

Guidelines for Cumulative Dissertations

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Introduction

Doctoral candidates at the Faculty of Philosophy and Education may submit their dissertation either as a monograph or as a so-called *cumulative dissertation*, that is, as a compilation of publications and manuscripts. Cumulative dissertations are an increasingly popular option for presenting the results of doctoral research in philosophy.

With these guidelines, the Vienna Doctoral School of Philosophy aims to

- ❖ clarify the form and content requirements for a cumulative dissertation in philosophy,
- ❖ help doctoral candidates structure their time, work effectively, and produce high-quality research, thereby facilitating the successful completion of their dissertations.

The guidelines consist of three parts:

- §I.** A description of the formal requirements for all cumulative dissertations at the University of Vienna, as laid down in the General Guidelines for Doctoral Dissertations:
https://studienpraeses.univie.ac.at/fileadmin/user_upload/p_studienpraeses/Studienpraeses_Neu/Info-BI%C3%A4tter/Infoblatt_Leitfaden_kumulative_Dissertationen_EN_011015.pdf
- §II.** A clarification of the specific expectations regarding the content and form of a cumulative dissertation *in philosophy* at the University of Vienna.
- §III.** Appendix: Instructions that can be sent to reviewers to inform them about our criteria for evaluating dissertations.

§I. Formal Requirements (holding University of Vienna wide)

I.A. Requirements on the Included Publications and Manuscripts

- ❖ Cumulative dissertations have to meet standard formal criteria for proper academic work (e.g. list of references, correct citation, etc.).
- ❖ The contents of the included papers must stand in a bigger thematic context and be subsumable under some research question(s) governing the dissertation as a whole. The research question(s) must be explained in an introductory chapter of the dissertation.
- ❖ Included papers must be published, or intended to be published, in an academic venue, such as an academic journal, book, or edited volume. The papers can be
 - published articles
 - articles accepted for publication
 - articles submitted for publication
 - unpublished manuscripts.
- ❖ The papers included may be written in different languages (official languages at the University of Vienna are German and English; in principle, other languages are acceptable, but this should be agreed with the supervisor).

I.B. Requirements on the Structure

All sheets must be numbered consecutively; additionally, the original page numbering of the publications must also be indicated.

The cumulative dissertation must comprise:

- i. a cover sheet
- ii. a table of contents
- iii. an introductory chapter
- iv. several research papers
- v. a concluding discussion
- vi. a summary of results (i.e. a longer abstract).

Requirements on these items:

i. Cover Sheet

The layout of the cover sheet is subject to the *Statutory Order Regarding Formal Requirements when Submitting Scientific Papers* (published in the Bulletin of the University of Vienna, 39th issue, no. 260, on 24 September 2015):

http://www.univie.ac.at/mtblo2/2014_2015/2014_2015_260.pdf

ii. Table of Contents

- ❖ The page numbers in the Table of Contents should refer to the sequential numbering of the pages in the dissertation.

- ❖ Publications and manuscripts should be included as chapters, together with information on their publication status (published, accepted, submitted, unpublished).
- ❖ Other materials that are part of the dissertation and not intended for publication may be included in separate chapters.

iii. Introductory Chapter

- ❖ The collection of chapters must be preceded by an introductory chapter.
- ❖ This introduction should describe the research agenda and the research question(s) governing the entire dissertation. It should also specify the contribution of each chapter relative to the overall thematic context and research question(s).

iv. Publications and Manuscripts

- ❖ Each (peer-reviewed) publication and manuscript included in the thesis must include the author's/authors', names, the title, and information on the publication status (published, accepted, submitted, unpublished).
- ❖ Also:
 - For any co-authored paper included in the dissertation, the candidate's contribution must be specified.
 - For any published paper, a full bibliographic reference must be provided.
 - For any manuscript accepted for publication, the date of the letter of acceptance must be specified.
 - For any submitted manuscript, the date of the acknowledgement of receipt must be specified.

v. Concluding Discussion

- ❖ The dissertation must contain a concluding discussion that refers to all chapters.
- ❖ This discussion should explain how the chapters contribute to answering the research question(s) of the dissertation as stated in the introduction.
- ❖ In addition, the overall methodology should be discussed.
- ❖ Finally, it should be explained in what ways the chapters (both separately and taken together) contribute to progress in the field.
- ❖ The concluding discussion can be part of the introductory chapter.

vi. Summary of Results

A summary of results (i.e. a longer abstract) in German and English is an integral part of a cumulative dissertation, summarizing the main points of the dissertation.

I.C. Submission of a Cumulative Dissertation

Cumulative dissertations:

- ❖ must be submitted in printed and bound;
- ❖ all of their sections – irrespective of the printing format of the original publication – must be copied onto DIN-A4-format sheets.

Electronic submission:

- ❖ Most publishers demand that publications are put in an embargo (of a variable length, specified in individual contracts or general guidelines of journals). These measures ensure that the publisher's rights of commercial utilization are not violated.
- ❖ So if the electronic version of the dissertation is uploaded to the university publication server, the dissertation **must not** be made available online. For this purpose, you **must** request a lock.
- ❖ The duration of the embargo must match the online embargo specified by the publishers of the included papers.

Hard copy submission: Detailed information about the hard copy submission and about the relevant documents are available at the Student Service Centre Philosophie.

<https://vd-philosophy.univie.ac.at/phd-program/registration-for-compulsory-activities/thesis-preparation-submission-and-defense/>

<https://doktorat.univie.ac.at/en/phd-process/final-phase/completion-and-public-defense/>

I.D. Evaluation of a Cumulative Dissertation

The Cumulative Dissertation will be evaluated by two examiners appointed in accordance with the Statutes (§ 16) by the President of Studies Legislation and Affairs in consultation with the Program Director(s).

In order to be able to properly evaluate the dissertation, the examiners must be competent in the relevant field of research and their scientific contributions should be internationally recognized. There must be no close relationship between the evaluators and the doctoral researcher. Co-authors of the doctoral students cannot act as examiners.

Each examiner writes a separate evaluation of the dissertation in its entirety. Even if one or more papers have been accepted for publication in peer-reviewed journals, the examiners are still completely free in their evaluation of the thesis.

§II. Expectations on a Cumulative Dissertation in Philosophy

II.A. Disclaimer

Given the diversity of traditions, methods, and approaches in philosophy, no guidelines for cumulative dissertations can apply equally to all possible cases. In particular, expectations concerning the papers to be included in a cumulative dissertation (e.g. number, length, standards of excellence, etc.) may vary across areas, across departments, but also just across individual researchers.

This section will specify some ranges that are based on what seems *statistically most common* for the field of philosophy taken as a whole. But there can well be cases outside this norm. For instance, in some fields and/or in cases of extraordinarily groundbreaking work, even a single published paper might be considered sufficient for granting a cumulative dissertation. But this would be an exceptional case, not to be met in most areas of philosophy.

In any case, this section must not be read as specifying a fixed set of requirements, but

- ❖ as an informal set of data that can provide *a first orientation*;
- ❖ and as a rough clarification of *the amount of work* that is expected for a cumulative dissertation in philosophy, taking into consideration both
 - the expected time of completion of doctoral studies at the University of Vienna. (i.e. 3 years),
 - and widely, though not universally, shared international standards for awarding a doctoral degree.

Students aiming for a cumulative dissertation should discuss the matter with their supervisors, with other members of staff, and ideally with further senior colleagues working in their field.

II.B. General Remarks on a Cumulative Dissertation

- ❖ A cumulative dissertation should make an original contribution to philosophy. It should display the author's ability to
 - develop their own research agenda,
 - conduct research that goes beyond the state of art,
 - potentially pursue an academic career.
- ❖ All in all it should be comparable, in terms of academic substance and originality, to the contribution made by a non-cumulative dissertation.
 - A cumulative dissertation will often lack specific virtues of non-cumulative ones. A traditional monograph may, e.g., survey existing literature in greater detail and develop a coherent overarching position with applications to specific topics.
 - Such comparative weaknesses should be compensated, e.g. by greater degrees of rigor and originality, or e.g. by using the introduction to add literature surveys, a coherent meta-picture, etc.

II.C. Qualitative Aspects of the Papers

- ❖ Content:
 - Each paper in a cumulative dissertation should be a self-contained academic piece of research. It should be independently understandable.
 - Since the papers are meant for publication, they need not always explain the background necessary to follow the debate from scratch. One should look at how much background knowledge is typically presupposed in contributions to the pertinent debate and use this as a guideline when writing one's own papers.
- ❖ Substance:
 - Each paper should show the clear potential to make an original contribution to a scholarly debate. The *degree* of originality may vary: a paper certainly need not develop a completely new position, let alone revolutionize a debate; it can concern matters of detail in a specialized debate, e.g. a new criticism of an existing view.
 - Each paper should at least show the clear potential to become publishable in an academic publication (a journal or a collected volume).
 - At least some should live up to the quality required for inclusion in an established peer-reviewed journal.

II.D. Quantitative Aspects of the Papers

- ❖ Number of Papers:
 - *As a statistical rule of thumb*, a cumulative dissertation contains between 3 and 6 full-length papers (usually of 7.000 words upwards).
 - Fewer than three full-length papers can easily be regarded as too few, unless in cases of exceptional quality and impact. The same holds for a collection of three papers of shorter length.
 - More than six full-length papers would be somewhat unusual in terms of quantity; this *could* be regarded as negative if the quantity comes at the cost of quality.
- ❖ Length:
 - The *length of individual papers* can vary broadly, in accordance with the variation in length of papers published in journals (ranging from highly focused, short papers of 1.000 words to extensive explorations of a topic with 15.000 words).
 - As to the *overall length of a cumulative dissertation*, there can only be statistical indications about a word range in common cases. On average, a cumulative dissertation may have between 40.000 and 80.000 words.

II.E. The Introductory Chapter

❖ Content:

- The introduction to a cumulative dissertation should be an informative meta-commentary on the papers.
- It should ideally draw a picture of how the individual papers fit together in the research agenda of the researcher.
- It can also, for instance, add methodological reflections, additional background information on the debates relevant to the papers, additional thoughts on the contents of individual papers, or point to open questions for future continuation of the research agenda.

❖ Format:

- *Length*: In standard cases, the introduction has the dimensions of a medium-length to full-length paper.
- *Standards*: The introduction must itself live up to good academic standards, in terms of clarity, accuracy, correct citations, etc.
- *Style*: The writing style may vary from that of the papers contained, given the different nature of the pieces. It might, for instance, have a more narrative or a more *big picture* style.

III. Appendix: Instructions for Evaluators

The Evaluators will be sent these guidelines, but also the following short summary of instructions:

- ❖ A cumulative dissertation should, in terms of academic substance, not fall behind a non-cumulative one.
- ❖ A cumulative dissertation should be evaluated *primarily* based on the quality of the included papers (published or intended for publication). The introduction may play some additional role.
- ❖ The possible grades are:

Numerical	In Words	Description	Pass/Fail?
1	Very Good	Excellent achievement with at most a few marginal weaknesses.	Pass
2	Good	Overall a good achievement, though with some weaknesses.	
3	Satisfactory	Overall a solid achievement, though with a number of notable weaknesses. It satisfies	
4	Sufficient	An achievement which meets the minimal requirements but does not go beyond.	
5	Insufficient	Fails to meet the minimal requirements. Needs very substantial revisions and further work in order to pass.	Fail

- ❖ The best grade can also be seen as signaling that with the submitted research, the candidate shows potential for a career in academia. (You can find further information about the expectations we communicate to our candidates in attached guidelines.)
- ❖ Your report should contain a clear indication of the grade you award, and a justification for choosing that grade.
- ❖ There are not fixed expectations on the length and structure of the report you will write.
- ❖ What can be said is that, *on average*, reports range from two to six pages.
- ❖ Typically, reports comment on the following points:
 - Goals and research question (significance, originality).
 - Adequacy of methods, theoretical frameworks etc.
 - Substance, significance, and originality of the contribution(s) made to the debate.
 - Formal aspects (structure, readability, cogency, etc.).