



Guidelines for article-based PhD theses

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Definition

A PhD thesis is an independent scientific work that complies with international academic standards according to the governmental order on PhD degrees.¹ An article-based PhD thesis consists of an appropriate number of substantial articles related in content and a summarising introductory chapter (synopsis). Taken together, the number of articles and the scope and standard of the thesis must live up to what it is reasonable to expect a junior researcher to produce during a PhD programme.

¹ Order No. 1039 of 17 August 2013. An English translation is available in the [common rules and guidelines](#) for the PhD programme at the University of Copenhagen (adopted 9 November 2023)

Article requirements

An article-based thesis is a collection of articles by which the PhD student documents an appropriate, independent scientific contribution through single, lead, or other types of co-authorship. The articles must cohere in terms of subject area, theory, methodology, or other current academic practices in the field of legal research and/or other fields within which the thesis is submitted.

As a rule of thumb, an article-based PhD is comprised of 3-5 articles. The number of articles should be determined based on their size, the scope and complexity of the problem statements and/or empirical data collection and analysis, co-authorship, and degree of overlap. Articles in different languages can be included in the same thesis, although it might impact the selection of assessment committee members.

Each article submitted in a PhD thesis must meet general academic standards for articles published with peer review in national or international journals. However, it is not a requirement for the articles to have been published, peer-reviewed, or submitted for publication before the thesis is submitted. The publication status of the articles will not affect the assessment of the thesis. The assessment committee will assess solely based on the academic content present in the submitted text.

Conversely, the publication of articles does not prejudice the committee's assessment. For published articles or articles accepted for publication, the name and date of the publication must be listed.

Introductory chapter (synopsis)

The introductory chapter ("kappe" in Danish), for which the PhD student must be the sole author, constitutes an introductory, summarizing text approximating a major review article (usually approx. 30–50 pages).

Depending on the specific topic of the thesis, the synopsis will generally include the following:

- An introduction to the subject area.
- The overall problem statement of the thesis.

- A comprehensive overview of relevant related research and current knowledge (state of the art).
- An account of key theories and approaches in the field of research, along with a justification of the choice of theoretical/methodological approaches in the thesis and of its delimitation.
- An account of the criteria for selecting the empirical material and legal sources (if applicable).
- A synopsis of each of the articles, including their most important results and an explanation of the link between those results and the overall conclusion in the thesis.
- If co-authored articles are included, a detailed account of the PhD student's role in and independent contribution to each article for which they are not the sole author.
- A summary conclusion of the thesis, including a contextualisation of the thesis in relation to other significant research in the field.

Please note that if one or more of the above subjects is adequately met in the individual articles, it does not need to be repeated in the introductory chapter, which may be shortened accordingly.

Co-authorship

The PhD student should be the prime mover behind most of the submitted production. To obtain a PhD degree, the student must demonstrate a sufficient degree of independent scientific work in the thesis, and this must be presented in such a way that it can be identified and evaluated by the assessment committee.

For co-authored articles, in addition to the requirement above that the introductory chapter should detail the PhD student's independent contribution, completed co-author statements must be attached when submitting the thesis.

General supervision of a PhD student does not entitle the supervisor to be listed as a co-author. To justify listing, they must meet the requirements stipulated in the [University's Code of Authorship](#) (the Vancouver rules). Conversely, the PhD student should normally note and acknowledge any substantial input by the supervisor, both in the individual articles and the introductory chapter. The student and supervisor may consult the Faculty's named person for advice and guidance on this matter.