



ESTONIAN  
ENTREPRENEURSHIP UNIVERSITY  
OF APPLIED SCIENCES

**ESTONIAN ENTREPRENEURSHIP UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES  
PROCEDURE FOR CONDUCTING PRE-DEFENCES AND DEFENCES  
OF STUDENT RESEARCH PAPERS**

APPROVED  
by order no. 350 of 6 May 2020  
of the Vice-Rector for Academic Affairs

The student research papers written at the Estonian Entrepreneurship University of Applied Sciences (EUAS) include final papers and Master's theses assessed at public defences. The content and format requirements for student research papers have been established in the Guidelines for Composing and Formatting Student Research Papers and the main principles of study organisation are outlined in the Regulations of Organisation of Studies.

## **I. PRE-DEFENCES**

Pre-defences of final theses and Master's theses are organised 3-6 weeks before the final submission deadline. A successful pre-defence is a prerequisite for defending the theses.

### **Requirements for pre-defending**

The prerequisites for being allowed to defend a final thesis or a Master's thesis include:

1. Timely submission of the approved project topic and the pre-defence report. Submission deadlines are fixed in the academic calendar.
2. The final or Master's thesis supervisor's written approval for defence submitted via the Intranet.
3. By the time of the pre-defence, students must have completed at least 75% of their thesis. A draft of the paper in progress is submitted to the pre-defence committee three working days before the pre-defence and it must include at least the following parts:
  - the theoretical part
  - the practical part: means for and process of data collection and an analysis of primary data
  - literature used and other sources

### **The following documents are made available to the pre-defence committee:**

1. **Papers in progress**, incl. the measurement tool (e.g. a questionnaire, interview questions or an observation sheet), where applicable, by electronic means (students of professional higher education forward these to the chairman of the defence committee while MA students forward these to the MA studies coordinator).
2. Pre-defence reports of the theses being defended. The student makes it available to members of the defence committee via the Intranet.
3. **A pre-defence feedback form** in the Intranet, where the chairman of the pre-defence committee adds comments and proposals for further development of the student paper during the pre-defence. In the case of e-defences, students can request defence recordings, which contain information necessary for further development of their paper.
4. **An electronic examination sheet**, which the chairman of the pre-defence committee uses to mark down and approve the pre-defence results.
5. **Guidelines** for Composing and Formatting Student Research Papers that state the requirements for the content of the paper (available in the Intranet).
6. The **EUAS Procedure for Conducting Pre-Defences and Defences** of Student Research Papers (this document, which is available in the Intranet).

## Pre-defence procedure

1. Pre-defences are conducted either in the traditional classroom format or as electronic pre-defences. The defence format and the defence committee schedule and lists are determined by the decision of the vice-rector for academic affairs.
2. The committee gathers 20 minutes before the defence.
3. The candidate must be ready at least 15 minutes before their defence time.
4. In the case of an electronic pre-defence, the candidate is responsible for their ability to participate in an electronic defence (incl. configuration of their personal computer for an e-defence, the ability to use the e-defence environment and avoiding disruptions during the e-defence).
5. During the defence, the webcams of both the candidate and members of the defence committee must be switched on in order to ensure that the whole e-defence process can be monitored.
6. The chairman of the committee registers the participants of the e-defence (as a screenshot in the case of an e-defence), introduces them to the members of the pre-defence committee and provides an overview of the defence procedure.
7. The chairman of the defence committee introduces the candidate.
8. The candidate presents their in-progress paper in **eight (8) minutes**, using the pre-defence report as base material.
9. The pre-defence committee:
  - checks whether the content of the paper is in accordance with the topic and the author's objective;
  - gives feedback and, if necessary, suggests ways to improve the research problem/question, topic and objective based on the data presented by the student during the pre-defence or in their report;
  - assesses the appropriateness of the research method, solution or analysis;
  - points to the strengths and weaknesses of the work in progress; makes suggestions to help improve the thesis;
  - evaluates whether it is possible to complete the paper in time;
  - assesses the pre-defence and fills in the examination sheet and feedback form in the Intranet (in the case of an electronic pre-defence, the student is given a recording of the defence).
10. In order to announce the result of a pre-defence, the candidate is asked to rejoin the defence committee within the agreed time. The result is announced by the chairman of the pre-defence committee.

Each student's pre-defence will last for **20 minutes** at most.

The supervisor of the final or Master's thesis is allowed to attend the pre-defence as an audience member. In the case of an electronic pre-defence, the supervisor reports their wish to participate to the Study Department. The employee of the Study Department adds the supervisor to the list of electronic pre-defence participants and forwards them the respective link.

### Assessment of pre-defences

1. The pre-defence committee gives the paper a non-differentiated grade (pass/fail) and records the results on the examination sheet.
2. If the pre-defence committee's assessment of the paper is negative, the paper is not allowed to be submitted for defence. Papers can be resubmitted for the next scheduled pre-defence.
3. The pre-defence committee does not assess the compliance of the formatting of unfinished papers with the requirements of the Guidelines for Composing and Formatting Student Papers.
4. If the candidate cannot participate in a pre-defence (incl. for technical reasons), the members of the respective pre-defence committee decide, in cooperation with the programme manager, the supervisor and the candidate, on a new time for the pre-defence or another result. The decision is based on the student's justified and motivated application.

## II. DEFENCE

### Requirements for participating in defence

The prerequisites for being allowed to defend a final thesis or a Master's thesis include:

1. an approved topic project;
2. passing the pre-defence in the same semester the paper was submitted;
3. a timely submitted paper in electronic format. The submission and defence deadlines are recorded in the academic calendar;
4. the supervisor's approval for submitting the paper;
5. receiving a positive review or if this is not possible, getting the approval of the head of defence committee.

**The following documents are made available to the pre-defence committee:**

1. theses to be defended (**electronically via the Intranet**)
2. **reviews** of the theses being defended, which are uploaded to the Intranet at least five days before the defence
3. **the defence committee protocol template**, which sets forth the grading criteria and the reason(s) for giving a negative grade in table format
4. **an electronic exam sheet**, which the chairman of the pre-defence committee uses to mark and approve the final grades of papers
5. **guidelines** for composing and formatting student papers (available in the Intranet), which describe the contents and requirements for the respective paper
6. The **EUAS Procedure for Conducting Pre-Defences and Defences** of Student Research Papers (this document, which is available in the Intranet).

## Defence procedure

1. Defences are conducted either in the traditional classroom format or as electronic defences. The defence format and the defence committee schedule and lists are determined by the decision of the vice-rector for academic affairs.
2. The committee will gather 20 minutes before the defence.
3. The candidate must be ready at least 15 minutes before their defence time.
4. In the case of an electronic defence, the candidate is responsible for their ability to participate in an electronic defence (incl. configuration of their personal computer for an e-defence, the ability to use the e-defence environment and avoiding disruptions during the e-defence).
5. During the e-defence, the webcams of both the candidate and members of the defence committee must be switched on in order to ensure that the whole e-defence process can be monitored.
6. The candidate presents an identity document to the defence committee upon arrival. Students will sign a consent sheet for recording the defences, making the grade public after the defence and publishing the thesis in the EUAS e-library.
7. The chairman of the committee will introduce the members of the committee to the audience and give an overview of the defence procedure.
8. The chairman of the defence committee introduces the candidate.
9. The candidate will introduce their thesis (**final theses up to 12 minutes, Master's theses up to 15 minutes**), mainly focusing on the results section. The candidate's supporting presentation materials must be in an electronic, reproducible format.
10. The reviewer or a member of the defence committee will read out the review (the content can be summarised) and the questions contained therein. The candidate will respond to the review, defending and justifying their claims, whereas committee members have the right to ask questions to clarify the candidate's points.
11. Committee members will ask the candidate questions and the latter will respond.
12. Listeners will ask the candidate questions and the latter will respond.
13. The candidate will be given the opportunity to say a final word.
14. The results of the pre-defences and defences of final theses and Master's theses are made public immediately after conclusion of the defence protocol, but no later than within two working days of the defence.

Final thesis and Master's thesis defences (the defence speech and answers to questions) are recorded using the lecture recording system. The chairman of the defence committee will launch the lecture recording system. Recordings are confidential and are only used if the committee's decision is appealed. After the appeal deadline has passed, all recordings will be destroyed.

If a research paper has been declared confidential, only the candidate, members of the defence committee, the supervisor and the reviewer are allowed to stay in the room. Confidential papers will not be made public by EUAS. In order to request confidentiality, students must submit a respective application to the vice-rector for academic affairs at least one week before submitting the paper for defence.

The average duration of defences of final theses and Master's theses are **30 minutes** and **45 minutes**, respectively. The supervisor of the final or Master's thesis is allowed to attend the pre-defence as an audience member. In the case of an e-defence, they must report their wish to participate to the Study Department. The employee of the Study Department adds the supervisor to the list of electronic pre-defence participants and forwards them the respective link.

Once all of the papers have been presented, committee members will have up to one hour to reach a decision regarding the grades. The chairman of the committee will then notify the students of their grades and explain the decisions by providing brief feedback. After the defence, the defence committee returns the filled in examination sheet and the defence committee protocol to the study centre.

### **Assessment of papers**

Grades comprise two components – the committee's assessment of the paper and the defence. The committee will take the reviewer's notes and comments into account upon assessing the paper. The committee must explain any negative grades ('0') in written form in the committee protocol.

Both reviewing and grading of final theses and Master's theses follow the same principles:

- is the paper relevant, original and practical and is the topic choice justified
- correspondence of the topic to the paper
- does the structure make sense and are sections tied together (title, research problem, objective, research questions (hypotheses), theoretical overview, methodology, conclusions and proposals)
- are the conclusions and proposals justified, original and applicable and do they follow from the content of the paper
- are the sources sufficient, relevant and reliable
- is the paper correctly formatted (including citations), is the language and style of writing appropriate
- are the tables, graphs and other illustrative materials sufficient and accurate
- does the paper have practical value
- does the amount of work done correspond to the requirements

The following are assessed during the defence:

- specificity
- knowledge of the topic
- argumentative structure of claims and justifications
- use of illustrative materials
- precision of presentation

Final theses and Master's theses are graded on a six-point scale.

**Positive grades:**

**'5' - 'excellent'** – the paper is outstanding and thorough, it has been reasonably divided into ordered sections, taking into account the nature of the research problem. The student has contributed to the field (analysis, evaluations, proposals), the text is fluent, parts are well connected and form an integrated whole. The paper is well structured, the theoretical part corresponds to the empirical and no substantial errors or formatting mistakes can be found. The defence speech is convincing and the candidate responds appropriately. The paper meets the requirements in the best possible way.

**'4' - 'very good'** – the paper has very good theoretical content and is also applicable. It mostly meets the set requirements, there may be a few smaller formatting mistakes, but no substantial errors can be detected. The student has contributed to the field (analysis, evaluations, proposals), the argumentation is mostly fluent and parts are well connected. The defence speech is clear and the candidate mostly responds well. The paper meets the set requirements.

**'3' - 'good'** – the paper has good theoretical content and is also applicable. It mostly meets the set requirements. The paper could have been divided into ordered sections more purposefully. The student has somewhat contributed to the field, there are formatting errors and some substantial imprecisions can be detected. The argument is fragmented at times, a few parts are not well connected. The defence speech is clear, the responses are somewhat imprecise.

**'2' - 'satisfactory'** – the set requirements are barely fulfilled and the paper has many shortcomings. Other authors are mainly cited, the paper is mostly descriptive. Many formatting errors and at times substantial mistakes can be detected. The text is not connected to other parts of the thesis and sections do not comprise a whole. The student hesitates upon answering questions and the defence speech is not convincing.

**'1' - 'poor'** – the set requirements are barely fulfilled and the paper has substantial shortcomings. Other authors are mainly cited, the paper is mostly descriptive. Many formatting errors and substantial mistakes can be detected. The text is not connected to other parts of the thesis and sections do not comprise a whole. The student hesitates upon answering questions and the defence speech is not convincing.

**Negative grade:**

**'0' - 'fail'** – the paper does not meet the requirements for a final thesis or Master's thesis. There are substantial mistakes and formatting errors, the text is fragmentary and sections are not connected. The student has not acquired the skill of writing a research paper. The candidate's responses reflect uncertainty, some questions might be left unanswered. The paper is plagiarised.

Students absent from the defence of a final thesis or Master's thesis will be marked 'not present' in the protocol and the examination sheet.

### **III. PRINCIPLES OF FORMING (PRE-)DEFENCE COMMITTEE**

1. (Pre-)defence committees are approved on the proposal of the director of studies by the rector's orders. Committees must have at least three members.
2. Other requirements for the members of the defence committee and the principles for forming the committee are established by the order of the director of studies.

### **IV. DIVIDING TASKS AND RESPONSIBILITIES UPON PREPARING THE (PRE-)DEFENCE PROCEDURE**

#### The head of academic affairs:

- approves the required documents and submits the reviewers, defence dates, committee memberships and defence format of research papers to the vice-rector for academic affairs for approval;
- processes students' applications for declaring defences closed.

#### The Study Department employee responsible for organising defences:

- ensures that the information concerning guidelines for organising and conducting defences reaches the relevant employees (first and foremost the programme managers and chairmen of the defence committee) and students;
- draws up, checks and fills in documents related to organising and conducting defences and calculating the working hours of committee members;
- forwards information concerning the papers to be defended to the members of the defence committee; in the case of e-defences, ensures defence committee members access to papers;
- replies to relevant questions from parties regarding the Intranet written assignments section and makes sure people are granted necessary access;
- checks whether reviews, reports and other necessary documents are submitted to the written assignment section in the Intranet;
- prints out reviews of the papers to be defended or in the case of an electronic defence, forwards them to the committee members;
- prepares the technical devices and the room for the defences;
- in the case of electronic defences, forms defence groups on the basis of the e-defence environment, including both candidates and members of the defence committee and forwards the link to the respective committee to all parties;
- enters the (pre-)defence results submitted by the committee on paper in the Intranet.

#### The chairman of the defence committee:

- agrees on a suitable environment for e-defence (EUAS MEET or, as an alternative, Zoom or Skype) in the case of e-defences;
- introduces the defence procedure and process to participants;
- manages the defence procedure and ensures that the defences are on schedule;



- fills in and submits the defence protocol to the Study Department after the defence;
- forwards the decision of whether or not the student is allowed to defend their paper in the event of a negative review.

The head of the curriculum:

- agrees on the reviewers of research papers and submits them to the head of academic affairs;
- makes proposals for appointing defence committee members;
- shares and introduces this document to students of their speciality;
- with the Study Department, ensures that the room used for defences is technically prepared.

Members of the defence committee:

- read the papers submitted for defence;
- participate in a discussion with the candidate and the assessment of papers;
- fill in personal assessment sheets for each candidate.