



Guidelines for the Assessment of Doctoral Theses at the Faculty of Environment and Natural Resources, University of Freiburg, Germany

Many thanks for your willingness to assess and grade this doctoral thesis!

The University of Freiburg and the Faculty of Environment and Natural Resources aspire to bring forth cutting-edge researchers. For the quality of research at our faculty, it is essential that you assess this work in relation to the highest international standard. This is possible only with fair, transparent and comparable grading.

Our PhD regulation require that you were not involved directly in the supervision of the PhD candidate.

Your assessment is independent of other assessments, there must be no alignment of grades among examiners.

The subject of your assessment is *only* the thesis, i.e. we would like to ask you to not take into account the overall CV, awards, talks or other information you may have about the candidate.

The thesis is to be assessed in terms of its *originality, conceptualisation and theoretical foundation, methodological validity, presentation and (potential) importance and impact.*

Before you start assigning grades (see below), please note that you must consider whether you accept the submission of this doctoral thesis, reject it or return it for fundamental improvements. If rejected, the thesis is to be marked as a failure ("*non probatum*", see below); this is appropriate when you think the thesis does not have sufficient merit for a PhD dissertation, or if there is evidence of scientific misconduct. In the case of returning a thesis, the dissertation would be withdrawn from the current round of assessment and returned to the doctoral student. It has no further negative consequences and does not represent a missed attempt. This may occur when the thesis has enough potential but needs more work to achieve the level required of a doctoral thesis.

In this document we outline our grading system for your orientation. You, the assessor, have to decide what the appropriate standard in your field is and whether the work meets the appropriate quality level. For a paper-based (cumulative) doctoral thesis the quality of the journal is immaterial: there are poor works in leading journals, and excellent studies in low-impact-factor journals.

Our doctoral rules require a numerical mark for a doctoral-thesis assessment. Its final (Latin) grade is computed from the mean of your and the other assessors' marks, which counts 2/3, and the average mark for the defence (1/3). Your grade is given on a Latin scale, which works as follows:

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- A **summa cum laude** (Mark: 1) is to be awarded only in exceptional cases, i.e. the best 15% of all PhDs. The work must be exceptionally good, field-defining or -changing, outstanding. *Note that a summa cum laude as a final grade can only be awarded if all marks (all assessments of the written piece of work and all marks of the defence) are 1.0 or 1.3.*
- A **magna cum laude** (2) is to be awarded to a very good thesis, dominated by research at the cutting edge in the field, with only few and only minor deficits. It should belong to the best 50% of PhD theses in the field.
- A **cum laude** (3) is the mark for a sound thesis, with room for improvement and largely standard approaches and average craftsmanship. It belongs to the best 80% in the field.
- A **rite** (4) marks a thesis that demonstrates scientific research of acceptable standard overall but exhibits substantial deficits and lacks in craftsmanship. A rite *is equivalent to a simple "pass"*.
- A **non probatum** (5) means "fail". Quality of scientific approach and/or conceptualisation are below an acceptable standard. *While entirely plausible, theses of such low quality are typically submitted only against the recommendations of the main supervisor, and hence only rarely will reach this stage of assessment.*

The numerical marks allow a bit more nuance:

1,0	1,3	1,7	2,0	2,3	2,7	3,0	3,3	3,7	4,0	5,0
summa c.l.		magna c.l.			cum laude			rite		n.p.

The assessment must make clear why the selected mark was given, explicitly mentioning strong and weak points. *Note that this assessment is the most important document should the candidate challenge the grading. It thus must make meaningful, specific and comparative statements in neutral tone.* (The doctoral candidate may access the assessments during a 2-week period before the oral defence.)

If the assessor suggests changes, corrections or other forms of revision, these must be detailed: it is the duty of the first supervisor to later confirm the necessary revisions have been made.

Please email your assessment (silke.deboer@unr.uni-freiburg.de) and post your originally signed assessment *in duplicate* to:

Examination Office
 Faculty of Environment and Natural Resources
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Again, thank you very much for your review of this thesis!

Prof. Dr. Carsten Dormann
 Chair of the Standing PhD Committee
 Faculty of Environment and Natural Resources