



NUTRIM

Institute of Nutrition and Translational Research in Metabolism



NUTRIM PhD Guide



Maastricht University



Maastricht UMC+



1 | Welcome to NUTRIM

1.1 | What is NUTRIM?

NUTRIM Institute of Nutrition and Translational Research in Metabolism aims to contribute to excellence in health maintenance and personalized medicine by unraveling lifestyle- and disease-induced derangements in metabolism and by developing targeted nutritional, exercise and drug interventions. This is facilitated by a state-of-the-art research infra-structure and close interaction between scientists, clinicians and master and PhD candidates.

NUTRIM is a multidisciplinary research institute of approximately 450 researchers including 300 PhD candidates and 65 support staff. Our core research program is organized around integrated multidisciplinary themes in 3 research areas including 21 clinical and basic science departments of Maastricht University Medical Centre+ (MUMC+).

Research Area 1 | Metabolic Health

Researchers study how lifestyle and environment - such as diet, exercise, sleep, and temperature - affect metabolic health. Through human studies and detailed tissue analysis, they uncover mechanisms in muscle, liver, brain, and fat. Their findings guide evidence-based lifestyle and dietary strategies tailored to individual needs. The aim is to enhance quality of life and reduce obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease.

Research Area 2 | Liver and Digestive Health

This research focuses on how the gut and liver interact through the gut-liver axis, bile circulation, and microbiome. Scientists investigate inflammatory, functional, and malignant diseases to improve prevention and treatment. Insights are translated into clinical practice and linked to other organs such as the heart and brain. The ultimate goal is to improve digestive health and overall well-being through an integrated, lifestyle-aware approach.

Research Area 3 | Healthy Ageing

Researchers examine how ageing, lifestyle, and environment - like inactivity, smoking, poor diet, and pollution - affect health and disease. They identify early risk factors for conditions such as muscle loss, metabolic disorders, and respiratory decline. The work supports developing lifestyle interventions that delay disease progression. The focus is on promoting active, independent, and healthy ageing for a better quality of life.

1.2 | Welcome NUTRIM PhD

Welcome to NUTRIM and to the start of your PhD journey. This newest edition of the NUTRIM PhD guide is designed to help you find your way - both at the beginning and throughout the years ahead.

In these pages, you will find practical information on the NUTRIM PhD programme, from setting up your Personal Research Plan and Training and Supervision Plan to navigating courses, supervision, teaching, and progress evaluations. The guide also points you to the many forms of support available within NUTRIM, including the PhD council, introduction activities, and well-being resources, so you know where to turn when you have questions or need a sparring partner.

NUTRIM people and contact information

Prof. Daisy Jonkers

Scientific Director NUTRIM

Dr. Agnes Boots and Dr. Alex Remels

PhD coordinators

NUTRIM PhD council

Rob Levels

Managing Director

Patrick van Gorp

NUTRIM Information Manager and PhD-Track coordinator

Ryan Seyben

NUTRIM Office manager

Danielle Vogt

NUTRIM marketing- communications officer

Contact information NUTRIM

2 | How to get started

2.1 | Types of PhD candidates

There are various types of PhD candidates:

- PhD candidates with a contract for 4 years (or 3 years)
- PhD candidates with a scholarship
- PhD candidates or clinicians working at the hospital and doing a promotion track
- External PhD candidates who are being supervised by a NUTRIM staff member and are registered at UM
- External PhD candidates working abroad being supervised by NUTRIM staff

2.2 | Goals of a PhD programme

The aims of a PhD programme within NUTRIM are to cultivate research capabilities and a broad understanding of human nutrition and metabolism to provide PhD candidates with specific knowledge and skills needed for top-level research and to stimulate interdisciplinary training. You will complete the PhD programme after successfully defending your dissertation.

2.3 | Employment

The requirements for entering a PhD trajectory at Maastricht University vary, but a Master's degree, a high level of English proficiency and a strong academic record are basic prerequisites. Conducting a PhD at Maastricht University means that you are seen as a regular employee of the institution. You can inform about your working hours, conditions etc. with your HR assistant. The [Regulation governing the attainment of doctoral degrees](#) offers an overview of the requirements, regulations and steps to take for obtaining a PhD within Maastricht University. PhD candidates within NUTRIM are generally committed to a 4-year programme of education and supervision. Within 3 months after appointment, each PhD candidate and his / her supervisor jointly design a Training and Supervision Plan (TSP) and a Personal Research Plan (PRP). Courses are planned, as much as desired, when you need the knowledge and skills for a particular topic, depending on the stage of the research project. You may select external courses, exchange visits and international conferences and include them in the NUTRIM portfolio after positive evaluation. Your progress is evaluated during the annual assessment interviews during the PhD trajectory, using the TSP and PRP.

2.4 | PhD candidate tasks

Education and self-development

As a PhD candidate, you are asked to make a well-balanced choice from methodological and other courses and a variety of PhD-related activities. Three categories of educational events can be distinguished:

Category 1 - Department specific activities

Category 2 - FHML/MUMC+ PhD training programmes.

All courses are listed on [the FHML webpage for PhD's](#)

Category 3 - Institute specific activities

In the TSP the titles of courses you will attend are listed by category. Apart from attending scientific and some mandatory courses each PhD candidate is expected to participate in congresses, symposia, seminars and institute research meetings. However, as participation mostly involves fees and other travel expenses, the supervisor must approve plans for attending congresses etc. You can use TRACK as portfolio to schedule these activities and to provide an overview of them.

NUTRIM introduction course

Attending the two-day Introductory NUTRIM Course is compulsory for all first-year PhD candidates. During these days you will be introduced to NUTRIM and its variety of research topics. The programme includes relevant talks and discussions about the do's and don'ts in a PhD project. First-year PhD candidates will be invited by the NUTRIM PhD council.

Mandatory PhD Trainings

Maastricht University places great importance on *Research Ethics and Integrity, Open Science, and Science Communication*. To support your development in these areas, dedicated training courses have been developed and are compulsory parts of your PhD programme. These courses are offered online and can be completed individually. Additionally, interactive interdisciplinary sessions are organized for each theme, allowing you to exchange experiences with fellow PhD candidates. You can find the training courses and more information about registration on [the UM library website](#)

Registration of your educational activities in Track

NUTRIM PhD candidates are responsible for registering and keeping track of their educational activities and other training in the Track system. The basis of this portfolio is formed by the educational modules and courses included in Track. In order to keep the portfolio in PhD-Track up to date, PhD candidates must enter every course they have taken in PhD-Track under the heading "Professional Courses".

It is also possible to add additional courses or activities and upload certificates obtained to support the registration. At the end of the PhD programme, a formal overview of the registered educational activities can be requested from the [NUTRIM secretariat](#).

Plan your training and supervision

For the purposes of the annual review of the Training and Supervision Plan, it is therefore advisable to enter the courses still to be taken in PhD-Track, along with the year in which a particular course is expected to be taken ('planned'). This can then be discussed during the annual meeting with the supervision team.

Teaching

Being a member of the departmental staff, the third aspect of a PhD candidates' job is teaching. PhD candidates can be asked to teach bachelor and master students at the Faculty of Health, Medicine and Life Sciences (FHML). The amount of time of input may vary. FHML regulations state a maximum of 10% of a full employment. Teaching may comprise for instance being a tutor in a tutorial group; supervising a student during traineeship or during writing a master's thesis, lecturing, or giving practical skills training.

2.5 | PhD-Track System, the Portfolio Supervision System

The Faculty of Health, Medicine and Life Sciences (FHML) uses the Maastricht University programme PhD-Track to support PhD candidates in monitoring their progress and maintaining a comprehensive record of their activities. The system serves both as a progress management tool and as a portfolio platform documenting the various components of the PhD trajectory. PhD-Track provides a visual overview of your timeline within the PhD trajectory and highlights key milestones. Progress is monitored through regular evaluations by your (co-)supervisors and through the Annual Questionnaire, which becomes available nine months after the start of your appointment and is repeated annually.

PhD-Track is also used to plan and document the mandatory introduction courses and other professional courses to take, visits to make and conferences to attend. In the beginning of the PhD, you can reflect on your skills and competences and use this reflection to set up goals for your PhD training programme.

PhD- track coordinator is Patrick van Gorp

You can login to PhD-Track [here](#).

Training and Supervision Plan (TSP)

The Training and Supervision Plan (TSP) is a mandatory document that outlines how you will develop your research and professional skills during your PhD. Within the first three months, you must complete the TSP (together with the Personal Research Plan, PRP) in discussion with your supervisors. In it, you agree on your research goals, responsibilities, planned courses, and other development activities. The TSP is signed by your supervisor(s), the NUTRIM PhD coordinator (on behalf of the Dean), and - if you are an internal PhD candidate - by your HR advisor. Your TSP is based on your educational and professional experience, the specific skills and knowledge needed for your research, and your career goals. It is based and created by your updates in PhD-Track, where it forms part of your personal portfolio. It is recommended to use the updated TSP as a starting point for the annual evaluation meeting with the supervisors, and be finalized by uploading the updated and signed version in PhD-Track.

Personal Research Plan (PRP)

The Personal Research Plan (PRP) is developed in collaboration with your supervision team and describes the scientific content, objectives, and timeline of your PhD research. The PRP must present a feasible research plan that can be completed within the appointment period, or according to individual agreements with the supervisors. The PRP is signed by both the PhD candidate and the daily supervisor, uploaded in PhD-Track, and submitted to the PhD coordinator for evaluation. Throughout your trajectory, the PRP should be evaluated and revisited periodically to assess progress and, where necessary, updated in consultation with your supervisor(s) to reflect adjustments in research direction, planning or timing.

2.6 | Support

If you have questions or run into issues during your PhD which you cannot solve with your colleagues, the NUTRIM PhD council is available for support at the peer-to-peer level. If you want to discuss this with an independent person, you can reach out to the [NUTRIM PhD council](#) or to [Agnes Boots](#) and [Alex Remels](#) Assistant Professors at the Department of Toxicology. They are the PhD coordinators within NUTRIM. The PhD coordinators monitor the continuity

of progress of each individual PhD candidate using the NUTRIM progress monitoring procedure, approve the TSP within 3 months after employment of a PhD candidate and ensure their annual adaptation. They furthermore act as impartial ombudsman and trust person for PhD candidates, organize the courses program, represent PhD candidates at institute council meetings, and represent NUTRIM at the Interfaculty PhD Candidates' Committee (IPC). If the issues are still not resolved or other actions need to be taken, they can refer you to the right person or can take actions for you. If you think he/she might be too much involved in your project, they can refer you to another trust person. In case you encounter other issues you can contact [the People and Development department](#) or [People & Development \(HR\)](#).

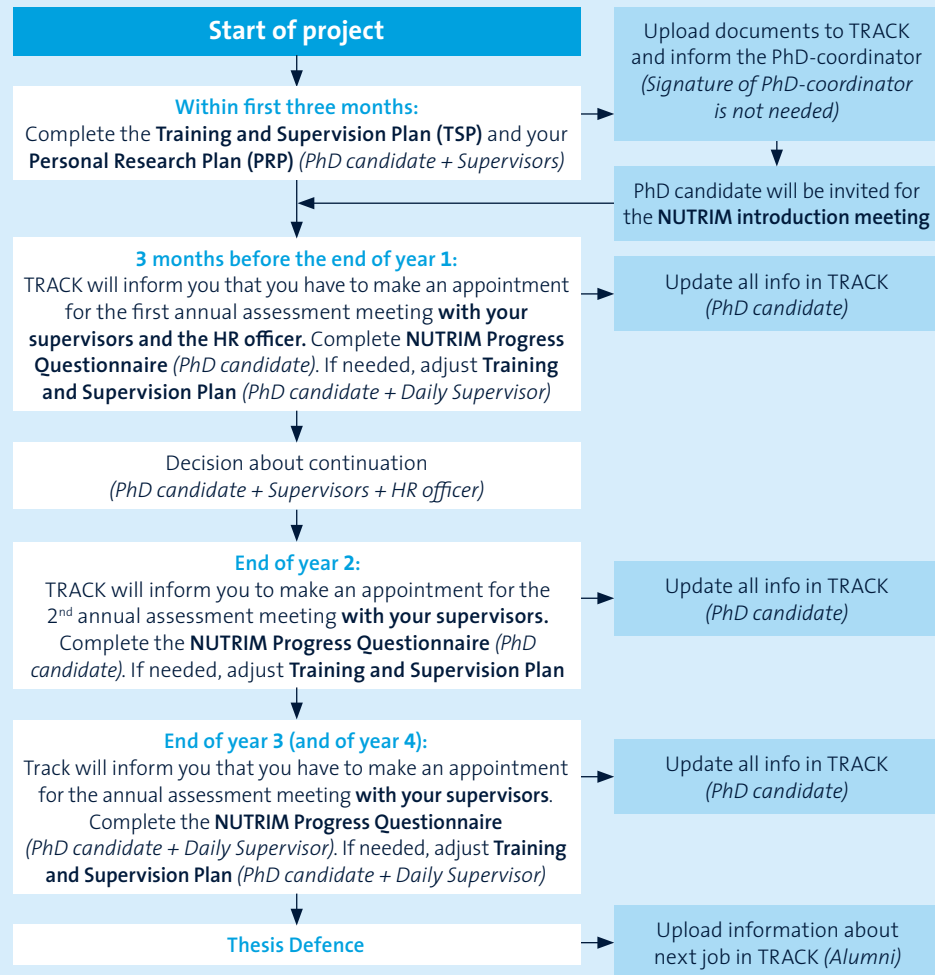
2.7 | PhD supporting squads

As off 2025 the NUTRIM PhD coordinators initiated a new buddy system. PhD supporting squads are groups of approximately eight NUTRIM PhD candidates who have all started their PhD project within the same year. These groups facilitate accessible communication between PhD candidates within different departments of NUTRIM. They are created to offer easy-accessible support from independent peers on PhD-related subjects as well as any other work-related or private subjects of personal interest and relevance. Although participation is not mandatory, it is highly recommended as it will make your PhD-journey smoother and hopefully also more enjoyable. The exact details and logistics are subject to the preferences of each individual supporting squad. Additional support on this matter can be asked to either the [NUTRIM PhD council](#) or the [NUTRIM PhD student coordinators](#).

2.8 | Evaluation

The first evaluation meeting (the so-called 'go / no-go meeting') takes place approximately 10 months after appointment, in order to determine whether you are allowed to continue. The supervising team (supervisor and co-supervisor), the HR manager, and you will be present at this meeting. If the employment is extended, you will receive a new contract for the remaining three years. An evaluation meeting with the supervising team will take place each following year. If, at evaluation meetings or any moment during the employment, you decide to end your PhD programme, or the supervising team decides that your work is of too low a quality or shows too little progress, the Scientific Director and the PhD coordinators are informed immediately. To prepare for your yearly meetings, it might be useful to take a look at some of the questions in the appendix.

NUTRIM PhD Progress Monitoring



3 | Work in progress...

3.1 | Education/Self-development

Skills development

Attending the two-day Introductory NUTRIM course is compulsory for all first-year PhD candidates. Mandatory PhD Trainings are also Research Ethics and Integrity, Open Science, and Science Communication (see 2.4). You can choose to improve your skills by attending workshops and courses. The Staff Development Centre of Maastricht University offers **different courses**, for example about writing a cover letter and your CV, a training on networking skills or self-management. **The university library** offers different courses on information skills, such as how to search in different databases, how to use EndNote and to determine in which journal to publish. Some types of research require additional certificates, such as the **BROK certificate** for human studies. These courses should be funded by your research group. It is recommended to discuss with your supervisor if you need to obtain any additional certificate(s) for your PhD trajectory. Further, you can attend courses, which are specifically related to your research topic or the skills that you need to obtain and analyze your data. To make sure that your supervisor agrees with you taking these courses, discuss it beforehand and integrate it into TRACK.

Development days

As employee you have the right for two development days per year. You may use these days to develop skills or knowledge which helps you not only for you PhD project, but also improves your future opportunities on the job market. That means, that the development days may not necessarily be related to your project. For more information, see the [web page about development days](#).

3.2 | Teaching

Supervision

During your project, you may be asked to supervise Bachelor or Master students who want to do an internship at your lab and eventually write their thesis about this internship. During this period, you will help the student to develop some scientific skills and in return, he/she will help you with conducting your project. If you want to benefit from this option, you can, together with your supervisor, publish a proposal for students from Maastricht University on [the dedicated portal](#).

Tutorials

Maastricht University is known for its special Problem Based Learning (PBL) system. This is an interactive system which uses realistic cases as starting point for actively gaining or deepening knowledge. To provide interactive sessions, students follow weekly tutorials to set up and solve learning goals. These tutorials are guided by someone familiar with the topic, who can gently guide the way though the course content and stimulate the independency of the students. You, as a PhD, can use this teaching activity as starting point to develop your teaching skills for groups. To successfully fulfill your tutor role, you need to follow the [PBL introduction course](#). At the end of your PhD programme, you should at least have conducted one tutorship.

For more information about possibilities in developing research skills, see the [UM educational development web page](#).

Lectures

Next to tutorials, you can give lectures for Bachelor or Master students. If you are interested to give a lecture in your research field, discuss this with your supervisor.

Digital learning environment

To share information about lectures, tutorials and study material, Maastricht University offers a [digital platform](#). Students have access to the information about the courses they are assigned to. As a teacher, you can decide which information your students can access. Further, the official study activities of each course are scheduled in the [timetable](#).

3.3 | NUTRIM PhD candidates' Council

NUTRIM's PhD candidates' council is a committee representing the PhD candidates from all NUTRIM research areas. The aim of the council is to inform NUTRIM PhD candidates about issues that are discussed at institute level and to take care of PhD issues, such as supervision and courses, which are brought to the council's attention. The PhD council has an advisory role towards the institute council, meetings of which are attended by the PhD coordinators and the council chair. The council organizes several events including the yearly NUTRIM symposium in November, a quarterly NUTRIM cafe, and the yearly two-day introduction course for new PhD candidates. Updates and upcoming events can be found on the council's [Facebook page](#) and [Instagram](#). If, at any time during your PhD, you would like to comment on issues or suggest new issues for discussion, feel free to [contact](#) the PhD council's! The more you keep in touch, the better they can stand up for your interests.



3.4 | After work

Of course it is also important to blow off some steam after a long day at work. UM Sports is a popular place to go in the evening for many PhD candidates. UM Sports is located behind the building at the Debyelaan (DEB), which itself is opposite the main entrance of the hospital. UM Sports has a gym and offers different sports classes and activities, all of which are given both in Dutch and English. You can buy a membership (with discount) at the counter of UM Sport or [online](#).

Furthermore, the [PhD Academy](#) organizes many events with the aim of enabling PhD candidates from all over the university to mingle with each other. They organize weekly improvisational theatre sessions, monthly movie nights at Cinema Lumière, dancing workshops and a yearly boat party at the beginning of the academic year. Many of their activities are also announced on [Facebook](#).

3.5 | Well-being during your PhD

Challenges can arise during your studies, therefore Maastricht University offers a variety of initiatives and programmes to support your well-being. Explore these activities on the [NUTRIM website](#). Or check out [UM evidence-based-health-tips for students](#).

4 | Ready for graduation?

4.1 | Qualifications of a PhD candidate after 4 years

Science / Research

When you finish your PhD trajectory, you should have reached several goals. In the first place, you should have developed your research skills. For that, you may have attended some courses or trainings (see chapter 3.1) and successfully conducted different projects, attended congresses and published and presented your scientific work. You should be able to think and act evidence-based and be able to implement the newest findings of the field into your ongoing research. Make sure you have achieved a variety of skills, since this will help you to successfully start your next position.

Teaching

As a NUTRIM PhD candidate, you should have learned to independently supervise and teach Bachelor and Master students. Make sure you have achieved these skills by supervising interns, guiding tutorials or practical trainings and giving lectures. For training options, see section 3.2. The experience you gained by the different teaching activities will help you with your following position especially in research and education.

Management

A NUTRIM PhD candidate is expected to have some knowledge of managerial tasks. This is not only for those continuing their career in science but also for the majority of PhD candidates that will have a job in industry, government or health care, or are running their own company. Maastricht University offers courses such as 'Time Management', 'Career Management' or 'Leading Complex Projects'. For more information, see [this page](#).

Fundraising

As last year's PhD candidate, you are expected to be able to write research grant applications. For achieving these skills, you might have helped your supervisors in writing their applications, or you can apply yourself for an FHML Kootstra Talent Fellowship. Kootstra Talent Fellowships are obtained in competition. These fellowships, consisting of a 6-month grant, are made available by the FHML to develop talent amongst young scientific researchers and are matched by NUTRIM. Therefore, they amount to a scholarship of 1 year in total. The fellowship is used to bridge the time between the end of a PhD project and the start of a post-doctoral employment.

4.2 | Graduation

The end terms for graduating are clear from the start of the PhD program and are communicated to you by the (co)promotors and the PhD coordinators. The Maastricht University requirements and regulations can be found in the [Regulation governing the attainment of doctoral degrees](#). The dissertation and all submitted and published papers must be in English.

Once the team of promotors judges the dissertation of sufficient quality, it is presented to a review committee consisting of several independent assessors, assembled by the promotor. This committee will assess the quality of the dissertation and will decide whether the dissertation is of sufficient quality to be defended at Maastricht University. The complete approval procedure, starting with the submission of the dissertation to the review committee and ending with the PhD defense ceremony, takes at least 20 weeks. Estimated printing costs for the dissertation in the Netherlands are € 2000, and in addition 6 copies are fully reimbursed. Participants are free to choose where they have the dissertation printed. Maastricht University supports financially by reimbursing € 0.36 per page of the ten dissertation copies that have to be sent to the deans' office, and by reimbursing printing costs as well as the costs of the reception after the thesis defense, up to a maximum amount of € 2000. Regulations on the reimbursement of printing and reception costs for PhD candidates and allowance PhD form can be found on the [FHML PhD webpage](#) under 'Preparation for Graduation'. For detailed information on all aspects of a PhD trajectory at Maastricht University, go to the [UM PhD office page](#).



4.3 | Life after a NUTRIM PhD

In the Annual Questionnaire both you and your supervisor(s) are asked to discuss your future career perspectives. It is of great importance to know about (inter)national career possibilities. (Inter)national cooperation sometimes results in jobs; PhD candidates may use the network of their supervisors. Supervisors will also encourage you to attend career events that are organized yearly. Furthermore, you are stimulated to apply for an FHML Kootstra Talent Fellowship. During this period grant applications can be written and submitted leading to a subsequent job.

Maastricht University has a separate Career Services department, which aims to bring students and the employment market in closer contact with each other. It offers preparation for your future career and acts as a portal for companies and organizations interested in recruiting alumni. The Staff Development Centre can support and guide you in developing your general competences, in order to develop the qualities you need for your present position or future roles. The Staff Development Centre offers courses such as “Analytic Storytelling”, assertiveness training and “Online personal branding”, and workshops about writing a cover letter or conflict management.

NUTRIM keeps record of its graduated PhD candidates. Graduated PhD candidates are kindly requested to upload information about their next job in TRACK.

Data storage

If you leave Maastricht University, please ensure that you appraise your research data, and take appropriate action. Please discuss this in time with your supervisor.

In general, data generated is property of the institution. Please, also check ethic approval(s), data management plan(s) or contracts with other institutions.

You may have to hand over custodianship of any data that will continue to be stored once you left to someone else within the research project team. Or you may have to ensure that data is destroyed if that’s what was originally agreed. Please also see the guidelines of our Quality Assurance System on [data management](#).

Appendix 1 | Support and quick links to useful websites

- [PhD Track](#)
- [NUTRIM website PhD page](#)
- [NUTRIM Umployee](#) (Intranet)
- [Golden rules for PhD supervisors and PhD candidates](#)
- [UM PhD office website](#)
- [Social and Scientific Integrity](#) (Roadmaps)
- [The NUTRIM PowerPoint template and poster template](#)
- [People and Development support](#)
- [Knowledge Centre for International Staff](#) (KCIS; for foreign PhDs)
- [Staff Career Centre](#)
- [UM Central PhD Candidates Platform](#)
- [PhD Support](#)
- [Promovendi Network Netherlands](#)
- The [Central PhD Candidates Platform](#) (CPCP) represents PhD candidates on an UM inter-faculty level.
- The [PhD Candidates Network](#) (PNN) represents PhD candidates on a national inter-university level.
- [NUTRIM LinkedIn Page](#)
- The PhD council’s [Instagram](#) and [Facebook page](#)

Appendix 2 | Questions to prepare for your yearly evaluation

Use these questions to reflect on your PhD project, your role, and your development as a researcher.

- How does your PhD project fit your interests and motivation?
- What are the main research goals of your team (e.g. knowledge gained, publications)?
- What are the goals for your development as a researcher (e.g. methodological, statistical and analytical skills, English proficiency, idea generation, presenting and writing skills)?
- What are your main roles and tasks in the team? Which expertise do you bring?
- How would you like to organize communication and feedback in the PhD team (meeting frequency, type and timing of feedback)?
- In which parts of the project do you want more autonomy?
- What kind of working atmosphere do you want to create together?
- Which pitfalls do you foresee in your PhD, and how would you like to deal with them?
- What should other team members know about you to help the team reach its goals?
- For 3rd–4th year PhD candidates: What do you envision for your career after the PhD, and how can your supervisors support you in planning and taking next steps?

Golden rules for PhD candidates

01. You are the captain of the ship.
02. Develop a clear, scientifically sound and feasible research plan.
03. Make a clear plan to support your professional and personal growth.
04. Discuss and evaluate mutual expectations regarding the supervision.
05. Manage your time well.
06. Discuss your personal support needs.
07. Follow the scientific integrity code of conduct.
08. Organise your own peer support network.
09. Plan your future post-PhD.
10. Recognise, monitor and address work pressure.

Golden Rules for PhD Supervisors

01. Discuss and evaluate mutual expectations regarding research and supervision.
02. Develop a clear, scientifically sound and feasible research plan with your PhD candidate.
03. Make a clear plan with your PhD candidate to support personal growth and development.
04. Be aware that support needs may change.
05. Provide constructive feedback on process and results.
06. Be open to receive feedback from your PhD candidate.
07. Recognise, monitor and address work pressure.
08. Open up your network, discuss career perspectives and opportunities.
09. Work on your supervisory skills and regularly evaluate your own way of supervision.
10. Assure scientific soundness and follow the scientific integrity code of conduct.

[Read the extended version of the ten golden rules for PhD candidates and PhD supervisors](#)

Editors:

NUTRIM PhD coordinators Dr. Agnes Boots, Dr. Alex Remels,
NUTRIM PhD council & NUTRIM Communications Officer Danielle Vogt



B1	9
B2	B
B3	B
B4	B
B5	B
C2	C
C3	C
C4	C
C5	C
D2	D
D3	D
D4	D
D5	D
E2	
E3	
F3	



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