Half-Term Assessment at the Department of Geological Sciences, Stockholm University: Description and Template

The goal of the Half-Term Assessment is to (i) encourage students to reflect on their project and its feasibility for completion in the allotted time; (ii) get students writing on their thesis; (iii) provide an assessment of the student's progress, the formulation of the project and catch any critical issues; and (iv) give students a feeling of a PhD defence.

At the end of 24 months of PhD studies (excluding sick leave, parental leave, teaching duties, etc.), students are required to complete the Half-Term Assessment. An outcome of the Half-Term Assessment is a recommendation by the committee as to whether a licentiate or PhD is more appropriate for the student.

Prior to the assessment the student must provide the examination committee with:

1. A *PhD Thesis Proposal* that summarizes the work done so far and plan for the completion of study, which should be structured around the template below.
2. A *draft manuscript* to be appended to the PhD Thesis Proposal.
3. Record of *completed coursework*.

The committee is comprised of two reviewers, the supervisor and co-supervisors. The supervisor is responsible suggesting these two reviewers. At least one of these reviewers must be external to the department. Both reviewers must hold a PhD and at least one must be docent competent. These reviewers are to be approved by the Head of Subject and the Director of PhD studies. The use of Zoom is encouraged.

The supervisor comes to an agreement with the committee on the timeline of submission for these required documents and the date of the exam. The documents do not have to be provided to anyone other than the committee and will not be made available to the broader audience. The student is responsible for booking a room for the presentation and informing the department of the date of the presentation (via the departmental website).

Template for the PhD Thesis Proposal

Below is the template for the *PhD Thesis Proposal*, which provides the basis for your Half-Term Assessment and discussion with your committee. This should be a concise document that demonstrates your progress through your project and gives a plan for completion. This document should be written independently by the student and not be more than 15 pages (excluding figures, tables, formula and references). Note that this template should *guide* you in writing your PhD Thesis Proposal but since each project is different, the template can be interpreted and applied in different ways.

Abstract

Title: This should be the provisional title of your thesis.

Introduction: This should provide the background to the project and a short review of the research context using key references. You should communicate what is known and what knowledge gap your work will fill. This should not be an exhaustive literature review but rather describe the reasoning and scientific development behind your project.

Research Aim: State the aim of your project.

Methodology: Briefly describe the tools you use (for example, fieldwork, analyses, facilities, resources used).

Research Objectives: State the individual objectives of your project (or questions you answer, hypotheses you test). These objectives should roughly equate to the manuscripts planned for your thesis. For each objective (i) describe its relation and importance to your project aim and (ii) summarize your progress to date for this part of your thesis. When describing your progress give any preliminary results. Outline which data you need as well as how you plan to collect this data. Of special importance is to make the connection between objectives, methods/analysis and the identified knowledge gaps, i.e. motivate why this will achieve the objective and move the science forward.

Objective 1: Should relate to the appended manuscript and explain any planned developments for the work or clarify any issues to date.
Objective 2: …..
Objective X: …..

Timetable for Completion: Using Gantt chart or similar provide a time frame for steps required to complete the research objectives above.

Societal Relevance and Implications: Briefly describe the implications of your work for your research field and for non-academic actors.

Appendix: This is where you include your submission ready manuscript or other documents of relevance for your thesis.

On the day of the exam

1. The student makes a 30-minute presentation based on the *PhD Thesis Proposal*.
2. There is a discussion with the committee and the audience based on the written documents and the presentation.
3. There is then a closed discussion with the committee where the focus is on the feasibility of the proposed plan.
4. The student is invited back for a discussion about the the committee's assessment and recommendation.

The final outcome is a recommendation from the committee if it is more appropriate for a student to carry on to a licentiate or a PhD degree.