

MD-PhD

Milestones of your thesis

For all doctoral students enrolled in the MD-PhD
program

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The logo for the University of Lausanne (Unil), featuring the word 'Unil' in a blue, cursive script.

UNIL | Université de Lausanne

Ecole doctorale de la FBM

The logo for EPFL (École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne), consisting of the letters 'EPFL' in a bold, red, sans-serif font.

1. **This booklet is intended for MD-PhD students who enrolled officially at the UNIL-FBM**

Welcome! The MD-PhD program is intended for medical students who wish to explore cellular and molecular mechanisms of disease, combine research and clinical activities and acquire a physician-scientist profile. Implicit in this, is the notion that the majority of successful MD-PhDs will pursue an academic career. There are two possible paths toward obtaining an MD-PhD: Track I, where you embark upon your MD-PhD thesis immediately following completion of your medical studies; and Track II, where you engage in your research project after having pursued clinical training for 2-3 years following completion of medical school.

The present document summarizes the necessary steps to enrol in the MD-PhD program, obtain a local fellowship and complete the doctorate in Medicine and Science (MD-PhD) at the University of Lausanne or the EPFL **in accordance with the 2022 Rules**. We recommend that you download this document from our website, so that you can use the clickable [links](#).

Concerning the study program in life sciences: In addition to the classical requirements of the thesis work, each doctoral student must follow doctoral level courses for 12 ECTS credits (see points 10 and 12 for specific information). This learning activity is structured in the form of a study programme. Detailed information can be found on the following web page: <https://www.unil.ch/ecoledoctoralefbm/programs>.

Respecting deadlines is especially important for MD-PhD students who have a contract that allows them to work on their thesis on a full-time basis. MD-PhD students who have a part-time employment in parallel to their doctoral studies can ask for deadline extensions, in accordance with their thesis director - please contact the Doctoral school (mdphd@unil.ch).

2. **Admission to the Program**

The first step toward admission consists of writing to the Coordinator of the program (mdphd@unil.ch) indicating your interest in obtaining an MD-PhD. You will be asked to submit a set of documents, including:

- A CV with a photo
- Copies of all relevant diplomas you have obtained
- Transcripts of your medical school exam results
- Certificates of any relevant electives and internships you may have done

The Coordinator of the program will then set up a meeting with the President of the MD-PhD Committee during which you will be expected to explain your motivation for joining the program and how obtaining an MD-PhD will affect and shape your future career. You will be provided with details regarding the preparatory requirements (see below) and invited to meet the MD-PhD Committee, which convenes four times a year.

3. Meeting the MD-PhD Committee

During your first meeting with the MD-PhD Committee, you will be asked to explain the reasons why you wish to become an MD-PhD and present your future career plans and research project. Following your presentation, you will be formally admitted to the program. A mentor will be appointed to you who will help you prepare your presentation toward obtaining a local scholarship and who will be available to discuss any issues that may arise during the preparatory phase (i.e. before you formally engage in your thesis work).

4. Selecting a project and a thesis director

At the time of your meeting with the President and your introduction to the Committee, you may not yet have a project or a thesis director, particularly if you are in your 3rd year of medical school. Your primary missions at this stage are twofold:

- to identify the medical specialty in which you wish to gain both clinical and scientific expertise and which will constitute the core of your future career;
- to find the optimal environment (in the majority of cases, research laboratory) for obtaining an MD-PhD in your field of interest.

The President and Committee members can guide you toward finding a suitable laboratory and thesis director. However, it is up to you to determine the field that you want to make your own – one in which you will become an expert and to whose progress you intend to contribute. Once you have selected your field and identified a potential host laboratory, you will, together with your future thesis director, define your research project.

5. Project presentation and local scholarships

Upon elaborating your research project with your thesis director, you will present it to the MD-PhD Committee in order to be accepted in the MD-PhD program, in the format requested by the local program. The format requires 1 minutes of introduction, including the reasons why you wish to obtain an MD-PhD and your career plan, and 5 minutes of description of your project with no more than 3 support slides. The Committee meets four times a year and you will be invited to present your project on several occasions. The primary goal at this stage is to prepare you to present your project to the MD-PhD Committee in view of obtaining a local scholarship. The MD-PhD Committee members will therefore provide you with comments and suggestions toward optimizing your presentation. In addition to the oral presentation, you will provide a written description of your project in the format of a grant application (details provided below).

For Track I MD-PhD candidates, it is imperative that you have a project at the very latest by the fall semester of your final (6th) year of medical school. In January of your final year, the Committee will select candidates based on the quality and feasibility of their project and the quality of their presentation to compete for a local scholarship, which means at the end of your "année à choix" as you prepare to revise for your final exams.

The scholarship provides 3 years of salary support, the fourth year being covered by your host laboratory, according to a prior signed agreement with your thesis director. If you are unsuccessful in obtaining a local scholarship, it will be up to your host laboratory to provide you with salary support.

The documents you need for participating in the competition are:

- Motivation letter, including career plan (max. 1.5 pages)
- Project summary (max. 1 page)
- Detailed research plan (max. 6 pages, incl. tables and figures but without references, min. font size 11 and min. single line spacing) incl. current state of research, hypotheses, aims, relevance of proposed research, role of applicant in the project, methodology, planned experiments, milestones, pitfalls and timetable
- CV with publications list (max. 2 pages): please indicate clearly the period of your undergraduate medical studies, the period of your MD thesis (if not completed yet, specify when it is planned) and the period during which you will be matriculated as MD-PhD student
- Confirmation from thesis director guaranteeing scientific and personal support, adequate workspace, access to infrastructure and funding for a 4th year if necessary to complete the MD-PhD
- Reference letters (max. 2)
- Copy of relevant diplomas and examination scores

One of the MD-PhD Committee's primary missions is to support candidates admitted to the program. The President and the Committee members, including your appointed mentor, will always be available to guide and help you throughout your preparation.

6. Preparatory training

In order to be eligible for the MD-PhD doctorate, you need to obtain 35 credits ECTS (see "Formation préparatoire" in the "Directives pour le Doctorat en médecine et ès sciences (MD-PhD) effectué à la Faculté de biologie et de médecine" updated in 2022).

For both Track I and Track II students, 25 credits can be obtained during the 6 years of medical studies at the UNIL or in another university. A total of 15 credits are awarded for the Master project, 1 credit is awarded for a "cours à option" during the second year (BMed2) and 3 credits are awarded for a "cours à option" in the third or fourth year (BMed3 or MMed1). Additional credits can be obtained by engaging in summer internships (1 credit/week of internship) and attending summer schools (typically 3 credits per course).

At the end of your medical studies, once you have successfully completed your final exams, you must attend training in one of the following areas:

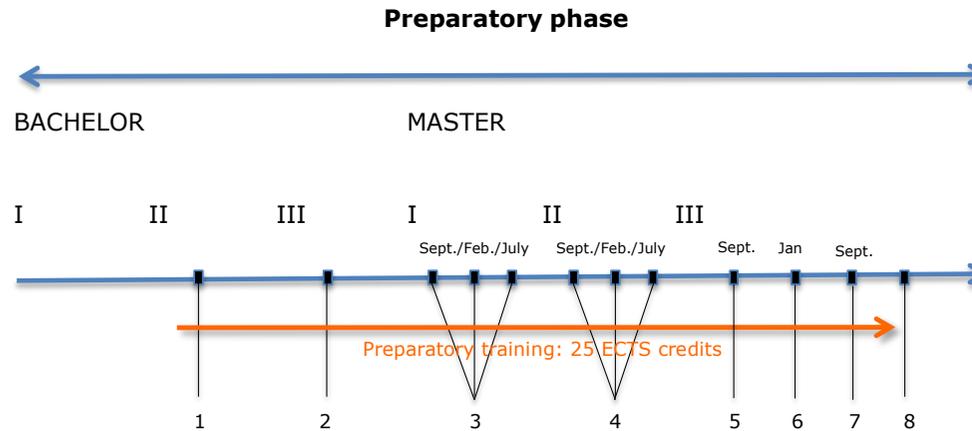
- Molecular biology
- Public health and clinical research
- Imaging and biomedical engineering

Courses are provided by the School of Biology and the Medical School and it is up to you to select the one that best suits your research project. You are encouraged to take a course in bioinformatics and biostatistics as well.

Training in any one of these areas will provide you with the 10 remaining credits. It is designed to provide you with a solid knowledge base to initiate your research project and should ideally be done before starting the MD-PhD doctorate. However, depending on the training you require, the relevant courses may not be available at that moment. You therefore have the possibility to perform the training during your first year of research, but you are encouraged to complete the training as early as possible to allow maximal time for your thesis work.

N.B.: **Students who engage in a research project at EPFL are subjected to EPFL rules and regulations regarding all requirements relative to their thesis.**

Medical school years



Interviews President/Coordinator: The student discusses her/his intentions with the President and the Coordinator of the MD-PhD Commission and she/he receives all necessary information. During the whole program the President and the Coordinator of the MD-PhD Commission stay available for the candidate if new meetings, information or help in searching a laboratory and/or funds are needed.

1 + 2 MD-PhD Information (BMed2 + BMed3)

3 + 4 Presentations to the MD-PhD Committee (Introduction to the MD-PhD Committee, definition of project and presentation to the MD-PhD Committee)

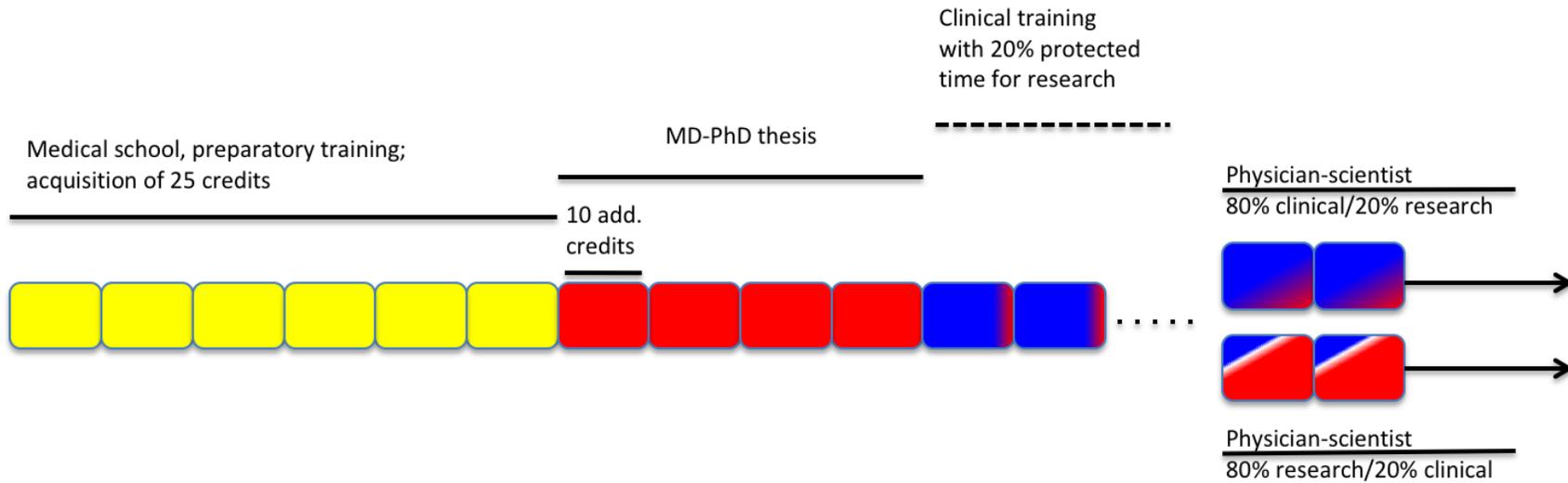
5 Presentations of finalized project to the MD-PhD Committee

6 Presentation to the MD-PhD Committee and selection for a local scholarship

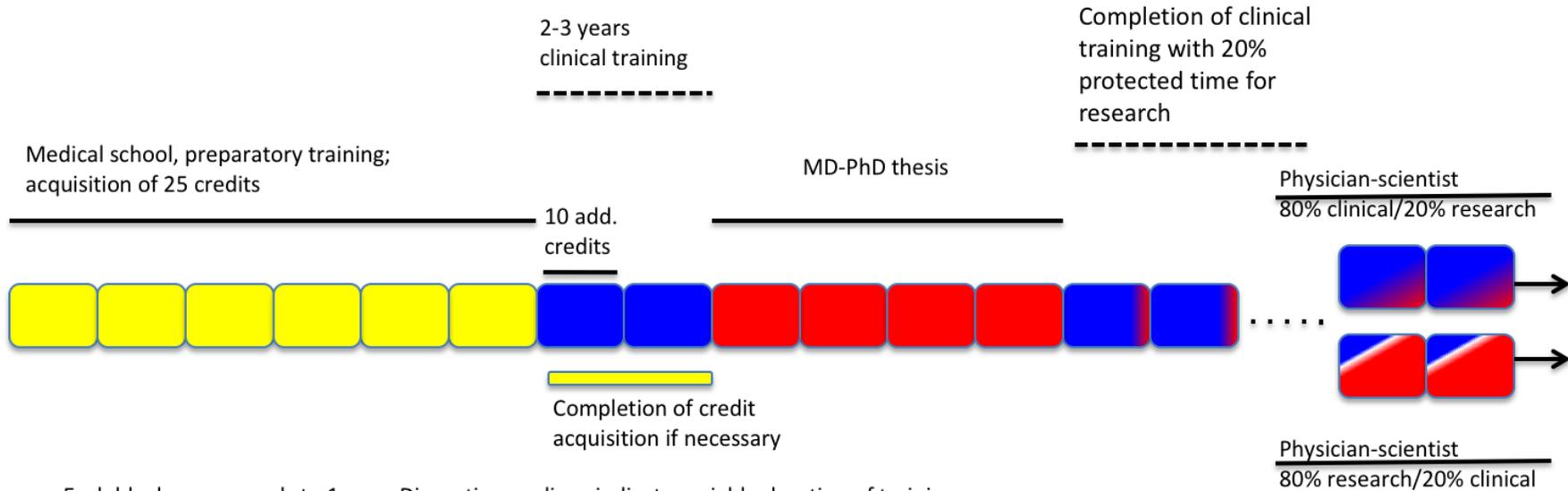
7 Final medical exams

8 Start of MD-PhD thesis (track I) or clinical training prior to the thesis (track II)

TRACK I



TRACK II



Each block corresponds to 1 year. Discontinuous lines indicate variable duration of training.

7. Following registration

At the very beginning of your research work, you must assemble a thesis committee that will follow your progress for the duration of the thesis period. The committee's composition, must be communicated to the FBM Doctoral School **as soon as possible after the start of the MD-PhD**, and at least one semester following your registration, and selected by common consent between the thesis director and yourself.

The Committee includes:

1. The thesis director (and co-directors, if applicable).
2. Two experts, with at least one employed outside of UNIL/CHUV/Unisanté. The experts should not collaborate significantly to the thesis project to a level which could likely influence their assessment/decision. Experts should hold a doctorate degree.
3. The president (mentor nominated by the MD-PhD Committee).

8. Credits required during your thesis

In addition to the 35 credits obtained prior to engaging in your thesis project or by the end of the first year of your doctorate, you must obtain 12 credits for course work during your thesis period. Mechanisms for obtaining these credits are indicated in the "Règlement 2022 pour l'obtention du grade de doctorat ès sciences de la vie (PhD)".

9. During the 2nd semester

- You must prepare a short report summarizing the subject of your thesis, the thesis milestones/plan and research progress **by the end of the second semester for a first evaluation by the thesis committee**. In order to be validated by the FBM Doctoral School, the report must then be sent according to specific instructions to your funding source and by e-mail to ALL the members of the thesis committee, including the President, with a copy (cc) to the thesis director and the FBM Doctoral School (mdphd@unil.ch).

10. At the end of the 1st year

- Compile and complete the ECTS documents related to your doctoral program. A minimum of 4 ECTS (including 2 tutorials accredited by the FBM Doctoral School) must be obtained **by the end of the 1st year of your thesis and before you organise your mid-thesis exam.**
- Forward all the documents by postal mail or by e-mail in PDF, with all the relevant documents merged in the appropriate order, to the FBM Doctoral School.

11. Mid-thesis exam

The mid-thesis evaluation must be held at the latest 18 months following the start of the MD-PhD contract, which in practical terms means the start of your thesis project. The exam provides the means for your thesis committee to ensure that your project is on track and to help resolve any issues that may have arisen up to that point. You are therefore required to present the progress of your research project to your thesis committee according to a format that resembles that of your final thesis exam.

Together with your thesis director(s) and committee members (including the president), you must choose an examination date. **At least one month prior to the mid-thesis exam**, you should forward the following information to the FBM Doctoral School:

- The mid-term report presenting the results and research progress (recommended length: 20 pages, double-spaced, 30 references). This document should be validated by the thesis director and then sent by e-mail to ALL the members of the thesis committee with a copy (cc) to the thesis director and the FBM Doctoral School (mdphd@unil.ch).
- An e-mail to mdphd@unil.ch mentioning the date, time and place of the exam. Please book a room either on the UNIL campus, at CHUV or at Unisanté.

For more details (exam duration, format of the report...), please check our ["Directives 2022 pour le Doctorat en médecine et ès sciences \(MD-PhD\)", section "Evaluation intermédiaire"](#).

12. End of the program

Completion of the program means that you will have completed your research project to a stage where, in agreement with your thesis director, it is admissible for a thesis defence. You will also have obtained a minimum of 12 ECTS as indicated above.

Please forward the documents for validation of the courses you have taken at any time during your thesis, but **at the latest 4 weeks** before depositing the thesis manuscript at the FBM Doctoral School Coordinator's Office (=manuscript for the private oral exam).

Please forward the ECTS documents (minimum 12 ECTS) to the FBM Doctoral School, possibly by postal mail or by e-mail as a PDF file containing all the relevant documents merged in the appropriate order. More information can be found on our guidelines: [here](#).

Should you have any queries regarding the requirements of the credits, contact program.ls@unil.ch.

13. Are you ready to defend your thesis?

In essence, you are expected to write your thesis manuscript and then defend it at the “private defence” session before your selected thesis jury (see below). Following a successful “private defence”, you will be allowed to present your research in a format accessible to non-scientists during a session open to the public. At this point, the jury will give a formal final evaluation following four criteria:

- The quality of the research work (skills and autonomy of the MD-PhD candidate; originality of the MD-PhD project)
- The quality of the written thesis (format and writing style)
- The outcome of the private defence/exam (aka: soutenance privée, colloque de these, private exam or oral private exam)
- The quality of public defence/exam (aka: soutenance publique, public exam or oral public exam)

The first three criteria are evaluated by the thesis jury during the “private defence”, whereas the fourth is evaluated during the session open to the public. The thesis defence usually takes place in the **3rd, 4th or 5th year** of enrolment in the program, provided that the minimum 12 ECTS of coursework have been obtained and that the mid-thesis exam has been successfully passed. It is your responsibility together with that of the thesis director to determine if a sufficient body of work, of publication quality, has been completed in order to initiate the final stage of thesis.

A. Thesis format and writing practices

Consult the “Good Writing practices” and “How to format your thesis” section (below) to duly organize and format the thesis document.

B. Confirm your thesis jury

A thesis jury needs to have minimum of 4 members and a recommended maximum of 6 and should include:

- The thesis director (and co-directors, if applicable)

- Two experts minimum, with at least one from outside UNIL/CHUV/Unisanté. Note that experts should not have collaborated significantly to the thesis project to a level which could likely influence their assessment/decision. Experts should hold a doctorate degree.
- The jury president (appointed by the MD-PhD Commission to chair the thesis jury).

Contact all thesis jury members to select a suitable date and timing for the private thesis defence. Remember: all members of your jury must participate in your private exam. Once the date is set, reserve a room either on the UNIL campus, at CHUV or at Unisanté to hold the private defence. The composition of the jury, as well as the date and location of the exam should be announced to the Coordinator of the MD-PhD program (mdphd@unil.ch) at least **5 weeks prior to the private thesis defence**.

C. Before the private defence (Art. 16 of the 2022 Rules « PhD en sciences de la vie »)

You will need to send by e-mail the following documents to mdphd@unil.ch **at least 5 weeks before the private defence**:

- The confirmation that the president of the thesis jury only requires the electronic version of your thesis. In any case, please send a PDF version of your thesis to the FBM Doctoral school (mdphd@unil.ch). If the president requires a paper **copy of the thesis**, provide it to the FBM Doctoral school (by postal mail or by depositing it to the reception) and the Doctoral school will send it to the president.
- A **letter signed by the thesis director** indicating the name, address and e-mail of each jury member and also the location, date and time chosen for the private defence.
- An **updated version of your CV** including a list of publications, articles, communications, conferences and abstracts related to the thesis project.
- Two one-page **summaries of the thesis, one in English and one in French**. Each summary must be written on a separate page.
- A **one-page summary of the thesis written for the general public, in French**, including the title of the thesis (in French), the name of the MD-PhD student and the name of the host department of the thesis project.
- The **Certificate with the credits** obtained during the PhD has to be requested at the latest 4 weeks before the deposit of the thesis manuscript for the private defence to program.ls@unil.ch.
- Along with the items in this checklist: [click here](#).

At the same time, send a copy of the thesis to all jury members. Each jury member should receive the electronic version of the thesis, unless they specifically request a hard copy (the printed document).

Around three weeks before the exam, the FBM Doctoral School will send an e-mail to the jury, with the MD-PhD candidate in copy (cc), announcing the exam and asking them to send their report to the FBM Doctoral School at least one week before the private defence.

In this report, they will provide an evaluation of the format and content of the thesis and indicate whether they consider the thesis eligible for presentation at the private exam. After receiving these reports and before the private defence, the FBM Doctoral School will send them to the president of the jury.

Upon receiving the thesis, the FBM Doctoral School will send a request of payment for the *exam's taxes* (CHF 500.--) to the student by e-mail, addressed to the private postal address.

14. Private Defence

During the private thesis defence your knowledge of your thesis field will be evaluated.

The defence (1-2 hours) will be conducted in the following order:

- 20-40 minute oral presentation by the MD-PhD student
- 2 rounds of questions from the experts
- Discussion among the jury members and formal grading

The language of the thesis defence should be either English or French; the choice of language should be decided upon by common agreement among the jury members, the thesis director and the MD-PhD Candidate.

During the discussion, the jury assigns 3 grades (ranging from 1 to 6; a pass grade is 4; half points are accepted) for three aspects of the thesis:

- The research work (skills and autonomy of the MD-PhD candidate; originality of the MD-PhD project)
- The clarity, depth, format and style of the written document
- The private examination, including the quality of the presentation and responses to questions raised by the jury members

You will need to obtain ***a minimum grade of 4 on each of these above-mentioned aspects*** in order to pass the exam and to continue to the public defence. Once you have successfully passed the private defence, you must select a date for the public thesis defence, together with the jury members (at a minimum, the jury president and thesis director must be present). The public defence should take place a ***minimum of 3 weeks following the private exam***. Once the date is agreed upon, you must reserve an auditorium to hold the public defence and announce the location, date and time to the Coordinator of the MD-PhD program at the FBM Doctoral School (mdphd@unil.ch).

If the jury requests corrections of your thesis, they should be communicated to you orally by the president and, if relevant, other members of the jury. Without other indication, your thesis director is responsible for checking your corrections. She/he has to receive the corrections and inform the Coordinator of the MD-PhD program (with the president in cc) that the new version of the thesis is acceptable in its revised form, **a few days before the public defence**.

The **electronic version of the thesis** should be sent to the president of the jury **prior to the public defence**. During the private defence, the "procès verbal" document will be filled out specifying whether the public defence will be held in French or in English (or in another language, upon agreement of the jury members).

15. Public defence

As indicated above, the public thesis defence takes place at least **3 weeks following the private defence**. At the end of the public defence, the members of the jury decide whether the thesis is judged as acceptable ("réussi") or not ("pas réussi"). If the decision is positive, you will receive the "imprimatur" page (official approval that the thesis can be printed) from the jury president who must have signed it, a copy of which must be included in all final copies of the thesis.

16. After the public defence

A. Bound copies of the thesis document

After the public defence, you have a **maximum of six months** to prepare official bound copies (see "How to format your thesis" section below) of the thesis document and distribute them as follows:

- 1 copy for the FBM Doctoral School to be sent to the Coordinator of the MD-PhD program
- 3 copies for the BCUL (Bibliothèque Cantonale et Universitaire Lausanne), one of them with a summary of the thesis in English. These 3 copies for the BCUL should be accompanied by a form called "Avis de dépôt de these" available on our website [here](#).

If required (to avoid wasting paper, time and money, we recommend that the jury members be contacted to make sure they really want a final hard copy of the thesis. You do not need to send a copy to the president, unless she/he requests it):

- 1 copy for the department where the research was done
- 1 copy for the thesis director
- 1 copy for each member of the jury.

Please note that ***you must remain enrolled at the University of Lausanne*** until the thesis has been deposited to the BCUL and to the FBM Doctoral School.

B. On-line publication of the thesis

The thesis can be published on-line at the University of Lausanne, through the [SERVAL website](#).

C. Order your diploma

Fill in the on-line form “Application de commande électronique de grade” available [here](#).

Good writing practices

Preparing students for having good writing practices is a responsibility UNIL takes very seriously. As a Doctoral School, we believe that scientific integrity and the prevention of plagiarism should be at the heart of the MD-PhD training. We therefore encourage all the MD-PhD students:

- To discuss about the good writing practices with the thesis director,
- To use the tools available at UNIL to ensure that all the written productions are free of any form of plagiarism. We strongly recommend that you do the self-training module: Avoiding plagiarism (to access use the activation key that can be asked to mdphd@unil.ch)

Additional information on this topic is available on our website in the section [Copyright, Open Access & good writing practices](#)

Use of Artificial Intelligence tools: if you use these tools to assist you in the writing of your thesis, you must **take full responsibility for the content** of the publication/manuscript and disclose the use of such tools in your thesis. Here is an example of statement: “During the preparation of this work, the author(s) used OpenAI’s ChatGPT and Grammarly to assist with the grammatical refinement of the paper. After using these tools/services, the author(s) reviewed and edited the content as needed and take(s) full responsibility for the content of the publication/manuscript”.

How to format your thesis

A. General formatting requirements for the final thesis version

Some general advice from the "Annexes IV and V, Règlement 2022 pour l'obtention du grade de docteur ès sciences de la vie (PhD)":

- A4 format, 29.7 x 21 cm
- Double-sided printing
- Paper 80 gr/m²
- 40 lines/page maximum
- 15 mm external margin minimum
- Clean presentation of text, pictures and tables, without corrections
- Front cover of the thesis in cardstock (130 - 180 gr/m²); the official title cover is available [here](#)
- The official title page, identical to the front cover of the thesis, but printed on paper (80 gr/m²), with the possibility to include supplementary logos
- An exact reproduction of the "imprimatur" is printed at the back of the second title page (attributed by the thesis jury)
- Please note that the binding of the document cannot be done with rings or plastic.

B. How to organize a thesis with published articles

To write your thesis with articles you need to have one or several articles posted, submitted, accepted or published. **Include the most recent version of the articles as they are posted or published.** In a thesis written with articles, the articles replace the chapters of the results section. NB: before each article, you must include a brief summary of the results, indicating precisely and in detail your contribution to each article (2-3 pages), as well as the stage of publication of the article (e.g. posted, submitted, under review, published, etc.).

Important note on self-plagiarism: The sections indicated hereafter with "→" must reflect the individual MD-PhD student's original work, and not be a replication of text available in other articles/manuscripts even if authored or co-authored by the MD-PhD student. Indeed, articles are very often a multi-author work, therefore using blocks of text of other articles in these sections of your thesis, which is a single author work, is considered as (self-)plagiarism. Briefly referring to other articles, with proper citation, is evidently permitted if it contributes to the overall understanding (also refer to the UNIL Directives 0.3 and 0.3bis)

A thesis with articles should be structured as follows (Annexe III des Directives 2022 pour le Doctorat ès sciences de la vie):

- Front cover of the thesis in cardstock (130 - 180 gr/m²); the official title cover is available [here](#)
- The official title page, identical to the front cover of the thesis, but printed on paper (80 gr/m²), with the possibility to include supplementary logos
- An exact reproduction of the Imprimatur page* is printed at the back of the second title page (* signed and handed by the thesis president after a successful public defence)
- Acknowledgements (max 1 page)
- → **Abstract** (in English and French, max 1 page for each language)
- → **Introduction** (10-60 pages)
- Brief summary of the results, indicating precisely and in detail your contribution to each article and the stage of publication (2-3 pages)
- Article(s) should be presented as individual chapter(s) and in the posted or published format
- → **Discussion** (5-30 pages)
- References

C. **How to organize a thesis without published articles**

("Annexe IV and V, Règlement 2022 pour l'obtention du grade de docteur ès sciences de la vie (PhD)"):

This type of thesis should be structured as follows:

- Front cover of the thesis in cardstock (130 - 180 gr/m²); the official title cover is available [here](#)
- The official title page, identical to the front cover of the thesis, but printed on paper (80 gr/m²), with the possibility to include supplementary logos
- An exact reproduction of the Imprimatur page* is printed at the back of the second title page (* signed and handed by the thesis president after a successful public defence)
- Acknowledgements (max 1 page)
- Abstract (in English and French, max 1 page for each language)

- List of Abbreviations
- Table of Contents
- List of Figures
- List of Tables
- Introduction (10-60 pages)
- Materials and Methods
- Results
- Discussion (5-30 pages)
- References

Please keep in mind the following points when writing a thesis with or without articles:

- Make sure to acquaint yourself with the applicable regulations on [Copyright, Open Access & good writing practices](#)
- Please download the [thesis official title page](#) from [our website](#).
- The imprimatur page has to immediately follow the title page in the final thesis version. This can be done by scanning the original imprimatur page and inserting it into the thesis document (please do not use a jpg-photo, the quality is not sufficient).
- A good introduction should show that you have acquired a broad knowledge of the previous and on-going research in your field, do not forget appropriate referencing.
- A good discussion should reflect critical thinking concerning what you have learned and should include:
 - Assessment of your results in light of those of other researchers in the field and an overall analysis of the publications reviewed
 - Analysis of the quality and limitations of your results
 - Formulation of conclusions, which must be supported by the results
 - A summary/discussion of future perspectives

If you have any question regarding the format of your thesis or the procedure, do not hesitate to contact the [MD-PhD Coordinator's office](#):

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www.unil.ch/mdphd

[Ecole doctorale](#)

Faculté de biologie et de médecine

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Version March 2024. Only regulatory texts are authentic. All titles and functions may apply to both women and men.