



# GUIDELINES

ON THE THESIS ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETINGS AT THE  
MAX PLANCK INSTITUTE FOR MEDICAL RESEARCH





# Guidelines



on the Thesis Advisory Committee Meetings at the Max Planck Institute for Medical Research

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The purpose of the Thesis Advisory Committee (TAC) is to provide guidance for our PhD students throughout their studies. It monitors the progress and development of the PhD students and provides advice to our students as well as their supervisors. The committee members will also be available for one-to-one consultations with the student and may become an important networking partner. Moreover, our PhD students may contact the committee members for personal discussions at any time.

At our institute it is mandatory for every PhD student who is not part of a structured PhD program to be supported by a TAC. In special cases, students can seek approval of exception by putting their arguments forward to the managing director in written form (gd@mr.mpg.de).

## Composition of the TAC

The TAC is established by the supervisor in consultation with the student and should consist of at least three members that are experts in the field.

- All faculty members of our institute can become TAC members, as well as senior scientists and facility heads.
- At least one member should be a director of our institute.
- The supervisor should be member of the TAC.
- If applicable, the co-supervisor/direct supervisor can take part as fourth member.
- All members (with exception of the co-supervisor/direct supervisor) have to be independent (financially and scientifically) of each other.

After constitution the PhD student should inform the TAC coordinator about the composition of the committee.

## Scope of TAC Meetings

**1<sup>st</sup> TAC meeting** should take place within the first 6 to 8 months after beginning of the PhD studies.

The scope of the proposed project should be assessed, covering the following topics:

- feasibility within anticipated time frame
- re-evaluation of topic and approach
- risk assessment and alternative strategies
- advice on individualized training schedule if required

**2<sup>nd</sup> year meeting** should take place about 1 ½ years after the start of the project.

The progress should be monitored, also covering the following topics:

- evaluation of the project regarding its suitability for a doctoral thesis and publication
- if necessary, assistance in identification of an alternative project
- timeline to reach goals and complete thesis
- individualized training schedule if required
- career planning and professional development

**3<sup>rd</sup> year meeting** should take place about 2 ½ years after the start of the project.

The progress should be monitored with regard to project completion and submission of the thesis, while also covering the following topics:

- timeline for remaining experiments and completion of the thesis
- if necessary, a decision about an extension
- status of publications
- career planning and professional development

### **TAC Meeting Procedures**

The student is responsible for the planning of and invitation to the TAC meetings. This also comprises the timely submission of the TAC report, latest one week before the meeting (see more details below). The TAC coordinator should be involved in the scheduling of the TAC meetings and a copy of the TAC report should also be submitted to him or her.

During the TAC meeting the PhD student will give a 20-minute oral presentation followed by about 30 minutes of questions and open discussion with the committee members.

Confidential discussions involving the supervisor and PhD student, respectively, with TAC members who are not supervisors will follow. They will intervene should problems between the student and the supervisor(s) be evident. Therefore, the TAC should first invite the student to leave the room and secondly, invite the supervisor(s) to step out. Finally, the student and supervisor(s) should leave the room, for the remaining TAC to discuss and summarize their views and to formulate recommendations.

In the scope of the TAC meeting the quality of the TAC report, the presentation and the discussion should be assessed. Critiques should be provided and suggestions for improvements put forward, this can also include comments on the development of the student's abilities. The future plans should be evaluated and recommendations concerning priorities should be made. The specific questions in the TAC review form (see attached) should be answered and complemented by written statements on the student's progress.

The protocol will be written by the TAC coordinator and distributed to the supervisor and PhD student. This protocol should explicitly contain strong and weak aspects of the student's progress and comments on the student's performance.

### **Frequency:**

1<sup>st</sup> TAC meeting within first 8 months after beginning of PhD studies

2<sup>nd</sup> TAC meeting after about 1 ½ years

3<sup>rd</sup> TAC Meeting after about 2 ½ years

## **TAC Report**

The PhD student hands in a written report on the project at least one week in advance. The report should not exceed 3 pages for the first year, 5 pages for the second year and 8 pages for the third year.

The report should comprise:

- introduction
- objectives/hypothesis
- research plan with timeline
- results and discussion
- conclusion/ outlook

# TAC review form



Assessment, comments and recommendations by the Thesis Advisory Committee

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PhD student .....

Department .....

Group .....

Starting date of PhD .....

Primary supervisor (Chair of TAC) .....

Second TAC member .....

Third TAC member .....

Additional members (if applicable) .....

Date of meeting .....

first TAC Meeting

second TAC Meeting

third TAC Meeting

## 1. Quality of the progress report

A very good

B good

C satisfactory

D sufficient

E inadequate

Comment:

## 2. Quality of the presentation and the scientific discussion

- A very good
- B good
- C satisfactory
- D sufficient
- E inadequate

Comment:

## 3. Quality of future plans

- A very good
- B good
- C satisfactory
- D sufficient
- E inadequate

Comment:

**4. Overall impression.** Is the student's progress adequate?\* - Recommendations, concerns etc.

- A very good
- B good
- C satisfactory
- D sufficient
- E inadequate

Comment:

\* If not, please make a plan to reconvene the TAC within the next few months, to further assess the situation.

**5. Specific recommendations by the TAC regarding prospective publications and career perspectives of the PhD student:**

**Signatures/date:**

Primary supervisor (Chair of TAC) .....

Second TAC member .....

Third TAC member .....

Additional members (if applicable) .....

Protocol written by .....

Signature/date .....