

The Thesis Advisory Committee (TAC) and its regular meetings are an essential part of the (AC)³ IRTG graduate training program. Each (AC)³ doctoral researcher is required to organize regular TAC meetings, and the members of the TAC are required to actively participate in these meetings. You may also contact individual TAC members as needed.

It is important to note that the TAC meetings are not intended to replace one-on-one meetings with your supervisor, and that your supervisor's role extends well beyond the scheduled TAC meetings.

Purpose of the Thesis Advisory Committee and its regular meetings

The Thesis Advisory Committee (TAC), in addition to the academic supervisor, is responsible for the individual scientific guidance of the doctoral researcher:

- Ensure that your project plan is clear, realistic, and achievable in the planned timeframe – and adjust the plan if necessary
- Review your progress against the set milestones and help resolve any questions or problems you may have
- Receive constructive feedback on your scientific approach
- Expand your scientific network by tapping into the networks of the TAC members networks
- Use the experience of your advisors and mentors to select the best conferences and publications to target
- Ensure that you receive the best possible support to develop as an independent researcher or for a post-doctoral career outside academia
- Get advice on personal development: what additional skills training you need, what courses to take, what events to attend etc.
- Receive support and advice in preparing for the dissertation defense
- If necessary, the independent mentor can mediate between the doctoral candidate and the supervisor. In cases of serious conflict, the TAC can refer to the IRTG coordinator or dedicated ombudspersons.

Who forms the TAC?

The TAC consists of the primary/scientific advisor and, if applicable the academic supervisor, at least one mentor and the doctoral researcher. The scientific advisor is central to the TAC, and should be present at all TAC meetings. He or she will assist the doctoral researcher in forming the TAC.

Mentors/co-advisors should be active researchers and hold a doctoral degree. We encourage mentors from different career stages and institutions. At least one of the mentors should represent a different research group/field than both the advisor and the academic supervisor. (AC)³ encourages interdisciplinary and integrative PhD projects, and it is important to include expertise from different approaches in the TAC. Mentors may come from outside (AC)³.

All TAC members should be present at each TAC meeting (TAC meetings can be conducted using an online conferencing tool).



Note that in some cases, a TAC will have been established before you begin – in these cases, the team will typically include the researchers who collaborated in writing the proposal. In other cases, it may be necessary for you to take the initiative yourself in seeking an advisory committee. In any case, it is important to start with your supervisor! (Do not ask any co-supervisors before checking with your main supervisor).

In order to monitor the PhD progress, regular TAC meetings are required!

At least once a year, the doctoral researcher will invite to the TAC to meet (beginning with the kick-off meeting, followed by annual progress meetings).

Goals of the TAC meetings

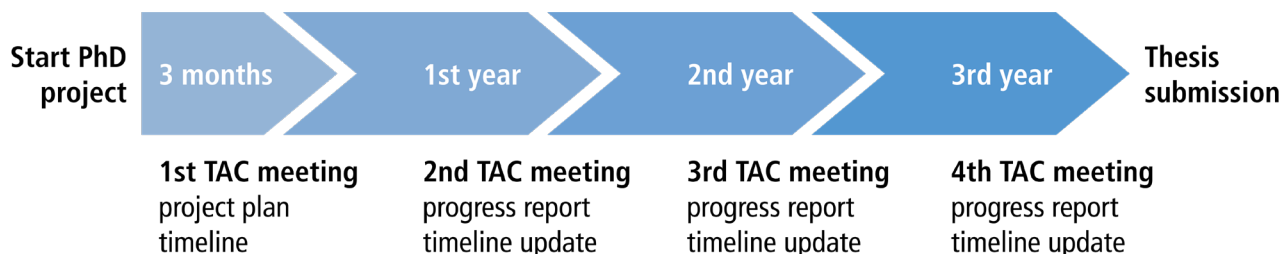
The TAC is responsible for the individual scientific supervision of the doctoral researcher. The main purpose of the TAC meetings is to review and discuss the scientific progress, and to give advice on the development of the PhD project. At least one mentor should not be a member of the academic supervisor's research group, in order to provide an external view of the project and an independent opinion. If necessary, this independent mentor can mediate between the doctoral researcher and the academic supervisor. In cases of serious conflict, the TAC may refer to dedicated ombudspersons. In addition, the TAC should advise the doctoral researcher on career planning and professional development.

At a minimum, the required sections of the TAC status report will be discussed.



Schedule of TAC meetings during the PhD project

The first meeting will be held no later than 6 months after the start of the project; subsequent meetings are due at least once a year. In the early stages, more frequent meetings are strongly recommended. TAC meetings are convened by the candidate, who also ensures that they are documented and that the TAC status report at the end of the meeting contains all necessary information / feedback.



Timing	Meeting	Suggested main outcomes
Within three months of starting the PhD	1st Project Plan meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreed project plan for the three-year PhD • Agreed milestones for the first year • Initial plan for training needs and how to complete training • Plan for local and international conferences • Plan the timing of a potential stay abroad
End of first year	2nd Progress meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check progress against the original project plan and adjust time plan • Discuss and tackle any obstacles/issues faced • Discuss and revise publication plans
End of second year	3rd Progress meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check progress against the previously agreed original project plan and adjust time plan again • Discuss and tackle any obstacles/issues faced • Discuss and revise publication plans
End of third year	4th Progress meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check progress against the previously agreed original project plan and adjust time plan again • Set timelines for thesis preparation • Discuss preparations for career post defense



Additional meetings

We encourage you to have additional progress meetings whenever necessary! For example, at the end of a fieldwork period/before submitting papers, etc., if you feel you need the support of your entire TAC team.

Suggested format for TAC meetings

- Your presentation (usually with slides, but the format is up to you)
 - Start with an introduction to your project, focusing on the main research questions/hypotheses (do not expect your TAC to remember these from the previous meeting)
 - Include a short summary of the main progress you have made since the last meeting / challenges / questions for the TAC (questions can also be related to, e.g., faculty PhD requirement, trainings, conferences, career development).
 - Note that you can invite discussion in the middle of your presentation (e.g., identifying questions related to each work package) or at the end
- Discussion between the TAC team and the doctoral researcher
 - For topics, follow the project plan/progress forms, and see below (topics you should always raise...)
- After the meeting, the TAC signs the (revised) report (digital signature is possible).
- Duration: 1 - 1.5 hours



How to prepare for the TAC meetings?

- Arrange the date and time of the meeting with your TAC well in advance. Do **schedule at least 1.5 hours** for each PAC meeting. *Remember to also reserve a meeting room in case of in-person meetings.*
- Note that finding a time that works for all your supervisors is likely to be very challenging – a good way to start is to find several *dates and times with your main supervisor*. Try to optimize your chances of success by scheduling the meeting well in advance!
- Once you find a date that works for everyone, remember to send a **confirmation email** to your TAC so that they mark the time in their calendar.
- Download and complete the **TAC status report form** from the [IRTG webpage](#). You should send the completed form to your entire TAC at least two weeks before the meeting. This is important to remind and update your TAC team on your project plan and progress.
- In preparation for the first TAC meeting, prepare a **detailed research plan and a time schedule**.
- At each TAC meeting, the TAC will specify which documents (e.g., **progress report, meeting minutes**), in addition to the mandatory updated timeline and the pre-completed TAC status report, the candidate must provide for the next TAC meeting.
- Details on how to prepare the research plan and progress reports can be found in the 'IRTG Reporting guideline', which can be downloaded from the [IRTG webpage](#).
- Prepare a **short presentation** to update your TAC on your progress (see 'Suggested format for TAC meetings' above). Remember that this is not a conference presentation, i.e., it should not only focus on your best achievements, but you should also highlight key issues that you have experienced and that may be hindering your progress.
- Be prepared to present and defend your **publication plans**.
- You may invite the IRTG coordinator to the TAC meetings whenever necessary (e.g., in case of supervisory conflicts).

Issues that you should raise at a TAC meeting

Remember that the main purpose of your PAC meetings is to help you progress in your doctoral project and in your development as an independent researcher. Be honest, and focus on finding solutions to your problems.

- What are the main **obstacles** to the progress in your work?
 - Are there any specific approaches/techniques that you need help or advice with? (Be specific!)
 - Are you getting enough material/technical support – if not, why not? How might the situation be improved?
- How do you plan your **publications** (approach, data, analyses, journals)
 - Good to discuss in detail, as your TAC team often has good recommendations for you.
- Your plan for **training** within (and beyond) the (AC)³ framework
 - What courses will you take and why? How will they support your personal development and progress?
 - Ask for recommendations for summer schools, workshops, etc.
 - Research stay abroad: what would be the most useful way to do this?
- Your plans for **teaching/supervision activities**: can the TAC support you in this?
- Your plans for the **future**: do you need support in terms of career advice or networking contacts?



Take notes and send a **summary of the meeting** to your TAC and collect the signatures of your TAC members on the TAC status report within two weeks of the meeting. Please send a signed copy of your TAC status report (keep an unsigned copy!), updated timeline and any other documents to the IRTG office no later than two weeks after the meeting.

Please note that the (AC)³ Data Policy (<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7570328>) and the DFG Guidelines for Safeguarding Good Research Practice (<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.6472827>) apply to all TAC members. These guidelines aim to promote ethical conduct and best practices to prevent scientific misconduct and any form of bullying, harassment or discrimination.

If you have any questions regarding the TAC process, or if you have any problems with your supervisor or TAC team, do not hesitate to contact the IRTG coordination!

You can also invite the IRTG coordinator to your progress meetings if needed.

irtg@ac3-tr.de

For further information and download of the 'TAC status report' 'IRTG Reporting guideline', please visit the IRTG webpage:

<https://www.ac3-tr.de/projects/cluster-z/irtg/>



Glossary

Thesis Advisory Committee (TAC)

The TAC will guide the candidate throughout the independent research phase. The doctoral researcher and supervisor jointly select the second (and third) committee members.

Scientific Advisor / *Betreuer*in des Promotionsvorhabens*

Person usually at the research institution where the doctoral project is being worked on.

Academic supervisor / *formale*r Betreuer*in*

Person holding the right to supervise doctoral candidates at the Faculty (only necessary in addition to the advisor, if the advisor does not hold this right). This person usually signs the Application for Admission as Doctoral Student / *Antrag auf Zulassung als Doktorand*

Mentor

Person holding a doctorate or PhD degree who joins the TAC alongside the advisor(s), without having an advisor role.