

Quick Guide for Supervisors of Master **Writing Assignments** of the Graduate School of Life Sciences (GSLs)

Start of the writing assignment

The student can only start his or her writing assignment after (s)he and his/her supervisors have received an email from the Research Project Coordinator, confirming the approval of the Board of Examiners (BoE). If the student chooses to go abroad, (s)he is responsible for arranging visa, accommodation, insurance and financial support.

Supervision terminology and responsibilities

The student:

- is responsible for choosing a topic and finding a suitable research group and examiner / supervisor;
- has to apply for approval from the Board of Examiners before starting the writing assignment;
- has to adhere to the rules of scientific integrity;
- has to finish the writing assignment in time, preferably within five weeks, but cannot take longer than three months;
- has to stay in contact with his/her examiner and if applicable daily or host supervisor;
- is responsible for seeking help when problems (either professional or personal) arise.

The examiner:

- has final responsibility for the grade of the writing assignment.
- is affiliated to Utrecht University or UMC Utrecht as a full, associate (UHD) or assistant (UD) professor with a tenured 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. Post-docs, PhD candidates, and professors not affiliated to UU / UMCU **cannot** act as examiner.
- In case of a writing assignment outside UU/UMCU, the UU/UMCU examiner will grade the writing assignment and (s)he determines the final mark in close consultation with the supervisor host institute.
- In case of a writing assignment inside UU/UMCU, the UU/UMCU examiner and second reviewer both grade the assignment. The examiner decides on the final mark in close consultation with the daily supervisor (if applicable) and the second reviewer.
- In case of a writing assignment outside UU/UMCU, the UU/UMCU examiner and the supervisor host institute both grade the assignment. The examiner decides on the final mark in close consultation with the supervisor host institute.

The daily supervisor (in case of a writing assignment at UU/UMC):

- is responsible for the daily supervision of the student during his/her assignment.
- works at the institute where the writing assignment is carried out.
- does not grade the writing assignment him/herself, but will advise the examiner on the grades.
- must be sufficiently capable of supervising a Master's student. If a daily supervisor is still rather junior (e.g. PhD candidate or postdoc), (s)he must be supported by the examiner.

The host institute supervisor (in case of a writing assignment outside UU/UMCU):

- is responsible for the daily supervision of the student during his/her assignment.
- works at the institute where the writing assignment is carried out.
- grades the writing assignment.
- must be sufficiently capable of supervising a Master's student. If a daily supervisor is still rather junior (e.g. PhD candidate or postdoc), (s)he must be supported by a senior scientist / staff member (e.g. his/her own supervisor).

The second reviewer:

- should only be appointed for writing assignments inside UU/UMCU. For writing assignments outside UU/UMCU both examiner and supervisor host institute grade the report and presentation, therefore a second reviewer is not required.

- is a senior scientist (not a PhD candidate or postdoc) who is **not** directly involved in the writing assignment. Ideally, a second reviewer is a staff member from a different group than the examiner.
- Assessment of the writing assignment by a second reviewer is mandatory.

Duration of project and extension

- Five weeks (7.5 EC) are scheduled for the writing assignment. The student cannot extend his/her writing assignment for credits.
- The writing assignment should be completed preferably within these five weeks, but maximally within a time span of three months, from the first meeting with the supervisor to discuss the assignment to submission of the assignment.

Contents of the writing assignment

- A writing assignment consists of several key stages: defining your topic, formulating a hypothesis, drawing up a timetable, literature research and the writing phase.
- The format should conform to that of a review paper in the relevant research field (literature review) or a NWO/ALW grant application (a research proposal).
- Up-to-date reviews, based on recent literature (maximally 5 years old) are more useful to students and their supervisors than reviews based on older literature. The writing assignment should have an in-depth discussion, in which the student demonstrates his/her ability to critically evaluate hypotheses and results, presents his/her own views, and draws conclusions that point towards new research opportunities.
- The body of the text (excluding legends, tables, footnotes, references, etc.) should be 6000–8000 words long. It should be emphasized that the content is more important than the number of words. The assignment should include minimally 25 and maximally 60 references.
- The assignment should be written in English and contain a summary specifically aimed at informing the general audience about the content (layman's summary – in Dutch or English, 500 words, high school Biology or science level).

Interim assessment (feedback during project)

An interim assessment is not mandatory, but it is important to evaluate the work and progress on a regular basis. The [rubric - writing assignment](#) can be used as a tool to discuss the applicable strong points and points of improvement of the draft and first version.

Fraud and plagiarism

Fraud or plagiarism is absolutely not allowed and will be dealt with as described in the Education- and Examination Regulations. The examiner:

- has the responsibility to ensure that no fraud or plagiarism took place. When you find or suspect that your student is committing fraud or is plagiarizing during his/her writing assignment, this must be reported to the Board of Examiners (BoE). You are invited to contact the BoE first for advice: [more information on how to deal with plagiarism or fraud](#).
- should check the final research reports for plagiarism using Ephorus, or an alternative comparable plagiarism checker.
- When the reported percentage of plagiarism in Ephorus is >10%, but there is no case of plagiarism, a motivation written by the examiner explaining this should accompany the assessment form. The student may only submit the assessment form of the research project if the summary of the Ephorus plagiarism check is attached to the assessment form.

Final assessment

At the end of the writing assignment, the student is expected to have met the [learning outcomes](#). In order to assess whether the student has achieved these learning outcomes, the [Rubric - writing assignment](#) can be used.

In case of an assignment [inside](#) UU/UMCU, the assessment is performed by the examiner in close consultation with the daily supervisor and a second, independent reviewer (see 'Supervision terminology and responsibilities').

In case of an assignment outside UU/UMCU, the supervisor host institute¹ grades the assignment first. The examiner and supervisor host institute should contact each other in order to make sure that the assessment of all components are performed according to the guidelines of the GSLS-UU.

- First, the supervisor host institute determines the grades according to his/her own marking system (e.g. Anglo/Saxon marking (F-A⁺)).
- Next, the supervisor host institute consults the UU/UMCU examiner. The examiner converts the grade according to the Dutch marking system. The conversion table is available [here](#).

If the UU examiners and host supervisors marks differ by 2 or more points, the Board of Examiners should be notified by the UU examiner.

In order to meet the [cum laude requirements](#) a student should receive a 8.5 or higher for his/her writing assignment.

Completion of the writing assignment

- The student will give a copy of the writing assignment to his/her examiner, second reviewer (or supervisor host institute) and upon request to the programme coordinator.
- The examiner and second reviewer must complete the assessment within 10 working days after the student has handed in his/her (final) writing assignment, by filling in and signing the assessment form.
- The student is no longer allowed to hand in his/her assessment form at the Administration Office. The new procedure is as follows:
 - the student collects the assessment form;
 - the examiner fills in his/her own grade and signs the assessment form, after ensuring the grade of the second reviewer or supervisor host institute are correct.
 - The examiner scans the form and sends to following to the to the Master's administration office, Master's programme coordinator and the student:
 - the form
 - the written motivation for the final grade (e.g. rubrics) and
 - the summary of (Ephorus) plagiarism check (< 10%)
 - The student sends a PDF of the writing assignment (including laymen's summary) to the Master's administration office.

Problems or questions and further information

In case of any problems or questions, contact the [programme coordinator](#) first, or otherwise the [academic counsellor](#) or [research project coordinator](#).

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](#).

In our [Study Guide Life Sciences](#) guides are available about [research projects](#) and [writing assignments](#), for both students as well as for supervisors.

¹ *If the supervisor host institute is still rather junior (PhD candidate or postdoc), (s)he must be supported by a senior scientist (e.g. his/her own supervisor).*