

RADBOUD

Institute for Biological and
Environmental Sciences

RIBES PhD **guide**

for RIBES PhD candidates
and their supervisors

Radboud University



Preface

The RIBES PhD Guide provides details of your PhD journey at RIBES, what's expected of you and your supervisors, and how we can help you throughout your PhD journey. Together with the information from Radboud University and your department, this guide describes the goals and expectations throughout your PhD journey to help you successfully finish your PhD within the agreed time.

In addition, you need to be aware of these other important regulations and requirements:

- Doctorate regulations of Radboud University
- RIBES Graduate School programme

If you have any questions about these guidelines or your PhD journey, feel free to contact ribes@ru.nl at any time.

This document was created by staff and PhD representatives of the departments of Ecology, Microbiology, Environmental Science, and Plant & Animal Biology, the RIBES management team, and the RIBES Graduate School coordinator (RIBES, 2024-2025).

Note for supervisors and other readers: these RIBES Guidelines address the needs and expectations of an individual PhD candidate, therefore we address them personally throughout the document.

Version 1 (November 2025)

The most recently updated version can be found on RIBES Graduate School website.



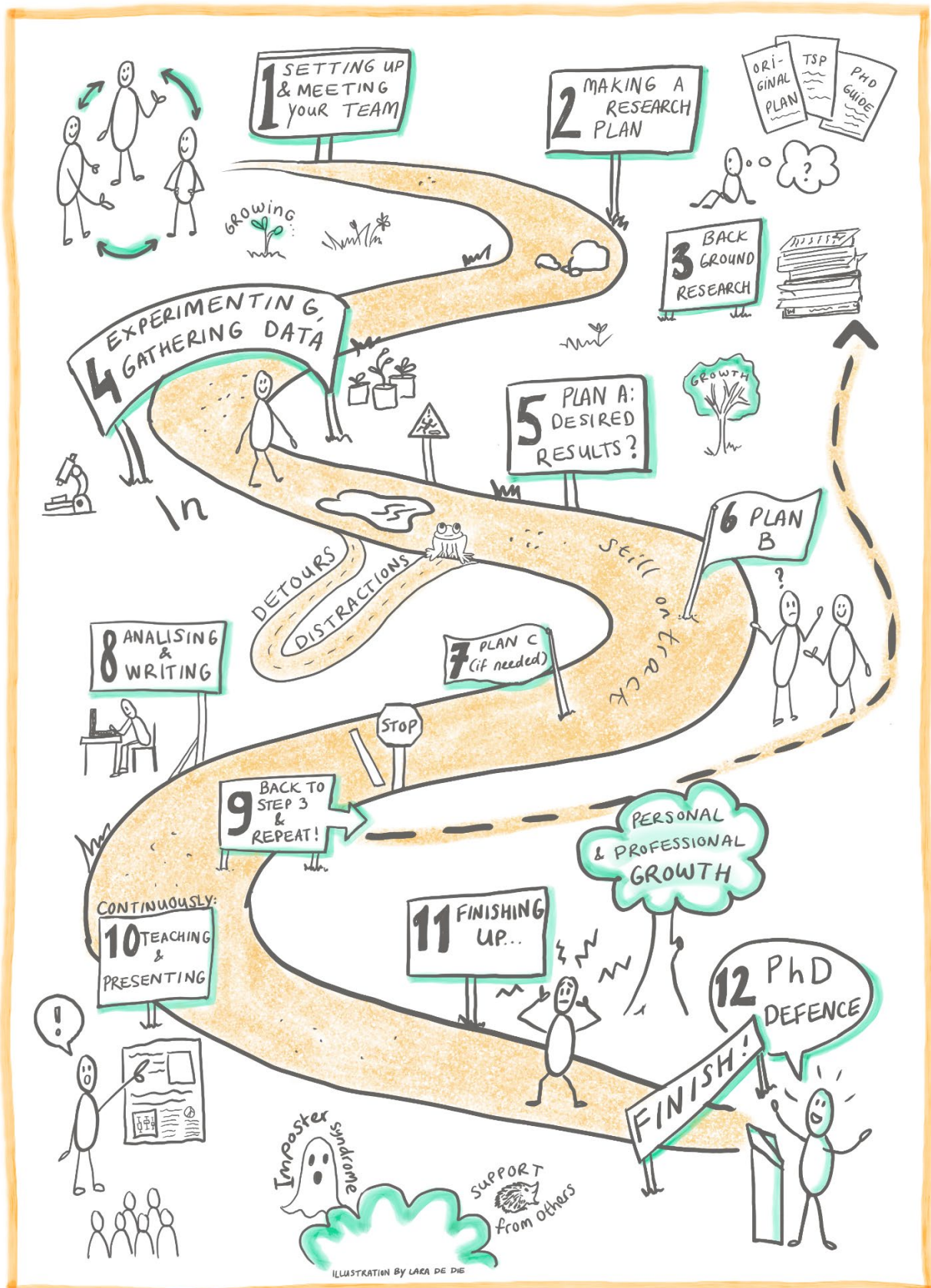
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1. The RIBES PhD roadmap

As a PhD candidate, you will conduct research, follow courses to obtain and hone skills, teach and supervise students, and make steps towards your potential future career. You do this as part of our academic community and your department. You will report on your research in a doctoral thesis and thereby demonstrate your capabilities as an independent researcher.

The roadmap below will give you an idea of the things you'll do on your PhD journey:



2. Completing a PhD

The end results of your PhD journey are the combination of your thesis and the skills and competencies obtained during your PhD journey while working on your PhD thesis. The most tangible result of your PhD journey is your doctoral thesis. Once approved, you defend your thesis at the PhD graduation ceremony, where you are awarded your doctorate.

Throughout the PhD journey, you work towards becoming an independent and competent researcher. Radboud University, RIBES Graduate School, and partnering graduate schools offer courses that help you learn, practice and hone the skills and competencies you will need towards achieving this aim. In the first three months of your journey, you will write and agree on a training and supervision plan (TSP) in which you describe your planned courses and training, including courses on teaching. See the RIBES Graduate School for the TSP template.

2.1 Your thesis

You will complete your doctorate at RIBES by writing and defending a chapter-based thesis as a final document. Your thesis should provide evidence of your competencies, and should show the manuscript committee that you're an independent scientist. To do so, the thesis has to adhere to the doctorate regulations of Radboud University (Chapter 5 The PhD thesis). A monograph or technological design are not the expected structure of a RIBES thesis.

2.1.1 General introduction and discussion

The chapter-based thesis contains a general introduction defining your research questions, the research chapters (see below), and a chapter with a synthesis and discussion in which your research findings are identified and discussed and the research questions answered. The general introduction and synthesis of the thesis should be your own work and emphasise the coherence of the different research chapters.

2.1.2 Research chapters

Writing the research chapters should start as early as your research permits. Ideally, your first (draft) chapter will be ready by the midterm review. At RIBES, we maintain the following standards for the quality, quantity and authorship of the research chapters:

Quality:

Your research chapters should be stand-alone manuscripts that are published or of high enough quality that they could be submitted to a journal.

Similar to other Dutch universities, we recommend that your research chapters have gone through the process of submission to a scientific journal, peer review, and rebuttal, but this is not mandatory for inclusion in the thesis. Each chapter describes the work that you conducted and analysed (experimental and/or modelling and/or data analysis), and demonstrates that you followed the scientific research cycle: identifying the research gap, outlining the approach,

describing and interpreting your results, and discussing their significance from a scientific perspective. The length and format of a chapter, the number of figures, the scientific depth, the quality of data collection, and the analysis thereof, should be of a level customary to your specific research field. Your chapters may also report on studies that didn't lead to the expected outcomes.

Quantity:

Typically, a RIBES thesis contains four original research chapters. In exceptional cases, such as the extensiveness of the work, fewer original research chapters can be justified. The competencies chart (see Appendix I) can be used to display your professional growth towards obtaining the competencies of an independent researcher, which may serve as a justification for a different number of chapters.

Authorship:

In the majority of the research chapters you are the (joint) lead author. In jointly authored research chapters, you must provide details of your contribution in the cover of that chapter following the CreDiT system (credit.niso.org). Your supervisors decide whether this is substantial enough to be included in your thesis.

2.2 Becoming an independent researcher

During your PhD journey you're expected to develop the following competencies:

1. Develop research ideas
2. Set up your research plan
3. Execute your research
4. Synthesize your research results
5. Write, publish & review papers in scientific journals
6. Communicate your research
7. Develop educational competencies (*for RU-employed PhD candidates*)
8. Show awareness of scientific integrity and ethics (in compliance with the Netherlands' Code of Conduct for Research Integrity)
9. Show your awareness of diversity and inclusion in a research and education environment

The competencies chart is a valuable tool for you and your supervisors to track your growth in these competencies (see Appendix I). In the first six months of your PhD, you and your supervisors should align mutual expectations on the relative importance of these different competencies, and the definition of which of these activities are to be considered as early stage, developing, progress or advanced level. We define 'early stage' as the competencies achieved during your MSc or the Radboud Biosciences Exam regulations, and an 'advanced level' as meeting a Postdoc level of independent research.

We recommend using the competencies chart as follows:

- You discuss progress in your competencies with your supervisors at least once a year according to your mutual agreements, using the chart.
- The chart is intended to foster discussions and reflection regarding your competencies as a developing researcher. It's not intended as a checklist that must be completed.
- The chart can be used to identify areas where you should spend more efforts on or receive additional training, and to be able to use in discussions on both your research progress and personal progress and growth.

- The chart has a column in which you can enter any identified concrete action points to improve these competencies.
- You're not expected to achieve an 'Advanced' level in each competency by the end of the PhD track, but you should demonstrate progress and have moved beyond early-stage in each category.

3. Building your supervisory relationship

Your PhD journey is a team effort. Your supervisors are experts in their fields and are there to help and support you to achieve your doctorate. With their expertise, guidance, and extensive networks they are there to help you develop the skills needed for your future career as an independent researcher, either within or outside academia. This chapter briefly describes your and their roles, and outlines the other people involved in your PhD as well.

3.1 Your role

You are the most important person in your PhD journey! As time goes on, you are expected to take more and more responsibility for your project, your development, and the final result. Your thesis and doctorate are your accomplishments – of course with the assistance and guidance of the people mentioned below.

3.2 Your PhD promotor (supervisor)

Your promotor is formally responsible for your PhD trajectory. They are also your supervisor in the sense of ‘manager’; you can turn to them with questions about your employment and well-being. Your promotor can also be your daily supervisor, i.e., the first person you turn to for feedback and questions on your research project. Their role is to interact with you frequently on your research design, provide guidance, training and feedback, monitor research progress, and ensure you achieve sufficient academic research quality.

3.3 Your PhD co-supervisors (co-promotors and others in the supervisory team)

In addition to your promotor, there is always at least one other person in your supervisory team. This person can be an expert in your topic and/or a collaborator in your project. If your promotor is not your daily supervisor, (one of) your co-supervisor(s) will fulfil that role.

Working effectively with the supervisory team

You will meet with your supervisors frequently (see also: **Appendix II - meeting timeline**). An understanding of each other's responsibilities and expectations is key to a fruitful collaboration. To ensure this and to avoid assumptions on either side, you and your supervisor(s) can align your expectations using the **expectation alignment sheet (Appendix III)**. This sheet helps clarify and align different understandings and expectations regarding your PhD project. We highly recommend that you prepare and discuss this sheet in the first months of your project.

3.4 Your independent advisor (RIBES agreement)

An independent advisor is a researcher in a field related to your research, but not involved in your project. They hold a doctorate, are involved in academic research, but their position or seniority level is not fixed. They have no formal ties with your project nor with your promotor or your daily supervisors.

Your independent advisor comments on the feasibility and planning of your project at the **midterm meeting**, which is usually at the end of the second year. We also recommend inviting your advisor when you discuss the project proposal and planning between six and nine months, and/or to the final progress meeting at six months before the end of your contract. Depending on the project phase and your advisor's availability, it is possible to have a different advisor at the different meetings, but we recommend inviting the same advisor to multiple meetings over the course of your PhD journey.

Your supervisors take the lead in finding a suitable advisor, but you and your supervisors can both come up with suggestions. Inviting an independent advisor to this role must be discussed between you and your supervisors before this person is approached.

3.5 Your mentor (RIBES agreement)

Your mentor is your personal sounding board and is independent, as described for the independent advisor in the previous section. It's essential that they are your personal choice, and that you feel comfortable enough to discuss any sensitive issues with your mentor in a one-on-one meeting.

The choice for your mentor should be indicated in your TSP handed in for approval within three months after starting your position. You should therefore already be in contact with and meet your preferred mentor in the first three months. You should meet your mentor at least once per year; together you decide the most suitable way to establish these meetings. The mandatory yearly meeting with your mentor can be credited with four hours for four years in the RIBES TSP.

3.6 Your Graduate School coordinator

All RIBES PhD candidates are connected to the RIBES Graduate School and can turn to the Graduate School coordinator for advice on the TSP and courses, Hora Finita, elective activities, and other aspects of doing a PhD. The RIBES Graduate School coordinator can be an independent sounding board, particularly if confidentiality issues arise. They are the first point of contact when you encounter communication or expectation issues with supervisors, planning issues, personal problems, or other issues you're struggling with.

For more details about the RIBES Graduate School coordinator and other support services at Radboud University, please see chapter 7.

4. Following the rules and agreements

The rules and agreements outlined by the university, faculty, and/or institute help paint a picture of what's needed and expected for you to complete your PhD successfully. They form a basis for effective communication and clear expectations between you and your supervisors, which ensures mutual responsibility for the success of your PhD journey.

In the following subsections, we first list important Radboud University and/or Faculty of Science rules about a topic, and then list the supplementary RIBES agreements.

4.1 Supervision

Radboud University and Faculty of Science rules:

- You must be able to rely on at least two actively involved supervisors;
- Your daily supervisor is frequently available for discussions and meeting (for example, on a weekly basis);
- Your other supervisor(s) is/are available for discussions and meetings at a lower frequency than the daily supervisor (for example once a month, but at least 4 times per year).
- You and your supervisors agree on the meeting frequency and availability (e.g., working days and hours, working from home) during the first weeks of the PhD project and document these agreements in the Training and Supervision Plan (TSP).
- Any structural changes to agreements about supervision and training must be updated in your Training and Supervision Plan (TSP). It's quite common to change the meeting agreements through different phases of the project, and this should be discussed at the annual evaluation meetings.

RIBES agreements:

- Communication between you and your supervisors occurs in an agreed-upon format, place, and time, within office hours. It only occurs outside of office hours after mutual consent.
- If one of your supervisors is absent for more than a month (e.g. due to illness, sabbatical leave, or personal reasons), your (other) supervisors are responsible for making arrangements to replace this person's role. If a supervisor leaves the project completely, your supervisors are responsible for finding a replacement.

4.2 Professional and personal development

Radboud University and Faculty of Science rules:

- You are affiliated with a graduate school and you have the opportunity to participate in courses, activities, outreach, and management/organisational tasks, supporting both your personal and professional development. Up to 10% of your time is spent on these activities.
- You are required to take a course on scientific ethics and integrity;
- All employed PhD candidates also take a required course on didactics and one on managing your PhD project;
- The arrangements and planning you make for the above are included in your TSP.

RIBES agreements:

- The PhD journey is a process of increasing independence. It is expected that, over time, you will take more and more responsibility for your research, development, and professional growth. You are not expected to be fully autonomous from the start and can rely on the support and guidance of your supervisors. You are expected to actively work toward developing the academic, personal, and professional competencies necessary to independently plan and manage your research project. Your supervisors facilitate the transition to autonomy and ensure you are equipped to take ownership of your project and development by the end of the journey.

4.3 Planning and completing your thesis

Radboud University and Faculty of Science rules:

- Each year, you and your supervisors have an annual evaluation interview in which you discuss and agree on a realistic plan for your PhD project in the progress and evaluation form.

RIBES agreements:

- It is your and your supervisors' mutual responsibility to ensure that you can submit your thesis before the end of the contract period.
- If you and your supervisors agree that you take on additional tasks, or any personal circumstances arise along the way, you and your supervisors should make arrangements regarding the feasibility of the project within the available time.
- Six months before the thesis submission deadline, you should be allowed to focus on writing. Your supervisors cannot expect you to produce new data or be involved in teaching at this stage.

5. Developing your teaching skills

As part of your PhD journey at Radboud University, you can also teach and supervise Bachelor and Master students. These educational tasks generally do not start until six months into your PhD and are finished before your last six months. In this chapter, your teaching responsibilities, activities, and expected time effort are described in more detail.

5.1 Your teaching load

Different types of PhD appointments may have varying regulations, including those concerning teaching:

- Employed PhD candidates: Typically, every PhD candidate employed at Radboud University is expected to spend 10% of their time on teaching.
- Educational PhD candidates (Edu-PhD) are expected to spend 25% of their time on teaching and their development as teachers; in section 5.4 you will find more specific policies for Edu-PhD candidates at RIBES.
- Joint Doctorate PhD candidates: As a joint doctorate PhD candidate, agreements about the teaching load at each partner university can vary. These should be recorded in a formal Joint Doctorate cooperation agreement (www.radboudnet.nl/onderzoek/regelingen-werkwijzen/joint-doctorates/) to ensure an appropriate distribution of teaching responsibilities.
- Scholarship and External PhD candidates typically don't have teaching responsibilities. You are, however, welcome to be involved in teaching if you want to work on related skills and competencies. Please discuss your options with your supervisors.

5.2 Your teaching activities and effort

Your exact teaching tasks will vary across departments due to factors such as the nature of the courses offered by that department, the available teaching activities, or the number of interested students. We expect you to participate in the following teaching activities:

1. Supervise students (internships, theses, proposals, essays)
2. Coach groups, tutorials, tutor groups
3. Assist with practical activities (lab/field/tutorials) during courses

The following activities are also considered a teaching activity and can be included after discussion with your supervisor.

4. Lecturing
5. Course organisation, preparation and admin (e.g., scheduling, lab/field course organisation, creating an online learning environment)

6. Personal and Professional Development (PPD) coaching
7. Course (co-)coordination
8. Assisting with exam grading

Other activities may be considered as teaching as well, but we recommend discussing this in advance with your supervisors. In your role as PhD candidate, you can never be the examiner, i.e., person responsible for the course and the grading, unless you have obtained your UTQ. If you ever encounter any issues with students or interns, you should note these and inform the course or internship examiner.

The time required for a specific teaching activity can vary. Table 1 provides an estimate of the time (hours) needed for each activity. However, as the actual time spent may differ from the estimate, we advise tracking your own time spent on teaching activities and communicating this with your supervisors. We suggest to use the estimated hours for supervision as a guidance in determining meeting frequencies and duration with your intern(s).

Table 1: Overview of teaching activities and estimated time effort

Task	Activity	Estimated hours
1	Supervising a BSc student internship	~24-36 hours for 12EC*
1	Supervising an MSc student internship	~72-108 hours for 36EC*
1	Supervising a student's review article	~12-18 hours for 6EC*
1	Supervising student's research proposal	~12-18 hours for 6EC*
2	PPD coaching first years	~27 hours
2	PPD coaching second years	~19 hours
2	PPD coaching third years	~21 hours
3	Lab, field, tutorial assistant	Course dependent
4	Lecture (preparing ~3h + lecturing 1h)	~4 hour for one lecture (45 minutes)
5	Course organisation, preparation, admin	Course dependent
6	Course (co-)coordination	Course dependent
7	Exam grading	Course dependent

**Based on 2-3 hours of supervision given by the PhD per student EC*

For reference: PhD candidates with a four-year contract who spend 10% of their time on teaching, should spend an average of four hours per week on teaching, which adds up to approximately 180 hours total per year. Edu-PhDs, who spend 25% of their time on teaching, should spend an average of 10 hours per week on teaching and professionalisation as a teacher, which adds up to 450 hours per year.

5.3 Professional development as a teacher

All PhD candidates employed at the Faculty of Science must take part in the introductory didactics course offered by the Faculty of Science. You can also take other (university-wide) courses, self-study modules, and workshops, all via ru.nl/lecturers.

Please note:

- If you prefer it, a university-wide teaching course can replace the standard didactics course of the Faculty of Science. Please discuss this with the graduate school coordinator in advance.
- Should you already have sufficient didactical experience, exemptions for the didactics course can be requested with the graduate school coordinator. Please note, the Teaching Assistant training by the Faculty of Science does not suffice.

5.4 For Educational PhD (Edu-PhD) candidates

As an Edu-PhD candidate, in addition to providing education, you have time to professionalise yourself in education. During your Edu-PhD, you can expect to spend four to five months in total on professional development in the form of courses and practical training, joining Faculty/University education days, and by participating in the University Teaching Qualification (UTQ).

5.4.1 The UTQ track

As a RIBES Edu-PhD candidate, you have to participate in the University Teaching Qualification (UTQ) track, ideally obtaining the qualification before the start of your final year. Information about the UTQ track and the required criteria can be found online:

www.ru.nl/en/staff/lecturers/lecturer-development/university-teaching-qualification-utq.

Non-Edu-PhD candidates may also participate in some UTQ modules and obtain one or two partial certificates. Obtaining the full UTQ is not feasible as a regular PhD candidate.

5.4.2 Education meetings

As an Edu-PhD, you are part of your department's teaching team and are actively involved in teaching at the Faculty of Science. Therefore, we expect you to frequently join the following meetings:

- Education Institute (BioSciences) meetings
- Department meetings about education
- Faculty education meetings
- Faculty education day
- University education days

6. Finalising your thesis & graduation

In this chapter we elaborate on the agreements we have at RIBES for finalising your thesis. For a formal timeline of your submission and defence process, please see www.ru.nl/en/staff/phd-candidates/getting-your-phd/phd-roadmap (step 4 and onwards)

6.1 Submitting your thesis

At RIBES we strive towards helping you finish your PhD thesis within your contract period. To help you achieve this, you and your supervisors discuss and agree on a timeline for the final year at the annual progress meeting preceding this year. You and your supervisors set dates for submitting versions of manuscripts and plan feedback moments. This is also the time to discuss when you will submit your complete (draft) thesis.

We reiterate two important RIBES agreements here:

- It is your and your supervisors' mutual responsibility to ensure that you can submit your thesis before the end of the contract period.
- Six months before the thesis submission deadline, you should be allowed to focus on writing. Your supervisor cannot expect you to produce new data or be involved in teaching at this stage.

In these final six months, you also have time to arrange (open science) data storage, disseminate your results to the public, and, following submission, any of the activities listed below.

The following parts of the thesis should be submitted to the manuscript committee:

1. Introduction chapter
2. Research chapters
3. Synthesis/conclusion chapter
4. Research Data Management page

6.2 After submission

Congratulations, you submitted your thesis! You have completed a huge milestone in your journey. Now finalising your journey really begins:

- Wait for the manuscript committee decision (up to 5 weeks)
- Organise, transfer and store your data, samples, materials, if you have not done so already
- After manuscript approval, contact the registrar's office to agree a date for graduation
- After manuscript approval, (prepare to) print your thesis

- Final edit and layout your thesis for printing, including:
 - Cover
 - Title page (always in Dutch, in strict Radboud University format)
 - Summary (always in Dutch)
 - Your resume
 - (optional: index, summary in English, summary in other language(s), propositions, acknowledgements)
- Prepare your graduation ceremony presentation

6.3 After graduation

Throughout your PhD journey, you and your supervisor(s) have discussed your vision of your future career. Should you wish to discuss your options and plans after graduation with someone else, please get in touch with the RIBES Graduate School coordinator, Human Resources, or the Faculty of Science career service (www.ru.nl/en/departments/fnwi-education-center/career-service-science).

7. Support network

Your support network is vital for the success of your PhD. Doing a PhD is a challenging task and usually comes with setbacks, ups and downs in your motivation, and unexpected issues. These are all learning opportunities, but you don't have to face them alone! Your support network can include family, friends, partners, colleagues, teammates, and Radboud support services.

The most important PhD support services available to you from Radboud University:

- The RIBES Graduate School coordinator can be your independent sounding board and is there to ask questions (for example, about the TSP or Hora Finita) and to help you address problems. The current RIBES GS coordinator is Lara de Die.
- The RIBES PhD Council organises PhD meetings in your department where you can get peer feedback from other PhD candidates. It's a great place to discover what other PhD candidates did when in similar situations.
- The Human Resource advisor, where you can discuss anything about your work situation. RIBES' current HR advisor is Kevin Hulsman.
- The head of your department and/or the RIBES Managing Director are available to discuss issues that may arise between you and others in your department or institute. The current RIBES MD is Jennifer Koelman. Other members of the RIBES Management are listed on the RIBES website.
- Internal confidential contact persons ('vertrouwenscontactpersonen') provide a low-threshold listening ear for junior academic staff. For more information and a list of current confidential contact persons, see the Confidential Contact Persons page of Radboud University > Faculty of Science. RIBES' current confidential contact persons are Aafke Schipper, Annelies Veraart, and Maartje van Kessel.
- The confidential advisors ('vertrouwenspersonen') are there specifically to talk to about undesirable behaviour or scientific integrity, and are certified members of the National Association of Confidential Advisors (Landelijke Vereniging van Vertrouwenspersonen). See the Confidential advisor staff webpage of Radboud University for more information.
- You can find many other supporting services on Radboud University campus, for example: an occupational social worker, campus psychologist, or union representative. An overview can be found on the website. If you or your supervisors are unsure who you should approach, please get in touch with HR or the graduate school coordinator for advice.

Should you be in a situation that cannot adequately be supported within our organisation, contact the RIBES Graduate School coordinator to help you find the appropriate external support.