career). Discuss suitable strategies with your supervisors.

Positioning yourself as a researcher: It is important to think about your role as a researcher. With a view to your defence or presentations at conferences, you should have a clear idea of your position within your field of research and your contribution to that field.

Good research practice: Doctoral candidates should familiarise themselves with the fundamentals of good research practice, research data management and open science in order to meet the requirements of the academic community and research funding organisations (e.g. the German Research Foundation, DFG) and to avoid scientific misconduct.

4. Establishing a trusting supervisory relationship

The responsibility of a supervisor is not limited to providing specialist advice on doctoral projects. Human interaction also plays a significant role. Fostering a trusting supervisory relationship, one in which both parties prove themselves to be reliable partners by honouring joint agreements, makes it possible for candidates to ask their supervisors (critical) questions and communicate their needs.

Completing the Doctorate



1. The start of the completion phase

The completion phase starts with a discussion between supervisor or the team of supervisors and the doctoral candidate, in which an agreement is reached on a realistic submission date for the dissertation and, if possible, on a deadline for scheduling the defence.

This, in turn, is influenced by

- the agreed upon period for revision,
- the preparation and submission of the reviewer assessments,
- the dates of the doctoral committee meetings,
- the period during which the dissertation is available for review, and
- the availability of the members of the examination committee.

As a rule, the points and questions mentioned in this chapter should be addressed and clarified at the latest during the completion phase, if they have not already been discussed during the research phase. An assessment should be made as to whether the results achieved so far are sufficient for a successful dissertation or whether additional work and time would yield an adequate further improvement in quality. It is also necessary to clarify the requirements for expression and style in the dissertation and whether professional help should be sought to polish the language of the work (proofreading or editing but not ghost-writing). This is particularly relevant if the work is written in a foreign language.

In addition, the following questions should be clarified:

- By when must the individual parts of the dissertation be completed?
- In the case of a cumulative dissertation, have all requirements been met, i.e. have all necessary articles been submitted for publication or already published, and have the other framing text sections (introduction, transitions and conclusion, if applicable) been written for submission?
- Are the supervisors willing to proofread individual chapters/parts of the dissertation or the entire text before submission?
- How long will it take for the supervisors to provide their revisions?

2. The completion of the dissertation

The next step is the preparation of the final version of the dissertation, for which supervisors and doctoral candidates should clarify the following points from their own perspective in the form of a final check before submission:

- Together with your supervisors, question once again with a critical eye whether the research questions have been addressed in a competent manner and using appropriate methods.
- Is the structure of the dissertation logical and sufficiently structured or clearly organised?
- Are the text structure and content coherent?
- Have the findings been presented and discussed in a convincing manner?
- In the case of a monograph: Have the individual chapters been written with regard to their significance for the work as a whole? In the case of a cumulative dissertation: Do the introduction, individual articles and concluding discussion form a plausibly structured unit?
- Has an appropriate contribution to scholarly knowledge been made, e.g. a contribution to the expansion of the theory or methods of the respective subject or similar?

3. Preparing for the defence

After the dissertation has been reviewed, an oral exam is required, the format of which is defined in the doctoral regulations. The most common variant today is the defence, in which the doctoral candidate gives a presentation on their own research, followed by an academic discussion. Far less common is the viva voce in which the academic content of the graduate studies is examined orally and therefore topics (focus areas) should be prepared.

We recommend preparing for the presentation and discussion during the defence in as many ways as possible:

- This may include attending a workshop on the topic and seeking help and feedback from other doctoral candidates or colleagues who have already completed their doctorates.
- Good preparation for the defence can include giving trial presentations to other doctoral candidates and/or supervisors or attending the defences of other doctoral candidates. Membership of a graduate school or a working group with a closer network of doctoral candidates and possibly several supervisors could also be used for this purpose.

Keep in mind that you are now considered an equal member of the scholarly community and are expected to act accordingly as a discussion partner during the oral exam.

4. Publication phase

Since completion of your doctorate is only upon publication of your dissertation, you should inform yourself well in advance about the specific requirements for publication (e.g. deadlines, mandatory copies – depending on the doctoral regulations) and discuss various publication options with your supervisors.

- If parts of the dissertation have not already been published as contributions to a cumulative dissertation, text editing may be necessary, especially if the work was written in a foreign language.
- Where should the dissertation be published? Does it make sense to publish it online only? How should the publishers/publication series/journals that are suitable for publication be identified? What are the printing costs? Does your university offer financial support for this?
- How should the dissertation be published? Is open access publication possible? Does your university offer financial support for this?
- What layout is required, e.g. by the doctoral regulations or a publisher?
- What format must tables or image/graphic material have?
- Does new image/graphic material need to be produced (important: clarify costs and any copyright issues)?

5. Determining the next steps in your career

In many cases, a doctorate is the first step towards a career in academia or non-university research. However, doctoral candidates may also strive for careers in other fields related to research. Due to the many and varied career opportunities available, each of which requires different considerations, you should start thinking about your future career already during the research phase of your doctorate.

Your supervisor can support you in this process, and you can also participate in relevant workshops and coaching or counselling services, e.g. from graduate institutions or career service institutions. If you have not done so yet, we strongly recommend that you consult with your supervisors about any remaining steps in the completion phase of your doctorate.

- To gain perspective in an academic context, it can be helpful to talk to your supervisor about gaps and horizons in your field of research.
- For both academic qualification opportunities and non-academic career aspirations, it may be advisable to ask supervisors or other academics whether they can facilitate access to their networks or relevant contacts (with regard to positions, postdoctoral or habilitation fellowships, publication opportunities, etc.).

Conflict Situations and Finding Solutions



These recommendations for action were drawn up in the hope, among other things, that they would help to prevent conflicts. The supervision agreement, in which mutual expectations and obligations are clarified and recorded at the beginning of the doctoral process, also serves this purpose. It is nevertheless possible that problems may arise between doctoral candidates and their supervisors. These problems can be of a practical nature – e.g. with regard to research content, approaches, misunderstandings or failure to comply with agreements, or organisational issues – or of a personal nature. In such cases, both sides should endeavour to address problems as early as possible and maintain an objective, respectful approach to the situation and to each other, so that mutual feedback remains possible and solutions can be found. If necessary, both sides should seek help and advice from uninvolved third parties acting as mediators, who, with their outside perspective, can often point to constructive ways out of the crisis.

There are a number of different contact persons available to you. In each individual case, everyone must decide for themselves which contact person(s) is/are appropriate for them, who may be familiar with the conflict situation, who they trust, and who could also be accepted as a mediator by the supervisors.

Possible contact persons include:

- Other professors you trust; if available, a member of the supervisory team would be the ideal contact person
- Postdocs or fellow doctoral candidates
- Representatives of non-professorial staff ('Mittelbau') or doctoral candidates
- Heads or coordinators of structured doctoral programmes or other graduate institutions
- Ombudspersons or arbitration boards
- Equal opportunity officers
- Members of the staff council
- The chair of the doctoral committee

However, sometimes a change of supervisor is unavoidable. Conflicts may arise with regard to content, working methods, time plans, etc. Such situations can be identified more easily and dealt with more effectively if both sides cooperate from an early stage, maintain regular contact and define interim goals (milestones). If a change of supervisor cannot be avoided, both sides should make every effort to find an acceptable solution.

A conflict of interest may also arise if your supervisor transfers to another university. In this case, close supervision may no longer be guaranteed, and you may need to find a new supervisor or location. In the event of a change of supervisor or the termination of a supervisory relationship, it is important to take into account the requirements of the doctoral regulations.

For your own protection and that of your supervisor, you should register your doctorate with the department/faculty at the beginning of the doctoral process if possible. Once you have been accepted as a doctoral candidate, the department/faculty is obliged to enable you to complete your doctorate within the framework of the set guidelines and conditions.

Mutual Expectations in the Supervisory Relationship

Questionnaire for Doctoral Candidates and Prospective Doctoral Candidates

With this questionnaire, we would like to provide you with a tool to reflect on your role as a (future) doctoral candidate and your expectations of your supervisor.

This questionnaire, formulated from the perspective of supervisors, can also be found in the corresponding section in the text version for supervisors.

You can use the questionnaire in discussions with your (potential) supervisors to find out more about how they structure doctoral supervision, to organise your collaboration and to align mutual expectations.

(A) Selecting your supervisor

1. What criteria would you use to select your supervisor?
2. Under what circumstances would you decline a professor's offer to supervise your doctorate?
3. Would you also accept supervision from a professor whose research focus is not closely related to the topic of your doctoral research? (If yes: What impact do you think this would have on the supervision you may receive?)

(B) Framework of the supervision

4. What forms of communication and instruments would you like to see used in the supervision?
5. How often should discussions about content take place?
6. How should appointments for supervision be arranged?
7. If your supervisor does not contact you for a long period of time, would you suggest a meeting to discuss the status of your work? If so, how would you go about it?



8. Should your supervisor also take your personal circumstances into account, in addition to content-related aspects? What should the balance be between closeness and professional distance?

(C) Content and feedback

9. How should your supervisor and you prepare for a supervision meeting?
10. How should a supervision meeting be followed up?
11. In what form would you like to receive feedback on your dissertation?
12. To what extent do you want your work on the doctoral project to be independent, or guided/directed by your supervisor?
13. When (and to what extent) would it be useful and desirable for your supervisor to intervene in the content and structure of your dissertation?

(D) Measures supporting the doctoral process

14. In your opinion, what else should be included in the supervision of a dissertation, apart from the content, structure and research methodology?
15. How do you see your own role in this – and that of your supervisor?
16. To what extent do you share your career aspirations with your supervisor? What kind of support do you expect from your supervisor
 - a. if your career goal is in academia?
 - b. if your career goal is outside academia?

Further Reading



Further reading that is specifically for supervisors can be found at the end of the text version for supervisors.

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Wissenschaftsrat (Ed.), Ausgestaltung der Promotion im deutschen Wissenschaftssystem. Positionspapier, (Drs. 1196-23), n. p. 2023. | <https://www.wissenschaftsrat.de/download/2023/1196-23.html>

ZEIT CAMPUS (Ed.), Ratgeber Promotion, Hamburg 2023. In book form: https://issuu.com/zeitmagazine/docs/campus_ratgeber_heft_pdf | <https://www.academics.de/themen/promovieren>

