

## **Guidelines for reviewing Bachelor's and Master's theses in the Department of Geography, University of Tartu**

A review is a reasoned assessment based on a critical analysis of a student's independent research. According to the established requirements, the opinion must be submitted in writing, and in case of absence thereof, the thesis cannot be defended. The role of the reviewer is essential in the defense of the thesis, as it shapes the impression of the listeners, including the evaluation committee, and the most important part of the defense of the thesis - the debate. The guidelines provided here for drafting an opinion are indicative and are intended primarily for younger colleagues with little or no experience in reviewing research.

The vast majority of theses defended in the Department of Geography belong to descriptive/experimental theses, the recommended structure of which follows the traditions of research on natural science. To a lesser extent, there are theoretical theses where there is no empirical part, in this case, the structure of the thesis depends on the logical development of the topic. For example, in the field of human geography, the structure of the thesis may be the same as used in the social sciences or humanities.

At the beginning of the review, there could be a declarative part, stating to which field of research the thesis belongs and describing the structure of the thesis. When writing the analytical part of the opinion, the structure should be based on the three grading criteria: content, level of complexity, and appearance. During the defense, the oral comments about the presentation will be added (the last sub-criteria – participating in discussion – can't be commented on, but it will be considered while giving the final grade).

Grading criteria:

### 1. Content

- Topicality, actuality, academic value (the use of scientific literature), authoritativeness (work of acknowledged authors) and comprehensiveness (whether all the relevant topics are covered) of primary sources;
- The level of analysis and synthesis of literature;
- Validity and comprehensiveness of the method(s) used;
- Logicality of the approach to the topic;
- Reasoned and comprehensive comparison of the results achieved with previous results;
- Applicability of the results;
- Novelty of the results;
- Quality, visual and contextual correctness and relevance of figures, tables, maps.

### 2. Level of complexity

- Compliance of the thesis to the requirements established for bachelor's and master's theses;

- Complexity of novel (scientific) results, viewpoints, created software and approach to the topic presented in the thesis;
- Amount of processed material.

### 3. Appearance

- Academic, correct and clear use of language;
- Good technical realisation (clear and logical structure; the quality of tables, figures and other illustrative material);
- Accuracy of citing (were the rules of the chosen reference style followed; whether all sources are referred to and whether the sources of all the references are provided, etc.);
- Cohesion of the text (whether the different parts of the thesis form an integral unity).

### 4. Presentation

- The structure and logicity of the presentation;
- The clearness of the presentation, the use of examples;
- The correct use of language;
- *The capability of answering questions and participating in discussion.*

The opinion addresses first the substantive aspects and then the formal aspects. Also, the positive aspects of the thesis, the valuable moments are highlighted first, then the mistakes and shortcomings are pointed out if the reviewer found them. In most cases, the reviewer has questions and objections about both the content and the format of the work.

The final, concluding part of the opinion should include an answer to the following questions:

- a) whether or not the comments and corrections made reduce the substantive value of the thesis;
- b) whether the independent research meets the requirements for the given type of theses (e.g., Bachelor's or Master's thesis);
- c) whether the author deserves the degree pursued in the case of Bachelor's and Master's theses.

NB! The reviewer doesn't write in the review or say during the defense his/her proposed grade, he/she will announce the grade directly to the head of the defense committee.

*Comments and suggestions from Professor Tõnu Oja, 11.05.2011.*

*1. The purpose of a review is not to show how smart a reviewer is or how foolish a defender is (which an overzealous reviewer can easily reverse to his/her detriment), but to help the defender*

*understand his/her mistakes and draw conclusions from them. Looking at this procedure from aside, the Committee usually obtains the impression it needs long before the debate is over.*

*2. The purpose of the review is not to put the audience to sleep or kill time. Keep it short and specific.*

*3. The remarks and criticisms should be precise, and with specific examples (if you say that the language is bad, give an example or two), substantive questions can also be question hooks. In the case of formal and linguistic errors, the reviewer may do all the work not done by the defender and the supervisor and address them all (in the written version, this is certainly to the defender's benefit), but not all of them can be discussed orally in defense.*

*4. When presenting a review orally (preferably by the reviewer), it is not necessary to read aloud the entire review - based on point 1, the reviewer may shorten the oral presentation. For example, it is not necessary to orally discuss (all) errors of the same type in formatting or language. Write down the text as the student support - he/she will read and draw a conclusion if he/she can. Summarize it in the speech, it is normal if the review together with the answers does not take more than 10 minutes.*

*5. If the written review is longer than 1.5 pages, the reviewer must think seriously about having to use a shorter version during the oral presentation. The version of the oral review needs to be thought through first, shortening it on the go usually takes more time than reading the entire text.*

*6. The recommended review aspects above mean part of the sentence for each aspect, not a subchapter. For example, set your goal to cover all aspects in three sentences. The concluding part of the opinion, together with the grade proposal, is one final sentence.*

*7. The substantive assessment of aspects must be based on the purpose of the thesis in the curriculum, e.g., in the case of a report style Bachelor's thesis it is not necessary to look for a contribution to world science - the sole purpose of this work is to show the author's understanding.*

*8. **The most important part of the review is the discussion of substantive issues that also takes the longest time in the defending.** This is a place where the student can be allowed to explain and create a debate, which shows how much he or she possesses the material, is able to defend himself or herself and justify his or her choices, and so on.*