

#### Sample letter for inviting a member of the Doctorate Committee to the doctoral ceremony This version is from October 11, 2022

Re: PhD defense by [name PhD candidate]

Date of ceremony: [date]

Address: main building, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, De Boelelaan 1105, 1081 HV Amsterdam

Meeting Doctorate Committee is in room: 2D-02 (Forumzaal)

Meeting Doctorate Committee starts at [time]

Ceremony starts at [time]

Reception afterwards starts approximately [time]

Dear colleagues,

The supervisors are pleased that you will take part into the defense of the doctoral thesis written by PhD candidate [name]. I hope that you have received the PhD thesis, entitled “[title]”. The pdf is attached to this invitation. The defense and conferral will be in public in the presence of the Doctorate Committee at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. Raising of objections and defense of the thesis will be conducted in English.

The Doctorate Committee consists of (in sequence of asking questions):

* [name, affiliation]
* [name, affiliation]
* [name, affiliation]
* [name, affiliation]
* [name, affiliation]
* [name, affiliation] (chair)

At Vrije Universiteit, the ceremony consists of a presentation of a summary of the research by the candidate (10 minutes; this might be in Dutch), followed by questions by the committee members and answers by the candidate (50 minutes). The Q and A is in English. Please prepare one to three questions. Each of member of the committee asks one or more questions lasting two to three minutes. Please start your contribution with the sentence “By authority of the Rector Magnificus and in my own right …”, followed “dear candidate”, and by general remarks (reflections on the thesis, complimentary notes) and an introduction of your questions. You can ask your questions one by one, or formulate all your questions in your introduction. When you speak for the second time, you do not need to indicate again that you are authorized by the Rector. After your question or questions have been raised, the candidate answers. Discussion is generally allowed by the chair, and it is appreciated if the candidate is given the opportunity to build an argument. The supervisors do not ask questions.

Professors and promoters wear a gown and beret, preferrable the gown of their university -–otherwise Vrije Universiteit is able to provide you with one. Under the gown they wear dark socks/stocking, shoes and clothing. Copromoters and opponents who are not professors wear dark clothing appropriate for the occasion. That means that jeans and sneakers are not appreciated. The hostess will show you the changing room.

In the case of an online defense, wearing a gown and beret is not always possible, in which case professors also wear dark clothing appropriate to the occasion. That means shirt and (for men) tie; sweaters and t-shirts are not appreciated.

A hostess is available in the entrance hall of the main building. Please ask her or him for further instructions. Directions to reach the main building: <http://www.vu.nl/en/about-vu-amsterdam/contact-info-and-route/route-description/index.aspx>.

If you like to have your valuables in a safe place, please ask the hostess. The meeting room will not be locked.

The committee meets at [time of start meeting] in the Forumzaal at Room 2D-02 (second floor, wing D, main building). At the meeting some formalities are conducted, and it will be assessed whether there is overlap between the questions that members of the committee will ask. If possible, please inform me with a short description of your questions at [email].

The ceremony itself will be held in the Aula of the university (also in the main building) and starts at [time]. After an hour exactly the public meeting is suspended for a closed meeting of the committee. In this meeting the members of the Doctorate Committee decide on giving the degree. Other members of the opposition may advise the committee. The ceremony is closed in the Aula with conferral of the degree certificate. There is opportunity to congratulate the PhD graduate afterwards.

Do not hesitate to ask us questions in advance. You can reach [name other supervisor] by phone ([number]) and email ([email address]) and me by phone ([number]) and email ([email address]).

Best wishes,

also on behalf of [name other supervisor],

[name supervisor]

Note on opposition and defense during the public meeting.

Typically, the candidate will start with a 10-minute presentation of the PhD research. Then the committee has its say. With, say, six committee members, each member has an average of eight minutes, of which typically two minutes are used to appreciate the candidate's work and the dissertation, and to introduce and ask the question or questions. Usually one question is asked first. Once the candidate has completed her or his argument in response to your question, you may ask a second or follow-up question with the permission of the chair. You may interrupt the candidate if you feel that the candidate is straying, for example. If the candidate is quick in answering questions, a second round of questions will be started. For the order of opponents, it is customary for any online attendees to ask their questions first, and then the decreasing geographical distance of the opponent to Amsterdam will determine the order.

If you would like to learn more about how the ceremony at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam works, you can check out YouTube recordings. Online graduations were possible during the COVID-19 pandemic.

* [www.youtube.com/watch?v=CxtneLp3BKA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CxtneLp3BKA) (May 16, 2021, aula + online)
* [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q8vfbtpM5Bg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q8vfbtpM5Bg) (May 28, 2020, online)
* [www.youtube.com/watch?v=sSNl7SLpfHs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sSNl7SLpfHs) (November 8, 2017, aula)
* [www.youtube.com/watch?v=7dKDhTQbh7E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7dKDhTQbh7E) (January 23, 2020, auditorium)