

Checklist for PhD candidates: final steps of the PhD process at SHE

Preparing the final phase (>6 months before thesis submission)

- ☐ Look at [examples of SHE PhD dissertations](#) for inspiration on structuring your dissertation and the introduction and discussion chapters
- ☐ Alert your supervisors to the “SHE Checklist for Supervisors”
- ☐ Have a look at the [UM Doctoral Regulations](#) and the [Frequently Asked Questions about the PhD defense](#) at Maastricht University
- ☐ Start planning the writing of the introduction and discussion chapter, the impact paragraph (see instructions^A), and the summary chapter.

Entering the final phase (0-6 months before thesis submission)

- ☐ Confirm with your principal supervisor (promotor) that they contact the SHE PhD office (Nicky Verleng) at least three months before the manuscript is ready for submission
- ☐ Discuss potential assessment committee members with your supervisors: the supervisors select the members, but the candidate is typically involved in these discussions. Check the requirements for assessment committee members^B. Your promotor invites the assessment committee members to take place in the committee
- ☐ Contact the SHE data manager (shedata@maastrichtuniversity.nl) to [store your research data on Dataverse](#) (you can still access your data after graduation)
- ☐ Complete your PhD thesis for submission. The version for the assessment committee should contain:
 - Title page
 - Page that lists the names and affiliations of supervisors and assessment committee members
 - Table of contents
 - Introduction chapter
 - Research chapters
 - Discussion chapter
 - Impact paragraph^A
 - English summary

A Dutch summary and the Propositions^C are not required for the assessment committee version of the PhD thesis

- ☐ Ask the supervisory team’s approval of the final version of the thesis

The thesis approval phase (thesis submission & assessment)

This phase takes 4-8 weeks

- ☐ Send the final version of your thesis to the SHE PhD office (Nicky Verleng), and put your team of supervisors in CC
- ☐ Check with your promotor if the Dean has approved their request for the composition of the assessment committee, and with Nicky Verleng that she sends the thesis & instructions to the assessment committee members within two weeks of the Dean’s approval. After four weeks of reading time (longer during summer or Christmas break), the chair of the assessment committee will inform the promotor, the Dean and the UM PhD office about the decision of the assessment committee^D
- ☐ While waiting for the committee’s decision, you can finalize the remaining parts of the dissertation:
 - Propositions (see proposition requirements & tips^C). Ask your supervisory team for approval of the propositions

- Dutch summary. Non-Dutch-speaking PhD candidates can make use of online tools and ask their supervisors for help with checking the translation
 - A brief Curriculum Vitae
 - Acknowledgements
 - SHE dissertation series (available from the SHE PhD office)
 - If applicable: ICO dissertation series (available from ICO)
 - Check the Guidelines for thesis first and last pages^E
- Select a printer company for thesis formatting, layout and printing, and contact them for quotes. Check this advice on how many theses you'll need to include in the quote, and options for printer companies & reimbursement^F
 - Design the thesis cover or have it designed
 - After the committee's reading time, ask your promotor to share the decision and the anonymized assessment forms
 - Possibly: incorporate feedback from the assessment committee with guidance from your supervisors

Planning the PhD defense (after thesis approval, 3-6 months before PhD defense)

- As a PhD candidate, contact the UM PhD office to set a defense date (alternatively one of your supervisors can do this; discuss within the team who will be responsible). The defense needs to take place within six months of the assessment decision.
 - First consult within the supervisory team for three suitable options
 - Then check these options with the UM PhD office (phone +31 43 388 3096, email phd-office@maastrichtuniversity.nl)
 - Ask your promotor to share these two or three options with the assessment committee members to ask for their preferences
 - Once a date has been set, inform the UM PhD office and Nicky Verleng!
 - Make sure that the promotor informs the defense committee members
- Complete "Model Letter 7" (this letter will be shared with you by the UM PhD office). The letter is a formal approval request for your admission to the public defense and the approval of your title page. Fill out this letter together with your promotor. The formal title page (including date of the defense) and reverse title page (names and affiliations of supervisors and assessment committee members) need to be included. **Send this to the UM PhD office (and CC to Nicky Verleng!) for formal approval, at least 3 months before the defense date!**
- Communicate the defense date with people you would like to be there (family, friends, colleagues)
- In case less than five assessment committee members can make it on the selected date, the promotor needs to invite additional members for the PhD defense committee. Check the requirements for the defense committee members^G. The promotor will submit a request for formal approval of the defense committee members and order of opposition ("Model Letter 8")

Final steps of the final phase (after thesis approval, 0-6 months before PhD defense)

Printing & distributing the thesis

- Make sure that you or the printer company does final formatting and layout of the thesis. Have a look at thesis examples and see the Guidelines for thesis first and last pages^E for further details.
- Send digital version to UM library with Statement of Approval signed by your promotor (three weeks before defense ceremony at the latest). Find details [here](#). You can also request an ISBN and DOI in this process (alternatively the printer company may provide the ISBN)
- Add an invitation for the defense ceremony and reception

- ☐ Take time to check the proof for printing errors, misspellings, design errors, etc.
- ☐ When the title page and reverse title page have been formally approved by the UM PhD office, print the thesis^F.
- ☐ For PhD candidates not based in the Netherlands, inform the printer company to address the printed thesis to Nicky Verleng, who will distribute it for you:
 - Maastricht University
SHE/N.Verleng
Universiteitssingel 60
6229 ER Maastricht
the Netherlands
- ☐ Distribute the thesis. A printed version should be sent to the assessment committee members at least three weeks before the defense
- ☐ Send the thesis title, abstract, and title page to the SHE communication officer ([Willine van den Brink](#))

Preparing the PhD defense

- ☐ Have another look at the [Frequently Asked Questions about the PhD defense](#) at Maastricht University
- ☐ Invite family, friends and colleagues to the PhD defense ceremony^H
- ☐ Organize reception, drinks and/or dinner after defense^H
- ☐ Select and invite two Paranympths^I
- ☐ Attend or watch a SHE PhD defense to learn about the expectations. Check the [agenda on the SHE website](#) for upcoming PhD defenses, and watch them through the [Maastricht University PhD Defenses YouTube channel](#) (livestream or video).
- ☐ Prepare (powerpoint) presentation and practice your presentation. Time it at 15 minutes!
- ☐ Study your PhD dissertation carefully and think of possible questions from the defense committee members and your answers
- ☐ Organize a mock PhD defense^J and ask for feedback on your presentation and on answering questions
- ☐ Make an appointment to test your powerpoint at the PhD defense location (the UM PhD office will inform you about this)
- ☐ Possibly: organize thank you gifts
- ☐ Possibly: hire a photographer

During the PhD defense

- ☐ Enjoy the moment!

After the PhD defense

- ☐ Enjoy your achievement and take a few days off (at least the day after the defense)
- ☐ Apply for reimbursement of promotion costs (thesis printing and reception), the application form will be sent to you by the UM PhD office. Send the completed form to the [SHE financial contact person, Joost von Weersch](#).
- ☐ Stay connected to SHE! E.g. by following [SHE on LinkedIn](#), subscribing to [SHE Communicates](#), participating in SHE events, joining the SHE Alumni Community, and informing us when your contact info changes

NOTES

- **A: The impact paragraph**
- **B: The composition of the assessment committee**
- **C: Instructions for writing propositions**
- **D: The assessment decision**
- **E: Guidelines for thesis first and last pages**
- **F: Printing your thesis: numbers, printer companies, costs & reimbursements**
- **G: The composition of the defense committee**
- **H: The PhD defense and reception**
- **I: The paronyms**
- **J: The mock PhD defense**

A: The impact paragraph

The impact paragraph is a reflection of 500 to 2000 words, in layman's terms (for a wide target group), on the scientific impact of the results of the research described in the thesis, as well as, if applicable, the social impact anticipated or already achieved. If the impact of the results of the research is also discussed elsewhere in the thesis, the candidate can come back to it in the impact paragraph. The paragraph must be written in the same language as the thesis.

Scientific impact is the short- and long-term contribution of the results of scientific research, to a shift in understanding and to advance science, method, theory and application within and across disciplines. Scientific impact has a wide variety of manifestations: from conferences for a scientific audience to contributions to publications, (open) data, infrastructure or education.

Impact on society is the short- and long-term contribution of the results of scientific research to changes in, or development of societal sectors and to societal challenges. Examples of societal sectors include the economy, culture, public sector and healthcare. Impact on society has a wide variety of manifestations: from communicating science to the wider public to contributions to government policy, patient care or innovation in the industry or business sectors.

Four questions are provided that can serve as a guideline for drafting the impact paragraph:

- (Research) What is the main objective of the research described in the thesis and what are the most important results and conclusions?
- (Relevance) What is the (potential) contribution of the results from this research to science, and, if applicable, to social sectors and social challenges?
- (Target group) To whom are the research results interesting and/or relevant? And why?
- (Activity) In what way can these target groups be involved in and informed about the research results, so that the knowledge gained can be used in the future?

B: The composition of the assessment committee

Requirements:

- The committee consists of 4-5 members representing different scientific views
- The chair is a UM full professor with *ius promovendi*
- At least two members are full professors or emeritus professors who have the *ius promovendi*. An international professor should demonstrably be a full professor!
- At most two members are experts without the *ius promovendi*. They should have a PhD degree
- Two members are not attached to the UM. A person with some sort of UM relation will be regarded as an internal (UM) member
- Ideally the committee includes at least 1 female and 1 male member
- A member cannot be a (co)supervisor, co-author, or partner/family member of the candidate up to the 2nd degree

C: Instructions for writing propositions

At Maastricht University PhD candidates are required to submit a set of *propositions* (in Dutch: *stellingen*) alongside their dissertation. These are short, well-reasoned statements that reflect the candidate's ability to think critically, argue concisely, and connect their research to broader scientific or societal contexts. They are

intended to stimulate discussion, show that the candidate can engage thoughtfully with topics beyond the focus of the research, and can formulate defensible positions and back them up with clear reasoning.

A minimum of 8 and a maximum of 11 propositions or statements should be added to the PhD thesis (only required for the final dissertation, not for the assessment committee version). Four propositions must be related to the subject of the dissertation. Three propositions must be related to the candidate's discipline, with the exception of the subject of the thesis. One proposition must be related to the impact of the results of the research for science and/or society. Any other propositions do not have to be related to the subject or the discipline. Find examples (attached to SHE dissertations) [here](#).

The team of supervisors must approve the final list of propositions. It is advisable that candidates start in time with thinking about the propositions; preferably they collect them during the course of the project. During the PhD defense, questions can be asked about the propositions. Candidates should be able to defend them.

A good proposition is:

- Concise: Usually 1–2 sentences, no long explanations.
- Debatable: Avoid facts everyone agrees on; instead, make a claim that requires reasoning.
- Grounded: Supported by evidence, logic, or expert consensus (even if not everyone agrees).
- Relevant: Linked to the dissertation, the field, or a broader societal theme.
- Memorable: Phrased clearly and, if possible, elegantly.

Types of propositions include research-focused, methodological, theoretical, policy-oriented, ethical, educational, societal, or light and personal (but defensible). Contact the SHE PhD coordinator if you require a step-by-step writing guide.

D: The assessment decision

The assessment committee will assess the quality of the thesis and will decide whether the thesis is of sufficient quality to be defended at Maastricht University. The assessment committee has the possibility to approve the thesis or to ask for minor revisions, which will be executed under supervision of the supervisor (i.e. the thesis will not be resubmitted to the committee). In very exceptional cases, the committee may reject a thesis, after which the candidate can resubmit a new version within six months.

E. Guidelines for thesis first and last pages

In order to promote the School of Health Professions Education (SHE) dissertations, PhD candidates within SHE are requested to use the following structure for first and last pages of their thesis.

Page 1: Title thesis

Page 2: The research reported here was carried out at Maastricht University / MUMC+ (use logo), in the School of Health Professions Education (use SHE logo), and, if applicable, in the context of ICO (use ICO logo), and if applicable, supported by funder (use funder logo) ([download example here](#))

ISBN, DOI, copyright and credits to cover design, layout and printing can be mentioned on this page.
[The Maastricht University logo and the SHE logo can be found in the 'SHE Group' in Umployee.](#)

Page 3: Formal approved title page: Information about the public defense ceremony, see example thesis (this can be in Dutch or English)

Page 4:

Name(s) and affiliations of the promotor(s)

Name(s) and affiliations of the co-promotor(s)

Names and affiliations of the assessment committee members, starting with the chair and then in alphabetical order. For internal supervisors and members "Maastricht University" is mentioned as affiliation. For external supervisors and members the institution and country are mentioned.

Second-to-last page: SHE dissertation series, check the most recent version with the SHE PhD office

Last page (only for ICO PhD candidates): ICO dissertation series (available from ICO)

F: Printing your thesis: numbers, printer companies, costs & reimbursements

Make a list of people you want to send the thesis to so you know how many theses you want to have printed. Reserve 20 copies for SHE (this includes 6 for UM PhD office, 3 for supervisory team, 5-7 for assessment committee, 4-5 for SHE). It is up to you to order any amount of theses to be printed on top of these 20. Typically, your collaborators, close colleagues and family receive a copy. Alternatively, you can send a digital version.

Some options for printing your thesis: [Ipskamp Printing](#), [Gildeprint](#) or [Proefschriftmaken.nl](#). However, **don't print yet** before you receive approval from the assessment committee, and before your title page and defense date have been formally approved, **see section Printing & distributing the thesis**.

The costs for layout and printing the PhD thesis are to be advanced by the PhD candidate. However, these costs (up to EUR 2000 including the reception costs) can be claimed to Maastricht University. A claim form can be submitted, this will be shared with you by the UM PhD office closer to the PhD defense date.

G: The composition of the defense committee

Requirements:

- The Defense Committee consists in principle of the supervisors, and all members of the Assessment Committee, and possibly one or more professors and persons with a doctorate. Persons without a doctorate with recognised expertise in the field of the thesis subject can, with the consent of the Board of Deans, be appointed as a member.
- The Defense Committee, apart from the supervisors, must consist preferably of 5-7 members, but of at least 4 members.
- If applicable, the experts invited for Cum Laude assessment of the thesis must be invited to sit on the Defense Committee.
- The first supervisor ensures that in principle at least half of the members of the Defense Committee are attached to the University and that in principle at least half of the members of the Defense Committee are professors or emeritus professors.
- The partner and family members up to the second degree of the doctoral candidate cannot be members of the Defense Committee.
- The defense committee members will not be paid any fees or travel costs to participate in the PhD ceremony by SHE. If travel of an external member needs to be covered, the PhD candidate must find financial resources themselves.

H: The PhD defense and reception

The thesis will be publicly defended in a one-hour session in which members of the assessment committee and possibly additional examiners question the candidate on various aspects of the research. The defense is an open ceremony and may be attended by relatives, friends and colleagues of the candidate. The PhD degree from Maastricht University is awarded after the ceremony. The defense will take place at Minderbroedersberg 4-6, Maastricht (in the city centre). A hybrid form, where some of the members of the assessment committee join online, is possible as well.

The one-hour session starts with a 15-minute presentation by PhD candidate (this time limit is strict!), followed by 45 minutes of discussion with the opponents. The presentation should summarize the thesis and is meant to inform the (lay) audience. During the discussion with the opponents, full professors should be addressed as "highly esteemed opponent", and assistant and associate professors as "esteemed opponent".

The PhD candidate is required to organize a (small) reception after the PhD defense ceremony to celebrate the achievement, and to enable the committee members to congratulate the candidate. You can choose to organize this onsite at Minderbroedersberg or at another location. The UM PhD office will provide information about this. There is a possibility to claim the costs of the reception to Maastricht University, using the PhD ceremony allowance. The form will be sent to you by the UM PhD office.

I: The paranympths

During the defense two people will support the candidate. They are called “paranympths”. They will sit next to the PhD candidate during the defense and have no further role. They could be asked to read aloud one of the propositions during the defense. The PhD candidate can choose these individuals; it could be relatives, friends or colleagues. In online defense ceremonies there are no paranympths.

Sometimes paranympths help to plan the reception/party after the defense, and/or organize a joint gift or keepsake for the candidate. You can also ask them to help you with organizing your mock defense.

J: The mock PhD defense

A possible approach to the mock defense:

You could schedule a 90-minute session with your supervisors, peer PhD candidates, and/or colleagues to do a mock PhD defense. Ideally (most of) the attendants are aware of the expectations for PhD defenses at Maastricht University. In the first hour of the session, you could present your 15-minute presentation, and practice the 45 minutes of discussion with opponents. For this purpose, you could ask 4-6 session attendants to prepare a question about one of the chapters from your thesis. The last half hour of the session could be used to discuss their feedback on your presentation and their tips & tricks for answering questions.