

## FINISHING YOUR PHD

When you are approaching the end of your PhD project, there is a lot you will have to think of. This document below will help and guide you through this process. It points out the most important things you need to know. The first part is a summary of the process, the second part is a summary including a specific recommended timeline.

### A. FINISHING THESIS

#### PhD requirements Erasmus MC

- Erasmus MC policy:

The Erasmus MC follows the Erasmus University's Doctoral Regulations for the evaluation of PhD theses.

The full documents with all information regarding *Doctoral Regulations* can be found below:

- [DOCTORAL REGULATION](#) (NL)
- [DOCTORAL REGULATIONS](#) (ENG)

*Because of COVID-19 there are new rules/options and a protocol for digital PhD defenses:*

- [Contemporary Memo](#) (NL)
- [Contemporary Memo](#) (ENG)

There are two remaining additional guidelines for Erasmus MC PhD students related to the number and coherence of articles in a thesis:

1. The quality of the thesis should be satisfactory. An important indicator for academic quality is the publication of all or various parts of the PhD research in academic journals or an equivalent academic publication. In general, when the promotor decides that your PhD work and publications are sufficient, you can promote.  
The guideline indicates that the thesis should contain at least **four peer-reviewed international academic publications** (accepted or published), at least **two of which should be first-author works**, and at least **two in the first quartile of the scientific field** concerned.
2. The thesis should deal with **one single topic** and should be **coherent**.

However, it should be mentioned that these guidelines should not be interpreted as strict rules. Your promotor can deviate from the guidelines if he or she feels that it is justified to do so. In line with the EUR doctoral regulations, when the promotor decides that your PhD work and publications are sufficient, you can submit your thesis. After submitting, your 'small committee' decides if you can defend your thesis. After your defence, the Doctorate Committee will decide if you receive your doctorate.

It is recommended to discuss and determine the content of your thesis with your supervisors at an early stage during your PhD. Also discuss with your supervisors if there are any additional departmental guidelines you need to adhere to. Your supervisor may not take the initiative to do so, so also guard this process yourself.

Note: In some fields 4 publications during your PhD is rare and a big stress factor for many. When your promotor finds your work sufficient you can promote, even without meeting these guidelines.

Erasmus MC specific guidelines can be found on the selfserviceportal. Search for promotion trajectory (or in Dutch: “promotietraject”) and on the right side between Frequently Asked Questions you will find the Erasmus MC specific guidelines. We also attached the document in this file.

### **Thesis check**

1. The thesis should include:
  - a title page;
  - a table of contents;
  - an introduction outlining at least the problem definition of the thesis. The introduction should also clarify what the PhD candidate, the supervisors and other authors (if any) contributed;
  - a scientific evaluation;
  - the conclusion;
  - a summary and its translation;
  - if possible, a name and subject index and/or source index;
  - a curriculum vitae of the PhD candidate. The PhD candidate’s curriculum vitae must show where the thesis was reworked and which departments collaborated in its realisation;
  - the portfolio of the PhD candidate: which specifies all the courses they have successfully followed, teaching activities, congress visits and presentations that they have given and attended. The Promotor needs to approve the portfolio. He or she will receive a request in Hora Finita.
    - *Erasmus MC recommends students to obtain 30 EC’S (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System) in education and training during the PhD programme, but this is not obligatory.*
2. The propositions are inserted into the thesis on a separate sheet and also submitted digitally.
3. If desired, the PhD candidate can include a concise foreword
4. For inspiration: Check other theses from your department for specifics.

### **Writing and printing thesis**

- The PhD student is free to pick a printer of his/her own choosing. There are several companies that can print your thesis. E.g.: [PROEFSCHRIFT MAKEN](#)
- Number of booklets: the beadle always wants a specific number, your department, and don’t forget to ask your supervisory team if they want some extra. Also, think about the number of booklets you want to spread among your colleagues, family and friends.

## Thesis allowance

PhD students are eligible for a reimbursement of their thesis production costs of up to €750, provided that they submit the required number of minimum of 22 copies to EUR. For details:

[Click here](#)

Other possible reimbursement options:

- Professional associations related to your thesis
- Charity/patient organizations related to your thesis
- Other subsidiaries (a quick google search could be worth investigating)
- Tip: Check other theses from you department for other sponsors.

## B. ORGANISING DEFENCE

### To arrange before defending your PhD

- You select two paranymphs
  - They will help with the practical stuff around your defense
  - They can help you fold booklets, distribute invites, manage the crowd and speak at your defense party
- A plagiarism scan takes place when you have submitted your full thesis manuscript to Hora Finita.
- Subcommittee
  - Composition: 3 people
  - Documents required to be handed in to the subcommittee are:
    - Introduction, Discussion, Summary in English + Dutch and the propositions
  - The defense date will be approximately **5 months** after sending the manuscript to the subcommittee
- After approval from subcommittee, you will compose the full committee with your (co)promotor(s) (minimum of 5, maximum of 8 people)
- Schedule the date for the thesis dissertation
  - Contact the bureau of the Beadle for available dates. Email: [pedel@eur.nl](mailto:pedel@eur.nl) or [telephone number: +31104081006](tel:+31104081006)
  - Check if all your supervisors and the whole committee are available and inform the Beadle about the definitive date.
- When you have a defense date, you will be invited by the beadle to have a walkthrough of the big day
- Mock-defense: Try to organize a mock defense to practice your presentation, answering questions and all the stress that comes with it
  - Choose friends and/or colleagues who have sufficient expertise to make you sweat
  - Schedule this at least 2 weeks before your defense date, so you have plenty of time to make adjustments/study.

### C. TIMELINE:

	6 months	4-3 months	1-2 months	Last weeks	PhD defense day	After the defense
Choose the subcommittee with your promotor					<b>Remember to enjoy your day!</b>	
Set data for promotion						
Contact the print shop for time frame and costs						
Make reservations for dinner/party						
Send thesis to reading committee and let promotor fill in approval form						
Choose paronyms						
Arrange reception at university						
Print thesis at print shop and submit to beadle (e- and hard copy)						
Arrange outfit and photographer for defense						
Mock defense and last preparations (literature, how to address opponent)						
Visit career center (loopbaacentrum @erasmusmc.nl)						

### **6 months before your defense**

- Choose the subcommittee with your promotor (and possibly also with your copromotor)
- Ask information at the print shop (time frame and costs)
- Set the data. Think about the ways you would like your PhD defense day to go; if applicable, make reservations for the dinner/party
- If you haven't done already: start thinking about your propositions and write them down somewhere, for example in the notes app in your phone.

### **3-4 months before your defense**

- Send your thesis to the reading committee
- After approval of the reading committee, your promotor should fill in an approval form
- Finish your thesis including the front page, summary and acknowledgements
- Make an appointment with the print shop to talk about the possibilities (for example the lay-out) of your thesis.
- ISBN-number for your thesis(the printer will fix this for you)
- Choose your 2 paranymphs
- If you would like to have a dinner or celebration party: confirm the location
- Arrange the reception at the university

### **1-2 months before your defense**

- The thesis must be submitted to the Beadle, as an electronic copy (for inclusion in the library) and in hard copy, at least 5 weeks before the scheduled date of the PhD defense
- Send your definitive thesis to the print shop and get it printed!
- Make an address file of everybody that should receive your thesis (think of all coauthors on your papers, (ex-)colleagues, staff members, family and friends. There are applications available that can be of great help, for example <https://mailbook.nl/>)
- Once printed; send your thesis to everybody on the address list
- Arrange your outfit and a photographer for your defense

### **Last weeks before your defense**

- Last preparations for your defense:
  - o Last check of the doctoral regulations; how to talk to your opponents during the defense?
  - o Mock defense with your colleagues and supervisors
  - o Read recently published literature regarding your PhD subject
  - o Read your thesis and think about strong and weaker subjects of each publication, questions that potentially will be asked during your defense

### **PhD defense day (The Big Day!)**

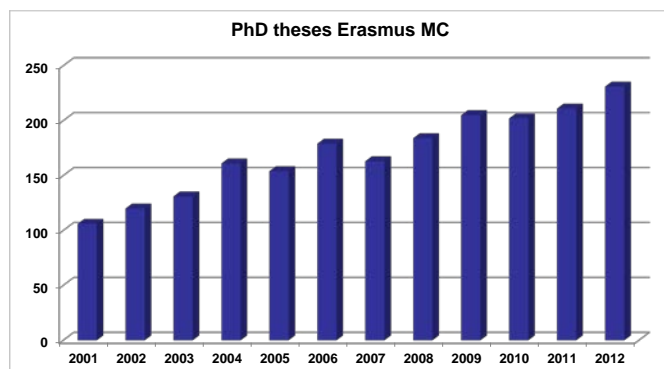
- The defense is 1 hour (15 minutes for the general summary and 45 minutes for questions from the committee)
- Try to enjoy it, you have worked so hard the last couple years; this is YOUR day!

#### **After your PhD defense**

- Dr. and then?
  - What do you want to do after your PhD?
    - Start thinking about this on time
    - Use help if available (career advisor etc.)
    - Plan a visit with the career center to get help for career orientation (loopbaancentrum @erasmusmc.nl)

## Guidelines for the PhD programme and thesis evaluation within Erasmus MC

These guidelines were drawn up in 2013 after discussions in the PhD committee, the Graduate School Board (GSB) and the Medical Research Advice Committee Erasmus MC (*Mrace*), in consultation with the Rector Magnificus of Erasmus University (EUR) and the Netherlands Federation of University Medical Centres (NFU). The need for transparent guidelines for the PhD programme and for evaluating the quality of PhD theses at Erasmus MC was prompted by the sharp rise in the number of PhDs awarded in recent years (nearly 100% in 10 years; see table). But it was also prompted by the fact that the content of PhD



programmes can vary considerably, and that the process for evaluating the quality of theses lacked transparency. The evaluation criteria varied greatly, and were determined largely on an individual basis, partly because the doctoral regulations at Dutch universities mostly offer only cursory indications on how theses should be evaluated.<sup>1</sup>

The aim of the guidelines is to provide clarity to PhD students and supervisors

(i.e. *promotors* and *copromotors*) on a number of points, and to give direction regarding the desired content and quality of the PhD programme and the thesis. This document in fact describes guidelines which in most cases are already standard practice. Erasmus MC standards were already high, and are consistent with the guidelines drawn up at European level and by the NFU.<sup>2</sup> The current Erasmus MC guidelines (2015) have been adjusted following the EUR doctoral regulations 2015.

### Guidelines for the PhD programme

#### Duration of the PhD programme

In principle, a PhD programme within Erasmus MC lasts four years; in the case of a full-time position, it corresponds to 3-4 years of research work. There is no difference in the requirements for clinical and pre-clinical PhD programmes; the four-year duration is a basic principle for all PhD programmes. If there are well-founded reasons, it is possible to diverge from this guideline.

<sup>1</sup> The new doctoral regulations of Erasmus University (version 2015) ([http://www.eur.nl/english/ab/beadles\\_office/phd\\_defence\\_ceremonies/doctoralregulations/](http://www.eur.nl/english/ab/beadles_office/phd_defence_ceremonies/doctoralregulations/)) now provide more specific instructions for assessing theses.

<sup>2</sup> At the European level, ORPHEUS (Organisation of PhD Education in Biomedicine and Health Sciences in the European System) published a position paper in 2009. It was entitled 'Towards Standards for PhD Education in Biomedicine and Health Sciences' (2009), and served as the basis for the NFU document 'Guidelines for PhD tracks in biomedical sciences in the Netherlands', which was produced for purposes of maintaining and enhancing the high standard of Dutch PhD programmes. Where possible and desirable, this is an issue the University Medical Centres wish to work on together.

### Training and supervision plan (TSP; in Dutch: *Opleidings- en begeleidingsplan, OBP*)

At the start of the PhD programme, each PhD student discusses the training and supervision plan (TSP) with his or her *promotor* (also included in art. 1.7 of the Erasmus University's doctoral regulations). The TSP includes a number of standard points:

- General information: PhD student, supervisor(s), *promotor* and *copromotor*, research school
- Training programme: courses, seminars, conferences
- Teaching tasks
- Thesis layout: general organisation
- Planning: duration of PhD programme, timetable for coming year
- Results: objectives for the coming year, such as research protocol, data collection, first draft of first article, etc.
- Supervision: frequency of appointments with supervisors and *promotors*
- Available budget: for courses and conferences
- Other: other activities during the PhD programme
- Signatures

The TSP can serve as a guide for the annual evaluation with the PhD student about the progress of the PhD programme. If necessary, the TSP can be changed or adjusted during the PhD programme.

### Training of PhD students

Erasmus MC recommends students to obtain 30 ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System) in education and training during the PhD programme. Such activities involve knowledge or skills of a general, academic, or specialist nature; conferences or seminars in the Netherlands or abroad; and participation in retreats or journal clubs. Provided it is relevant and contributes to their PhD research, research physicians or residents in training (*assistenten in opleiding*, or AIOS) may also include instruction they have had in the context of their medical studies. A PhD student and his or her supervisors/*promotor/copromotor* share responsibility for the type and amount of education and training completed during the PhD programme.

### Teaching

Teaching can be a very useful additional activity for PhD students as part of their training or development. If PhD students do academic or skills-based teaching, it is a requirement that they obtain a basic teaching qualification (*'deel-BKO, i.e. Basis Kwalificatie Onderwijs'*). Teaching experience and the basic teaching qualification can of course be included in the PhD student's portfolio (see next section).

### Portfolio

Courses and activities must be listed in the doctoral thesis. On the last page of their thesis, all Erasmus University's PhD students should include a "portfolio" (art. 4.4. of doctoral regulations) which specifies all the courses they have attended and the teaching they have done. Here, provided these are related to the PhD programme, they can also include their supervision of students or research assistants, as well as teaching or management activities.

## **Thesis evaluation / thesis requirements**

From September 1 2015 onwards Erasmus MC basically follows the Erasmus University's Doctoral Regulations for the evaluation of PhD theses. The previous guidelines for the composition of the inner doctoral committee and the reporting by the inner doctoral committee have therefore expired. The two remaining additional guidelines for Erasmus MC are related to the number and coherence of articles in a thesis:



- **The quality of the thesis should be satisfactory.** An important indicator for academic quality is the publication of all or various parts of the PhD research in academic journals or an equivalent academic publication. The guideline is that the thesis should contain at least four peer-reviewed international academic publications (*accepted* or *published*), at least two of which should be first-author works, and at least two in the first quartile of the scientific field concerned. This guideline allows, for example, scope for high-risk research, for differences in publication policy, and for differences in publication opportunities in a range of fields. If there is a divergence from the guideline, it must be supported and justified by the *promotor*.
- **The thesis should deal with one single topic and be coherent.**