



Evolution and Ecology Research School Tübingen (EVEREST)
Thesis Advisory Committee (TAC) Guidelines

Purpose

The *Thesis Advisory Committee* (TAC) guides the PhD student from initial registration through to preparations for the PhD defense. The committee **meets at least once per year** to evaluate the student's progress and to provide support and advice on research and career planning. TAC members are available to the PhD student for individual consultation and may become a source of references for job applications. For composition of the TAC, check the guidelines in → *EVEREST Supervision Agreement.pdf*

TAC meetings (duration approx. 1.5 hrs.) always consist of (i) a brief introductory presentation by the student about progress and challenges in his/her PhD (~15 min), (ii) extensive discussion of the prospects of the PhD project including suggestions for skill training, conference attendance, or manuscript preparation (~45 min), and private exchange among (iii) the student and TAC members *excluding* the direct PhD supervisor (5-10 min) and (iv) all TAC members *excluding* the student (5-10 min).

One member of the TAC (NOT the prime thesis supervisor) is identified as the **chair** for the session and completes the → "TAC Assessment Form" (→ pages 3, 5). All meeting participants sign the form. The PhD candidate then sends a scan of this form to the EVEREST coordinators and all TAC members.

It is the **student's responsibility** to

- (i) schedule TAC meetings well in time,
- (ii) send TAC members a written overview about the state of the thesis **2 weeks in advance** (see below),
- (iii) organize a room and technical equipment for the meeting (your group secretaries will be able to help),
- (iv) send a short reminder to the TAC members 1 day before the meeting,
- (v) submit a scan of the signed meeting protocol to the EVEREST coordinators and all TAC members shortly after the meeting.

The first TAC meeting (TAC 1)

The first TAC meeting must take place **within the first six months** after a student commences his/her PhD project. It serves to provide guidance for the student during the early phase of project planning and implementation. The student provides a **written thesis proposal** to all TAC members no later than **two weeks before the meeting**, briefly specifying the basic outline and goals of the project, including initial results where available. (→ see "TAC 1: Pre-meeting Research Proposal" on page 2-3).

Discussion of the project should focus on the following topics:

- Project scope & expected scientific impact
- Identification of, and solutions to, expected challenges and risks
- Constructive feedback on the student's performance
- Suggestions for further training in scientific and transferrable skills

Subsequent TAC meetings (TAC 2 & 3)

The **second TAC** primarily evaluates the PhD student's progress and assists in prioritizing and modifying research projects and accompanying skill training as needed. **Two weeks before** the meeting, the student distributes a **progress report** among TAC members (→ see "TAC ≥ 2: Pre-meeting Research Update" on page 4-5).

The goal of the **third** (or any further) **TAC** meeting is similar to TAC 2, now with additional focus on (i) evaluating the PhD student's progress with regard to project completion and thesis submission, and (ii) discussing career perspectives after graduation.



TAC 1: Pre-meeting Research Proposal

Two weeks before your first meeting with the *Thesis Advisory Committee* (TAC 1), please send an informal and concise proposal of your PhD project to all TAC members and the EVEREST coordinators as detailed below.

The total proposal should **not exceed 3-5 pages!** It is *not* mandatory to address every single aspect mentioned below – select those that are particularly relevant for the development of your specific project.

1. Header

- Name, PhD start date, direct PhD supervisor, preliminary project title.
- Date and location of the scheduled TAC meeting

2. Abstract (~ ¼ page)

Brief project summary, includes major research questions and proposed sampling / experimental / analytical strategy.

3. Introduction (~ ½ to 1 page)

- What is the relevant research context for your project?
- What is the current state-of-the art (key references)?
- Identify the gaps of knowledge that are relevant to your project.

4. Aims and significance (~ ½ page)

- Which specific questions or research hypotheses do you want to address in your PhD project?
- How will your findings help advancing the knowledge in your field?

5. Research plan (~ 1 page)

- What sampling / experimental / analytical approaches are you proposing to address each of your research questions?
- Are there equivalent alternative approaches to (some of) your questions?
- What are the advantages, challenges, or drawbacks of each experimental approach?
- Clearly identify those aspects where you still seek advice, or feel insecure.
- You may include the findings of pilot studies, if applicable.

6. Outlook (~ ½ page)

- Provide a rough research plan that schedules your research project across the intended 3-year PhD phase (e.g. the one you specify for the EVEREST supervision agreement).
- Which specific steps do you wish to accomplish in the coming year (a table may be useful)?
- Which additional skills, qualifications, or collaborations do you require to thrive in your research field (e.g. proposed courses, workshops etc.)? Also consider required funding opportunities.



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TAC 1 – Assessment Form

TAC 1 – Date: _____ Protocol by (NOT the direct supervisor): _____
Student name: _____ Start of PhD: _____
Project topic: _____

ASSESSMENT

Project scope:

Expected impact:

Risks, feasibility, suggested solutions:

Technical aptitude & performance:

Suggested skill training:

Further comments:

TAC meeting components: student presentation discussion 5' w/o supervisor 5' w/o student

	Name	Signature
Student	_____	_____
Supervisor	_____	_____
TAC member 1	_____	_____
TAC member 2	_____	_____
[TAC member 3]	_____	_____

Agreed date for the next TAC: _____



TAC ≥ 2: Pre-meeting Research Update

Two weeks before any of the subsequent meetings with your *Thesis Advisory Committee* (TAC 2 ff.), provide an informal and concise update on the progress of your PhD project to all TAC members and the EVEREST coordinators.

The total update should **not exceed 3-5 pages**. It is not mandatory to address every single aspect mentioned below – select those that are particularly relevant for the development of your project.

1. Basic Information (~ ¼ page)

- Name, PhD start date, direct PhD supervisor, project title.
- Date and location of the scheduled TAC meeting

2. Introduction (~ ½ page)

- What is the relevant research context for your project?
- What is the current state-of-the art (key references)?
- Which gaps of knowledge relevant to your project can you identify?
- Which specific research questions / hypotheses did you plan to address in your PhD project?

3. Project progress (~ 1 page)

- List 3 particularly positive aspects of your work, e.g. with good progress or scientific reward. For each of your central research hypotheses, specify the current state of the project:
- Has data collection (and analysis) been completed as planned, with what kind of findings?
- Is research still in progress, and proceeds as envisioned?
- If not yet commenced, when do you plan to pursue this specific research goal?

4. Changes and challenges (~ 1 page)

- List 3 particularly problematic aspects of your work, e.g. those that generated frustration.
- For which project components did you already diverge from your research proposal, and why?
- Which project components turn out to be unfeasible within the frame of the PhD project?
- Which alternatives can you think of?
- On which aspects do you seek advice?

5. Credits, skills & qualification (~ ½ page)

- What is your status with respect to the credits required for EVEREST (PhD retreat, DOSE, StEvE-meeting, scientific and transferable skills)?
- Which additional skills, qualifications, or collaborations do you require to thrive in your research field (e.g. proposed courses, workshops etc.)? Also address issues regarding required funding.

6. Outlook and career planning (~ ½ page)

- Which steps do you wish to accomplish in the coming year (a table may be useful)?
- Which thesis chapters do you plan to publish, in which journal, under which authorship?
- Can you complete your PhD within the running funding? If not, what are your options for funding?
- Where do you see yourself after your PhD? What qualifications do you need for your desired job?



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TAC \geq 2 – Assessment Form

TAC 2 TAC 3 TAC 4 Date: _____

Student name: _____ Protocol by (NOT the direct supervisor): _____

Project title: _____

ASSESSMENT

Project progress:

Suggested changes in project priorities:

Goals for the coming year:

Suggested skill training / conferences:

Submission and Career planning:

Further comments:

TAC meeting components: student presentation discussion 5' w/o supervisor 5' w/o student

	Name	Signature
Student	_____	_____
Supervisor	_____	_____
TAC member 1	_____	_____
TAC member 2	_____	_____
[TAC member 3]	_____	_____

Agreed date for the next TAC: _____