



Based on the decision of the Academic Senate of the University of Rostock on April 3, 2020, the University of Rostock has decided to convert its range of courses, as far as possible, to formats without attendance. To ensure that oral defences of doctoral and postdoctoral theses can be carried out even during the period of physical-distancing there is the possibility of holding them via video conference. To ensure valid quality standards are upheld, the Rectorate defined the following general guidelines for the realisation of online post-/ doctoral defences on April 23, 2020.

Framework

Oral defences can be carried out via video conference if they can be regarded as equivalent in type, nature and content to the face-to-face defence provided in the specific doctoral or postdoctoral regulations. The equivalence is to be guaranteed by the responsible office for the examination procedure in the faculty in advance.

When carrying out online defences by video conference, it is important to observe the voluntary principle. An online version is only possible, if the post-/ doctoral student agrees. Accordingly, the consent of the candidate must be obtained in advance by e-mail. You can find a sample text for the declaration of consent at the end of this document.

Equally, all of the committee members need to agree to carry out the defence via video conference. Those declarations of consent must be obtained by the responsible person for post- / doctorates when the commission is build. If there is no such position, the decan of the faculty has to commit someone to this task. For ongoing procedures, the candidate's and commission members consent to participate in an online defence must be obtained immediately through the responsible person for post- / doctorates or the chairperson of the committee. If a post-/ doctoral defence takes place via video conference, the examination law provisions apply following the applicable doctorate or habilitation regulations.

When the invitation is published, the mode of registration is also made known.

- The *duration of the online defence* has to be equivalent to that of a face-to-face defence stated in the doctoral or habilitation regulations.
- If the doctoral or habilitation regulations intend a public defence, the online defence has to offer a possibility for guests to attend. When the invitation is published it has to contain information about the mode of registration (e.g. via email or a link for the video conference published on the invitation for the defence). If a large number of guests endangers the uninterrupted course of the defence, the number of guests may be limited by the chairperson. Guests have no right to participate.
- For the online defence, the chairperson has to commit someone to technical coordination. This may be a member of the committee as well as another employee of the University of Rostock. The tasks of technical coordination include ensuring that everything runs without interruptions, monitoring the connectivity of the participants, regulating access to the video conference (if necessary via the waiting room of the video confer-

ence system), providing support in case of technical problems and documenting any technical faults that may occur during the defence in a technical protocol.

- If possible, the candidate sits in a room of the University for the defence.
- If the current access policies allow more than one person in a room, further persons as the chairperson or other members of the committee can participate in the same room.
- Recording of the defence is not permitted. If technically possible, this function of the video conference system should be switched off. Since the recording of a defence seriously violates the personal rights of the participants, any violation will be prosecuted.

Video conference systems such as DFNconf, zoom, gotoMeeting, skype or BigBlueButton are suitable for conducting the defence. The BigBlueButton conference system is linked in the StudIP portal.

Participants

- The size and composition of the committee is based on the applicable doctoral or postdoctoral regulations.
- If it is a public defence, guests are allowed.

Requirements

To conduct an online defence, all participants need

- a computer/notebook/tablet/smartphone with a camera, audio system and microphone as well as
- stable internet access.
- In addition, everyone involved, who is attending from outside of the University-rooms must ensure a trouble-free environment.

Execution

The following section describes the procedure for defending a doctoral thesis; then the procedure for defending a habilitation thesis is described.

A – Execution of a doctoral thesis

Preparation

1. The candidate, chairpersons of the committee and the technical coordinator need to have a test meeting in advance, at least 3 days before the actual defence.
2. (optional) If a common electronic whiteboard or similar technical equipment can be used, their function must also be briefly tested before the actual defence.
3. The availability of the participants via phonecall should be ensured for the case of technical problems. In urgent cases, communication in such a case could also be conducted via e-mail. The contact details are given to the technical coordinator.
4. Before the defence, all members of the committee receive information about the video conference system which is used to determine the grade as well as the access data for this system. For this purpose, either a 2nd video conference can be used or the meeting of the commission can

be organised via separate video rooms of the video conference system. Apart from the commission members, no other persons have access to these rooms. The security should be regulated by setting a password and/or setting up a waiting room.

5. The declarations of consent of the committee members must be given when the committee is build. If the committee was already existing before the period of physical-distancing, this needs to be done retrospectively.

Execution

6. At the beginning of the video call, all participants should get to know the program in approximately 30 min. preparation time.
7. If the candidate is not taking the defence in a room of the University, s*he has to do a 360° rotation of the webcam to show that the door is closed, no other people are in the room and no unauthorized aids are used.
8. The chairperson of the commission briefly explains the course of the defence.

The defence can then begin. In most cases, this will consist of a presentation, the reading of extracts from the expert's reports followed by a discussion.

9. The *presentation* must be given live. It is recommended that all other participants switch off their microphones.
10. During the *reading of extracts from the expert's reports*, all microphones must be switched off, except the one of the respective expert.
11. During the *discussion*, it is recommended that only the candidate and the person asking a question have switched their microphones on. The execution of the discussion is based on the applicable doctoral regulation. Questions are submitted to the chairperson (for example by hand signals in the chat or similar means if the conference system provides them).
12. At the end of the defence, the technical coordination gives/ sends the *technical protocol* to the chairperson.

Grading and announcement

13. After finishing the defence all committee members leave the video conference to evaluate the defence. As soon as the grading is finished, they re-enter the video conference of the defence.
14. Initially, the candidate has to be asked, if the announcement of the grade can take place in public. If so, the announcement and justification are made. If not, all guests have to leave the video conference before that.
15. One copy of the protocol drawn up during the defence remains with the chairperson. The original has to be signed by all committee members who took part by the way of circulation.
16. Subsequently, the protocol has to be given to the responsible person for post- / doctorates of the faculty or the person who was committed with this task.

B – Execution of a habilitation thesis

The execution of a habilitation thesis is similar to the execution of a doctoral thesis.

Preparation

Numbers 1-5, like above

Execution

Numbers 6-8, like above

Additional:

- If the committee considers it appropriate to conduct the teaching sample as an online teaching sample, the participation of students for the online teaching sample must be guaranteed.
- If possible, the teaching sample should be implemented into a regular online series of lectures.
- The online teaching sample (based on the applicable habilitation regulation) may be held before, directly after the defence or at a later time. It has to be ensured, that participants can ask questions during/ after the teaching sample.
- The composition of the group for evaluating the teaching sample depends on the requirements of the respective habilitation regulations.

Numbers 9-12, like above; the execution of the discussion (Number 11) depends on the requirements of the respective habilitation regulations of the faculty.

Grading and announcement

Number 13-15, like above

After the protocol was signed by all members of the commission it has to be sent to the faculty council.

Procedure in the event of exceptional occurrences

- If the internet connection is interrupted during the online defence, an attempt to continue the defence must be made as soon as possible.
- It could also be tried to continue the defence with another video conference system. To proceed in this way, the candidate, as well as the committee members, have to agree.
- If the connection is interrupted repeatedly, the defence must be stopped and held at a different time.
- All disruptions in the course of the defence have to be documented in the protocol, specifying the type, scope and duration. In particular, the technical coordination shall ensure that a quorum exists throughout the defence.
- If there is suspicion of attempted fraud during the defence, the candidate can be asked to do a 360° rotation of the webcam to show that the door is closed, no other people are in the room and no unauthorized aids are used. In case the doubts cannot be dispelled, the defence will be stopped by the chairperson of the committee with a corresponding note in the protocol.
- Technical problems of the participating guests do not lead to an interruption of the defence.



Form for the declaration of consent of the candidate

I hereby apply to conduct my [doctoral/postdoctoral defence] on [date] as an online defence.

I have read the "Guidelines for the realisation of online defences" of the University of Rostock and agree with the mentioned conditions.

I also agree with the use of the platform [name of the video conference system] for the examination and the resulting data protection regulations.

Place, Date

Name

Form for the declaration of consent of the commissioners

I agree that the doctoral defence / postdoctoral defence of [name] on the topic [title] on [date], of which I am a member/ the chairperson of the committee, is carried out as an online defence.

I also agree with the use of the platform [name of the video conference system] for the examination and the resulting data protection regulations.

Place, Date

Name