GSLS Research Project Guide for **students**

Graduate School of Life Sciences

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Preface

This guide is intended for students of the Graduate School of Life Sciences performing a Research Project as part of their Master's programme. A corresponding guide has been drawn up for examiners and supervisors. The purpose of this guide is to provide a helping hand and to refer to other sources for additional information or support.
Chapter 1. Quick Guide gives you an overview of the most important information you need to know in order to successfully conduct a Research Project.
Chapters 2 and **3** provide more extensive information for those that are interested.

Additionally, the **students' site** is a useful tool created to provide support to students. Here you can find a wealth of information on all the topics mentioned in this guide as well as all forms and documents you may need. The research projects of the GSLS Master's programmes are governed by a number of rules and guidelines recorded in the GSLS Education and Examination Regulations, the Rules and Regulations of the Board of Examiners and the Student's Charter. The latest version is available on the Students' site.

GSLS principles on scientific integrity

During your Master's degree and in particular by working on your research project, you are part of the world of scientific research. Thus, a code of conduct applies, based on principles of proper scientific behavior. The GSLS follows the principles of scientific integrity, as described in the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (Pieter J.D. Drenth, 2010) and The Netherlands Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (2018). Both codes set out the principles that should be observed by each individual concerned, which are the following basic norms: honesty, reliability, objectivity, impartiality and independence, as well as open communication, duty of care, fairness and responsibility for future science generations.
Plagiarism, falsification and fabrication are the top three actions of scientific misconduct. More information about what precisely these actions entail can be found in the Education and Examination Regulations (EER).

Chapter 1. Quick Guide

The main part of the training of Master's students within the Graduate School of Life Sciences (GSLS) at Utrecht University (UU) consists of one or, in some cases, two research projects. The Graduate School of Life Sciences maintains a high standard of education. With many research projects being supervised both inside and outside the UU and UMC Utrecht, the uniform assessment of these projects is a major challenge. Although the majority of the projects are carried out at renowned and excellent research groups, each institute/country has its own standards when it comes to assessing student research projects. In order to ensure a uniform and high standard of education, including assessment, we hereby provide guidelines for supervision and assessment of the research projects performed by GSLS students.

1.1 Learning Outcomes of the research project

After finishing the research project, you are capable of:

- Translating a Life Sciences problem into a relevant research question, suitable for research development or product design.
- Designing a suitable research plan to test the formulated research questions, according to methodological and scientific standards.
- Independently performing research, with the required accuracy. Graduates are able to handle, analyse, interpret and evaluate the empirically derived data in a correct manner.
- Discussing the outcomes of empirical research and linking them with scientific theories.
- Indicating the importance of research activities for solving a biomedical question or problem, if applicable from a social perspective.
- Critically reflecting on their own research work in Life Sciences, from a social perspective.
- Comprehensibly reporting research results orally and in writing, to specialised and non-specialised audiences in an international context.

1.2 Start of research project

You can only start your research project after:

- You and your examiner/supervisor have received an email confirming the approval of the project by the Board of Examiners.
- When applicable, you have arranged everything regarding visa issues, accommodation, insurance and financial support. If required, the help of your examiner/supervisor can be requested.
  The application should be submitted by creating a 'New Case' in the Osiris Case platform via OSIRIS Student.

Note: For approval of the application and assessment access to Osiris Case is needed. If your supervisor or examiner do not have an account in Osiris Case, an email will be sent with instruction on how to log in. Please make sure they check their spam folder, if they did not receive this email.

1.3 Supervision terminology and responsibilities

Definitions

Examiner:

- is affiliated to UU/UMCU, Princess Maxima Centre, or the Hubrecht Institute as a full, associate (UHD) or assistant (UD) professor with a tenured (track) position. Professors on a UU/UMCU special chair (bijzonder hoogleraar), but in daily life affiliated to a non-UU/UMCU institute, can also act as examiner.
- cannot be a postdoc or PhD candidate.

Supervisor host institute (only applicable for projects outside UU/UMCU):

- works at the host institute (outside UU/UMCU, Princess Maxima Centre, or the Hubrecht Institute) where the project is carried out.
- Is an expert in the field (cannot be a PhD candidate or postdoc)
- must be sufficiently capable of supervising a MSc student.

Daily supervisor:

- can be the same as examiner or supervisor host institute. If this is not the case: the daily supervisor can be a PhD candidate or postdoc. If the daily supervisor is still rather junior (e.g., PhD candidate or postdoc), a senior scientist (e.g., their own supervisor) must provide support.
- works at the institute where the project is carried out.
- must be sufficiently capable of supervising a MSc student.

Second reviewer (only applicable for projects at UU/UMCU*):

- is an expert in the field (cannot be a PhD candidate) and is not directly involved in the supervision of the student or the project the student has been working on. Ideally, the second reviewer is a staff member from a different group than the examiner and daily supervisor.
- can be from outside UU/UMCU, Princess Maxima Centre, or the Hubrecht Institute.

*For projects outside UU/UMCU both examiner and supervisor host institute grade the research project, therefore a second reviewer is not required.

Responsibilities

The examiner:

- is familiar with the research field of the project
- ensures the academic master level of the proposed project
- supervises at a distance if the project is performed outside the UU/UMCU
- discusses grading process and academic level of the research project with supervisor host institute (for projects outside UU/UMCU) or daily supervisor (for projects at UU/UMCU) before the start of the project
- discusses rubric/assessment criteria with student and supervisor of the host institute or daily supervisor at the start of the project
- communicates regularly with supervisor host institute or daily supervisor and student during the research project
- discusses and judges the progress of the student during the interim assessment, if possible, together with supervisor host institute or daily supervisor in a single session, using the rubric
- ensures that the interim assessment occurs timely and is submitted to Osiris Case
- discusses the achievement of the student during the final assessment together with the supervisor of the host institute or daily supervisor, preferably using the rubric
- establishes grades for all parts (research skills, research report and final presentation) based on own observations and on in depth discussions with the student about the research performed (at least twice, in the middle and at the end*)
- determines the final grade
- supports grades with feedback (preferably using rubrics)
- can only assess maximum two of the following components for the same student: major research project, profile project, writing assignment, and business internship

*Recommendation for a project outside UU/UMCU: Let the student defend the performed research in front of the examiner and a second teacher, which may be the supervisor host institute, e.g. after the final presentation. However, any other means that ensures fair assessment of student research skills may be applied by the examiner instead, provided the grade is well substantiated by feedback.

The supervisor host institute:

- is responsible for the daily supervision
- communicates regularly with examiner and student during the research project
- monitors the achievements and progress of the student
- discusses and judges the progress of the student during the interim assessment, if possible together with examiner in a single session, using the rubric
- provides grades for all parts (research skills, research report and final presentation) based on own observations, observations of the daily supervisor (if applicable) and on in depth discussions with the student about the research performed
- discusses progress/performance with the student during the final assessment, if possible together with the examiner, using rubric/assessment criteria

The daily supervisor:

- guides the student during practical work and while preparing the report and presentation
- communicates with student and examiner (for projects at UU/UMCU) or supervisor host institute (for projects outside UU/UMCU)
- advises on grades to examiner or supervisor host institute

The second reviewer (only applicable for projects at UU/UMCU*):

- provides grades for the research report and final oral presentation

*For projects outside UU/UMCU both examiner and supervisor host institute grade the research report and final presentation, therefore a second reviewer is not required.

The student:

- is responsible for choosing a topic and finding a suitable research group and examiner/supervisor
- must apply for approval from the Board of Examiners before starting the research project in Osiris Student
- must adhere to the rules of scientific integrity.
- must finish the research project on the agreed end date or takes the appropriate action in case of delay
- must stay in contact with the examiner and if applicable daily or host supervisor
- is responsible for seeking help when problems (either professional or personal) arise

1.4 Work ethics

- You are entitled to respect office working hours and limit the lab/practical work performed in the evenings and weekends
- You are entitled to take holidays during your research project; the duration and scheduling of your holidays should be discussed with your examiner and supervisor at the beginning of the project and the information should be included in the application form
- You should not be working without supervision in the lab
- The GSLS has Generative AI guidelines in place to help you navigate the use of these tools responsibly and effectively. Please also refer to the GSLS GenAI Research Project Guidelines or Master's students and supervisors for a short overview. First discuss with your supervisor before using Generative AI in your project.

1.5 Duration of the project and extension

- The duration of the different projects can be found in the student's site. The total duration includes the time for writing the report and preparing the final presentation.
- During your project, you might spend time on courses, trainings or holidays that you will indicate in their application form. When setting up the planning for the project, you are encouraged to take a suitable holiday leave upon discussion with your supervisor/examiner.
- Some projects can be extended with credits from the elective component. You should apply for this extension before the start of the project in the application form. In exceptional circumstances, some projects can be extended after the start of the project. This should be discussed with your programme coordinator and requires approval of the Board of Examiners.
- If you run into unexpected delay, you should take action to reschedule your end date including valid reasons for it and the approval of your examiner.
- The learning outcomes of the research projects do not include obtaining a certain amount of data or "positive" results. In line with that, producing additional data is not a valid reason to extend the duration of a research project.

1.6 Phases and outcome of the research project

- Every research project consists of several key stages: drawing up a timetable, reviewing literature, drawing up a research plan, carrying out experiments/collecting data, data analysis, writing the report and presenting orally.
- Group meetings and other research group activities are part of the research project.
- The final report should be written in English containing a summary specifically aimed at informing the general audience about the content of the project (plain language summary: ~500-word summary for an audience that understands Biology at high school level). A Dutch report is allowed by exception for research projects conducted in companies or government organizations that require a Dutch report. In this case, an English summary must be provided. No more than on ereport in Dutch is allowed during the Master's degree programme.
- The final presentation should take place at the research group of the UU/UMCU examiner (and, if applicable, also at the host institute).

1.7 Interim Assessment

The Interim Assessment meeting is a mandatory evaluation session that should take place two or three months after the start of the research project. During this meeting, you will receive feedback on your work, progress and performance. Your examiner and supervisor are advised to use the 'Rubric for Research Skills' as a tool to discuss your strengths and points of improvement. Please note: this interim assessment conversation is different from regular workdiscussions.

- For research projects at UU/UMCU: the meeting takes place with you and your examiner (preferably also with the daily supervisor).
- For research projects outside UU/UMCU the meeting is between you,the supervisor host institute, and your examiner (preferably in a single meeting).
- After the meeting, your examiner is responsible for uploading the highlighted rubric or a short written report (½ A4) summarizing the meeting in Osiris Case, after which you will be automatically requested to confirm your agreement to the submitted document.

1.8 Fraud and plagiarism

Fraud or plagiarism is absolutely not allowed and will be dealt with as described in the Education-and Examination Regulations. Sanctions vary from the invalidation of a paper and a record in OSIRIS to the permanent termination of programme registration. You cannot graduate with *cum laude* and/or honours if you have been found guilty of plagiarism or other scientific misconduct.

1.9 Final assessment – Grading

At the end of a research project, you are expected to have met the learning outcomes. In order to provide with feedback about the learning objectives, the examiner and supervisor are strongly advised to use the rubrics for research skills (60% of final grade), report (30%) and presentation (10%). All three elements have to be awarded at least a 5,5 in order for you to pass the final examination of the project. You have one chance for re-examination of each insufficient component. Student and examiner should discuss the deadlines and requirements for the re-examination and put it in writing.

For projects inside UU/UMCU, the assessment is performed by the examiner in close consultation with the daily supervisor and the second reviewer.
For projects outside UU/UMCU, the supervisor host institute grades all three components. The examiner and supervisor host institute should contact each other in order to make sure that the assessment of all components is performed according to the guidelines of the GSLS. The examiner establishes grades for all parts based on own observations and determines the final grade.
For projects abroad:

- First, the supervisor host institute determines the grades according to their marking system (e.g., Anglo-American letter grading (F-A$^+$)) of that country in consultation with the examiner.
- Next, the examiner converts the grade according to the Dutch marking system. The conversion table is available here.

If the examiners and second reviewers or host supervisors' marks differ by 2 or more points, the examiner should notify the Board of Examiners.
In order to meet the *cum laude* requirements a student should receive an 8.5 or higher for their research project(s).

1.10 Final assessment – Submission

- Your project is registered in Osiris Case; you will be asked to submit the final report digitally in Osiris Case after your examiner has submitted the final assessment in the system. After uploading the report, the Master's Administration Office will be notified to finalize the results.
- The assessment procedure for a project that is registered via Osiris Case is as follows:
    - For projects inside UU/UMCU, the examiner performs the assessment in close consultation with the daily supervisor and second reviewer.
    - For projects outside UU/UMCU, the examiner contacts the supervisor host institute to be informed about their grading and to make sure that the assessment of all components is performed according to the guidelines of the GSLS. The examiner is responsible for submitting the grades from both the supervisor host institute and themselves in Osiris Case.

1.11 Copyright and publication rights

By signing the application form, you declare to transfer the copyright of all products (including the tangible and intellectual products) of the research project to the UU/UMCU or host institute. Depending on the magnitude of the scientific contribution, you have the right to be a (co-)author of publications or to be otherwise acknowledged. Any questions in this regard should be addressed to the head of the research group.

1.12 Problems or questions and further information

In case of any problems or questions, contact the programme coordinator first, and otherwise reach out to the study advisor or research project coordinator. You can also refer to the student's site page about guidance and counselling. All official regulations of the GSLS are recorded in the Education and Examination Regulations, the Rules and Regulations and the Student's Charter, which can be found here.

Chapter 2. The research project from A to Z

2.1 Approval of a research project

The quality and suitability of the project is assessed by the Board of Examiners before the start of the project. The process is the following:

- The student discusses the project with the supervisor and examiner
- Before starting the application in Osiris it is recommended to discuss the proposed project with your programme coordinator.
- The student starts a 'New Case' in OSIRIS Student filling in the form with the following information:
  - Agreements on the content of the project
  - Start and end date (Note: The research project duration is planned for 40-hour working weeks; only in exceptional cases, research projects can be conducted part-time)
  - Time off taken by student and supervisor (e.g., holidays, trainings, courses, etc.)
  - Activities that the student will participate in within the research group
  - Other details that can be found in the application form and should be discussed
- The examiner and the programme coordinator will be notified by OSIRIS Case to review the application form (as well as the supervisor host institute, if applicable).
- The Board of Examiners assesses and approves the project
- Student, examiner, supervisor and programme coordinator receive an approval email.

Note: You must hand in the application form at least one month (20 working days) before the starting date of the project. You cannot start the project until they have received the formal approval of the Board of Examiners.

Note: When applying, you must indicate the weeks you will spend on courses, holidays, or other planned activities. The system will then calculate your project end date automatically. You are entitled to the public holidays listed as non-teaching days in the GSLS academic calendar; these do not affect your project deadline and therefore do not need to be indicated when applying. The summer holidays and Christmas break are exceptions to this rule. We strongly advise you to discuss your holiday plans with your supervisor at the start of the project and to plan them well in advance. This will help you maintain a healthy work-life balance and ensure smooth scheduling of your experiments.

Note: For approval of the application and assessment access to Osiris Case is needed. If your supervisor or examiner do not have an account in Osiris Case, an email will be send with instruction on how to log in. Please make sure they check their spam folder, if they did not receive this email.

2.2 Drawing up a timetable & a research plan

The timetable of a project specifies the timing for conducting the different project components. Having a clear timetable from the beginning of the project helps you to conclude your project successfully and avoid delay. You should draw the timetable during the first week of the project and keep updating and adjusting the plan along the project. Student and supervisor should discuss as often as necessary the timetable progression and occasionally identify targets that are not met to find solutions. Keep in mind that every project has an end date. Writing the final report and preparing the final presentation are essential components of the project and should fall within the end date. The supervisor should try to prevent you from exceeding past your end date, while achieving the learning objectives. Acquiring more data for the project is not a valid reason to request an extension.

The research plan can be drawn in parallel with the timetable. The research plan will define the actual research topic of your project as well as the research hypothesis. In order to do so, you should conduct a literature review. Draw up your research plan with care. The majority of students spend too little time on this phase as they are keen to start the practical research. A research plan that is too vague and quickly completed can cause you to perform the wrong experiments and overrun your timetable.

The research plan should include the following components:

- Background information which details why the research project should be conducted
- Research questions and hypotheses which form the aim of your research and demarcate your research topic

- Experimental methodology and strategy
- Strategy for data analysis
- References used in the research plan as well as those important for the project

For you to learn to think independently, the research plan should be designed by you and only afterwards discussed with the supervisor/examiner. During the discussion, you should receive clear feedback and make adjustments based on feasibility. Investing sufficient time on the research plan will help you move forward in the project in a confident way. You may also feel encouraged to present the project plan to the group/department for additional feedback. Be aware that,just like the timetable, the research plan should be adjusted during the project. This will help you to keep the literature background, aims, and strategy in mind while completing your research project.

2.3 Gathering and processing data

You can start the practical work once the research plan is ready. Depending on the nature of the project, the data collection will vary (e.g., laboratory/field-based experiments, computational models, database analysis, etc.). You should keep a lab journal to save and organize all the gathered data. This is an important habit for you as a researcher and it allows your supervisor and examiner to monitor your accuracy and progression.
You should have sufficient guidance at the start of the project and the involvement of your supervisor in the practical work should decrease over time. You should discuss with your supervisor what the best way for you to achieve that would be. You should feel free to ask for help and discuss new results, ideas and experimental planning with your supervisor and/or examiner.

2.4 Writing the report

The final report is an important outcome of the research project. You need to select, organize, interpret and put into context the data collected. The first steps include deciding on the scientific format of the report (e.g., scientific article, report, etc.) and preparing an outline. You and your supervisor should decide on a set of deadlines and feedback moments to give structure to the writing process and avoid possible delay. The final report is written in English unless an exception is made because the research is preformed in companies or government organizations that require a Dutch report.
The plain language summary is aimed at informing the general audience and fulfills the learning goal of comprehensive reporting to people outside the field. This summary should meet the requirements:

- Approximately 500 words long
- Understandable for people with high school Biology knowledge (VWO-level)
- In English or Dutch (only if the supervisor speaks Dutch)

Take note that the end report should only feature one author, which is the student. The end report should not be a compilation of efforts from multiple authors. It is essential that only your work is handed in and graded. Should there be an interest in publishing the report in an academic journal, the process to prepare the article should start after grading. The final product for assessment should not have influences of multiple authors.

2.5 Presenting the project

At the end of the research project, you need to give a final presentation to the research group (in English). If the project takes place outside UU/UMCU, you will give a presentation both at the host institute and at the research group of the examiner. Ideally, you will have finished the report before the final presentation. Your supervisor should provide feedback on the presentation beforehand (e.g., clarity of the slideshow, order of the story, accuracy of the conclusions, etc.).

2.6 Confidentiality for research projects outside UU/UMCU

The host institute may require you to apply confidentiality during and/or after the research project. In that case the following applies:

- The examiner should be allowed to have access to the report of the student at all times.
- The Board of Examiners should be allowed to have access to the report upon request.
- The student should be able to give their final presentation at the research group of the examiner.

In case of confidentiality, however, the student does not have to provide a copy of the report to the Master's Administration Office but just one page including the following:

- Title of the project
- Student name, number and Master's programme
- Name, email address and affiliation of the examiner and supervisor host institute
- Short summary of the project and remarks regarding confidentiality.
- Signature of the examiner

The final report should be checked for plagiarism (also in case of confidentiality) by the examiner.

2.7 Publishing

The final report can be written as a scientific article. However, writing a scientific article and preparing it for submission to a scientific journal is a difficult skill to master. This can have a negative influence in the final assessment. You are encouraged to discuss with your supervisor and examiner creating a plan that ensures the project completion on time avoiding possible delays of the publication process. The assessment should be completed before preparing the article for publication.

Chapter 3. During the research project

3.1 Expectations and feedback

Before the start of the project, it is important to discuss the expectations, learning outcomes and the matching assessment criteria with your examiner and supervisor. During the project, regular meetings should take place in which you discuss your learning progress with your supervisor. These evaluation meetings preferably take place every 2 months and at least once 2 or 3 months after the start of the research project (mandatory interim assessment meeting). Apart from discussing expectations, strengths and points for improvement, these meetings are a good moment in which you and your supervisor could discuss next steps, future career perspectives, etc. You can also provide feedback on the supervision and the feedback received.

Together with the Life Sciences Representatives (LSR), we developed the SEED tool for supporting you during those meetings. You can find the form here. The purpose of the tool includes setting expectations, making agreements and two-way feedback, meaning you will also provide your supervisor with constructive feedback about supervision and your collaboration so far, from a respectful and professional point of view.

3.2 Working schedules and time off

At the beginning of your project, and using the tool mentioned above, you should discuss the expectations regarding working schedules and time off.

Try to maintain a healthy working schedule in the lab. Unless it is required for the project, respect office hours and limit the lab work performed in the evenings and weekends. Take into account that you should never be working without supervision in the lab. When setting up the planning for the project, make sure to reserve time for a suitable holiday leave.

3.3 Final assessment

When keeping the assessment of the project in mind, be aware that this is a learning experience for you. Take into account both your 'end products' as well as the overall learning process, such as your speed of learning, the ability to absorb new information and your work attitude will be assessed throughout the project.

The Rubrics contain a list of assessment criteria, which can be used as a guideline for the final assessment. Some examiners determine the final mark by systematically weighing the assessment criteria they consider particularly important. Others may weigh up these factors more instinctively. You are entitled to know in which areas you are to be assessed, so discuss this on time with your examiner.

The examiner must complete the assessment form within 10 working days after the student has handed in the final report and has given an oral presentation. In order to make the assessment as objective as possible and to check if you have achieved learning goals, use of the rubrics for research skills (60% of final grade), report (30%) and presentation (10%) is recommended to examiners and supervisors. All three elements have to be awarded at least a 5,5 in order for you to pass the final examination of the project. You should be offered one chance for re-examination of each insufficient component. You and your examiner should discuss the deadlines and requirements for the re-examination and put it in writing.

For projects inside UU/UMCU, the assessment is performed by the examiner in close consultation with the daily supervisor and the second reviewer.
For projects outside UU/UMCU, the supervisor host institute grades all three components. The examiner and supervisor host institute should contact each other in order to make sure that the assessment of all components is performed according to the guidelines of the GSLS. The examiner establishes grades for all parts based on own observations and determines the final grade.
For projects abroad:

- First, the supervisor host institute determines the grades according to the marking system (e.g., Anglo-American letter grading (F-A+)) of that country in consultation with the examiner.
- Next, the examiner converts the grade according to the Dutch marking system. The conversion table is available here.

If the examiners and second reviewers or supervisor host institutes marks differ by 2 or more points, the examiner should notify the Board of Examiners.
In order to meet the *cum laude* requirements a student should receive an 8.5 or higher for their research project(s).
When the assessment form is signed by an examiner, it is stated that the report has been checked for plagiarism (see next paragraph).
The examiner can contact the Assessment Support Panel when advice is needed on grading (for example when there is doubt or something is unclear). They can be reached by emailing asp@umcutrecht.nl

3.4 Plagiarism check: Turnitin

Utrecht University takes fraud and plagiarism very seriously. You as a student are responsible for your work and using correct references. Also the examiner is responsible for ensuring that none of these issues take place. The plagiarism-detection software supported by Utrecht University is Turnitin, via Brightspace or Osiris Case. As a general rule, all written products from Utrecht University (essays, reports and writing assignments) have to be checked for plagiarism by using this software. It indicates to what extent plagiarism is committed, and which source is used.
Any act of fraud of plagiarism should be reported to the Board of Examiners. Students committing fraud or plagiarism will be punished by the sanctions described in the Education and Examination Regulations, varying from invalidation of a paper and a record in OSIRIS to permanent termination of registration to the programme. Furthermore, no *cum laude* classification can be obtained.

3.5 Completion of the research project

In order to complete the research project and get the grade registered in Osiris, you and your examiner need to follow these instructions:

- You send the final report to examiner, second reviewer (or supervisor host institute, if the project is outside UU/UMCU), and programme coordinator.
- You and your supervisor check together if there are any restrictions on publication (embargo). If there are, the examiner should upload the final report themselves in Turnitin so that it can be done under embargo (check guidelines on students' site).
- The examiner discusses the grading together with the supervisor host institute or second reviewer. The examiner fills out the assessment form in Osiris Case. This includes the rubrics and the Turnitin check.
- After the examiner has handed in the final assessment, the second reviewer (for projects inside UU/UMCU) or supervisor host (for projects outside UU/UMCU) will need to approve the assessment in Osiris Case.
- You will receive a notice from Osiris Case to upload your report. When this is completed the Master's Administration Office will register the grade.

Chapter 4. Issues and problems

4.1 Identifying issues

There may be times when you and your supervisor disagree about the progress or contents of the project, or when you fail to meet the supervisor's expectations. You may be experiencing personal problems, which can cause a delay in the progress of your research. It is important to identify and communicate issues in time and look for solutions to prevent further problems and delays.

Although you are expected to indicate when you need help, your supervisor and examiner should also actively keep in touch with you to identify and discuss any issues that may arise. Keep the following questions in mind: Do you feel there is enough time? Do you think it is going well? Do your supervisor and examiner think the project is progressing well? Is the feedback received understandable and are you able to learn from it?

4.2 Possible problems

Below you will find a list of frequently occurring problems, accompanied by some useful questions for identifying them for yourself and communicating with your supervisor and/or examiner.

- Bottlenecks in the 'problem formulation' phase

  If the scope of the project is too broad, or not clearly defined, you might have no clear reference point and run the risk of getting stuck in the information gathering phase. Because of this, it is important that you define the subject carefully and precisely.
  The following questions are particularly useful in this respect: Why have you selected this particular topic (in this research field)? Why does this topic interest you? What are the aims and objectives of your project? How can you demarcate your issue of interest? Which articles do you need to read if your keyword search produces 5.000 hits? Can the topic of interest be researched in the available time?

- Problems during writing the report

  You may encounter problems during the writing phase. The following questions are particularly useful in this respect: Who is your target audience (general science, scientific journal)? What are the standard criteria for the writing of the report? Do you have a rough outline of the table of contents, and have you discussed it with your supervisor? Do you know how to formulate scientific sentences, how to use references and how to edit a text?

- Attitudinal problems

  In certain occasions, you may have a different perception of the project than your supervisor and/or examiner, or you might not know what is expected of you. Also, you may be experiencing problems of a personal nature, causing a (serious) delay in the research. The following questions could be useful in this respect: How are you coping with the time pressure? Is the topic still sufficiently interesting? Are you receiving sufficient and appropriate feedback? Are you on track with the set deadlines?

Many of these problems can be prevented by making clear agreements before the start of the project. If you have personal questions or problems, but do not want to discuss this with your examiner, supervisor or other group members, you are advised to refer to the programme coordinator or study advisor. If a dispute arises despite these agreements, the student, examiner and/or supervisor(s) are expected to discuss the issues with each other first. If this fails to resolve the dispute, the student, the examiner and/or the supervisor can consult the programme coordinator, research project coordinator or academic counsellor. Any conversation with the

academic counsellor is confidential. With the prior approval of the student, examiner and supervisor, the academic counsellor contacts the other party, or other experts (e.g., the programme coordinator or institute director) for further mediation.

If consulting the programme coordinator or academic counsellor does not resolve the issue, the student discusses with the academic counsellor about the next step. This might be:

- Contacting one of the complaints coordinators, in case of a dispute on personal grounds.
- Or as a last resort contact the Examinations Appeals Board (College voor het Beroep van de Examens, CBE) in the case student disagrees with the decision of the Board of Examiners or an examiner.

4.3 Premature termination of the Research Project

You can also choose not to finish the project. This can be due to of a variety of reasons, such as the project has failed to meet your expectations, or you are experiencing personal problems that make it impossible to continue. Before deciding to terminate a research project, you should contact your programme coordinator and/or the academic counsellor, discuss the problems and look for a solution. The academic counsellor will advise you on further progress of the study programme. Students must notify their supervisor, examiner, programme coordinator and the Master's administration office as soon as possible of the decision to stop the project.

A project can also be terminated by the examiner. Reasons could be because the student fails to honour the agreements or doesn't stay in contact.

The following guidelines should be used:

1. The student has failed to honour the agreements as agreed upon and written down in the application form, and has been reprimanded clearly on several occasions by the supervisor and/or examiner.
2. The student has been granted at least two opportunities to make up for past behaviours/attitudes by continuing the project in the agreed upon manner. The student must have been notified in writing.
3. The supervisor and/or examiner has mentioned a clear deadline in the second letter, warning the student that the project will end unless the student's behaviour is improved and lives up to the previously made agreements. The student will be notified in writing if the project is terminated.
4. The supervisor and/or examiner has sent copies of this correspondence to the programme coordinator and study counsellor.
5. The student is entitled to appeal this decision with the Examinations Appeals Board. No credits will be given to prematurely terminated projects.

Additional sources and contact information

Students' Site of the Graduate School of Life Sciences
Teacher's Guide of the Graduate School of Life Sciences
GSLS GenAI Guidelines

Links to contact information

- Board of Examiners
- Assessment Support Panel
- Programme coordinators
- Research project coordinators