



Thesis Advisory Committees & TAC Meetings

What is the TAC?

Your Thesis Advisory Committee (TAC) is a structured mentoring instrument that supports you throughout your PhD. It provides scientific guidance, independent feedback, and strategic advice at key stages of your project.

TAC meetings should not be seen as formal hurdles. They are opportunities to reflect, recalibrate, and strengthen your project. The more clearly and proactively you prepare, the more valuable these meetings will be.

This guide explains:

- how TAC meetings are organised,
- what is formally required,
- and how to prepare them effectively.

PART A – STRUCTURE & FORMAL REQUIREMENTS

TAC Composition

Each PhD student is advised by a TAC consisting of at least three members:

- Your first supervisor
- One co-advisor (group leader from another department or institution)
- A second co-advisor (group leader or postdoc from MPIPZ or another institution)

Additional co-advisors may be appointed if helpful, for example in interdisciplinary projects.

TAC Assembly & Agreement on Training and Supervision

- Your TAC must be assembled within the first **3 months** of your PhD.
- Please inform the IMPRS [PhD Office](#) as well as the GSfBS about the TAC composition.
- The Agreement on Training and Supervision must be signed by all TAC members and submitted to the IMPRS [PhD Office](#) and the GSfBS.

This agreement defines expectations and ensures transparency from the beginning.

TAC Timeline

The regular TAC schedule is:

- **1st TAC:** 5–6 months
- **2nd TAC:** 12 months
- **3rd TAC:** 24 months
- **Final TAC:** ~33–36 months

Important (GSfBS regulation)

The time between two TAC meetings must not exceed **14 months**.

If deviations are necessary (e.g. scheduling constraints or special circumstances), please inform:

- the IMPRS [PhD Office](#), and
- the GSfBS coordinators in advance.

If you encounter difficulties, contact the IMPRS [PhD Office](#) early so we can support you.

Organising a TAC Meeting

You are responsible for organising your TAC meetings.

Please:

- Schedule the meeting in good time
- Inform the IMPRS [PhD Office](#) about date, time and location
- Circulate your written report to the TAC and the PhD Office at least **two weeks before the meeting**

Recommended meeting structure

- 15–20 min presentation
- 30–40 min scientific discussion
- 5–10 min discussion without the student
- 5–10 min discussion without the first supervisor

It is recommended that:

- The discussion without the student takes place at the beginning.
- The discussion without the first supervisor takes place at the end.

At each TAC meeting, please also:

- Present a sample of your data documentation (e.g. screenshots from eLab Journal, GitHub, or equivalent)
- Bring your lab book or equivalent documentation system

If you need a Zoom link without time restriction, contact the IMPRS [PhD Office](#) in advance.

Documentation & Upload (Important)

- Have the meeting minutes signed by all TAC members and by yourself.
- Upload the signed minutes and your TAC report to both
 - the IMPRS PhD Management System and
 - the GSfBS G-folder in Docfile.

Timely documentation protects you later at the stage of thesis submission and defence.

Good Scientific Practice Training

Participation in a course on good research practice / good scientific conduct within the first year is mandatory. This requirement is fulfilled through the training offered during the PhD Welcome Days at MPIPZ.

PART B – TAC MEETINGS BY STAGE

1st TAC Meeting (5–6 months)

Purpose

- Presentation of your project proposal
- Evaluation of your progress during the probationary period

Written report (max. 1000 words)

Your report should clearly describe:

- The scientific question you aim to address
- Why this question is important
- How you plan to approach it
- Potential challenges and how you might address them

This meeting ensures a strong start and clear expectations. The TAC must approve continuation of your project beyond the 6-month probationary period. If serious problems arise, please inform the IMPRS [PhD Office](#).

2nd TAC Meeting (12 months)

Purpose

- Evaluation of scientific progress
- Reflection on project direction

Written report (~3000 words)

The report should follow a manuscript-style structure:

- Abstract (200–250 words)
- Introduction (context, objectives, approaches)
- Methods (if needed for clarity)
- Results (including figures and legends)
- Discussion
- Outlook (milestones until next TAC meeting)
- References

This report helps you practise scientific writing and build material for future publications. At this stage, the TAC discusses whether the PhD should continue as planned. If progress is not approved, the IMPRS [PhD Office](#) must be informed.

3rd TAC Meeting (24 months)

Purpose

- Confirmation of satisfactory progress
- Strategic planning toward thesis completion

Written report (~3000 words)

The report (~3000 words) may closely resemble a manuscript to facilitate publication.

Important topics to discuss:

- Publication strategy
- Feasibility of completing the project
- **is strongly recommended to include a discussion on the possibility of a project extension as a key agenda point.**

In rare cases where sufficient progress has not been achieved, the TAC may recommend leaving the programme and evaluates possibilities. If progress is not approved, the IMPRS [PhD Office](#) must be informed.

Final TAC Meeting (~33–36 months)

Purpose

Preparation for thesis submission and defence.

Written report (thesis outline)

Instead of a full report, you prepare:

- A detailed thesis outline (circulated two weeks in advance)
- A presentation focusing on strategic questions

Topics to discuss may include:

- Structure of the thesis (monograph or cumulative)
- Inclusion and exclusion of data
- Remaining experiments or analyses
- Realistic timeline for submission and defence
- Contract extension (if necessary)
- Selection of reviewers
- Publication strategy beyond the thesis

If possible, it is recommendable to invite future thesis reviewers if they are not already TAC members.

PART C – Preparing for a Productive TAC Meeting

TAC meetings are interactive mentoring sessions. Use them proactively. Below is a non-exhaustive list of reflection questions.

Project Development

- Were previously defined goals achieved?
- What obstacles occurred?
- Do goals need adjustment?
- Which milestones are realistic until the next TAC?

Documentation & Reproducibility

- Is your documentation complete and reproducible?
- Could another researcher understand and repeat your work based on your records?

Supervision & Mentoring

- Are meetings with your supervisor productive?
- Do you feel sufficiently supported?
- Are you comfortable approaching your co-advisors?

Resources & Collaboration

- Do you have access to necessary resources?
- Would collaboration strengthen your project?

Personal Development

- Which scientific and professional skills have you developed?
- Which skills would you like to strengthen?
- Are you planning conference participation or training opportunities?

Scientific Literacy

- Are you keeping up with the relevant literature?
- Do you allocate time for critical reading and reflection?

Final Note

If you encounter scientific, organisational, or personal difficulties, please contact the IMPRS [PhD Office](#) early. The TAC and IMPRS [PhD Office](#) are here to support you in successfully completing your PhD.