**INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS REGARDING THE MASTER THESIS**
**FOR MSc MARINE AND LACUSTRINE SCIENCE AND MANAGEMENT 2026-2028**

The thesis work takes place in the second master year and investigates a research topic that is in the realm of marine and lacustrine science and management. It is written in English. It is preceded by a **literature study** of 3 ECTS which needs to be submitted in the 2nd semester of the first master year. The master thesis itself has a total of 27 ECTS and needs to be submitted by the end of the second master year. It consists of a **scientific manuscript** (60% of final score), and a **presentation** (10% of final score) with **defence** (30% of final score). The scores for the three parts (manuscript, presentation, defence) are merged (60% manuscript score, 10% presentation score, 30% defence score) into one final score. Each component must however correspond to at least 8/20 in order to apply the respective weighting. If a component is marked less than 8/20, then this is proposed as the final mark. The final mark is given on the basis of these rules by the jury / deliberation commission.
At any stage of the work, the literature review as well as the scientific manuscript must be free of any type of plagiarism. If after being informed about this, doubt remains, please contact lecturers or your promoter/supervisor for further information. Plagiarism will be screened for and may have serious consequences if detected (more info can be obtained via the head of the thesis commission).
Every effort must be done for language and quality control, making use of spelling checking.
Since some practical thesis activities such as sampling may take place before the start of the 2nd year of the MSc programme (e.g. during the summer holiday), it is strongly advised in such cases to thoroughly discuss all aspects with the thesis promoter/supervisor before effectively starting. This must be in line with good academic practice and insurance. You can find all further additional info in the point below 'General timing issues'.

**A comprehensive literature review about the chosen research project (5 – 10 pages, i.e. 15000 – 30000 characters excluding spaces, figures, tables, maps, and references)**

This literature review is submitted separately, prior to the start of the thesis work. It is a second semester course in the first master year. The literature review is submitted at the start of the June exams (or if necessary in second session - September) of the first master year. It should give the student the opportunity and incentive to familiarise themselves with the subject by a thorough consultation of the available literature in a thoughtful manner, before the actual research project is started. It also allows the student to think ahead about the wider context of its research and to identify the more specific questions that can be addressed by the proposed research activities. This work is not yet referring to any research results of the thesis itself.

A draft version of the literature review needs to be provided to the promoter/supervisor in time to allow him or her to give feedback and to improve the final document. We recommend the student to

1. inform themselves about the expected deadlines of draft submission with their promoter/supervisor
2. provide the promoter/supervisor with the detailed structure and topics that they plan to cover asap.
3. provide the promoter/supervisor with a draft text in time (as agreed in 1)
4. remind the promoter/supervisor to provide feedback at the latest before the 1st of May

**Scientific Manuscript**
**Part 1: A manuscript according to a comprehensive scientific manuscript as found in scientific peer reviewed journals (maximum 20 pages, 60000-90000 characters excluding spaces, figures, tables, maps, and references) (60% of the final mark)**

This manuscript is based on original analysis and interpretations made by the student. It will be the **main part of the thesis** and is submitted at the start of the examination session in June (*) in first evaluation session (depending on foreseen defence) or at the start of the examination session in August in second evaluation session.

It contains the appropriate **elements of a scientific paper (similar as papers published in peer reviewed journals),** such as an abstract, an introduction, materials and methods, results, a discussion, a conclusion, acknowledgements and references. Elements of the literature review can be recycled when they are relevant for the discussion or introduction. Furthermore, the manuscript can also have one or more appendices that contain aspects of the data collection or processing, which are generally not included in scientific papers (e.g. trials, failures, errors and corrections or proposing solutions). When the topic requires ethical advice, research permits or entails Nagoya protocol-related procedures or abiding with any other general or local regulation, these must be explicit in the thesis (permit number, ethical agreement or other legally necessary documents). It is the responsibility of the student to discuss and check this and take all necessary steps in agreement with the supervisor or mentor. Omitting this step if required may lead to non-acceptance of the thesis.

**Part 2: A PowerPoint presentation (as ppt or pdf) of 15 minutes, followed by defence with questions. (40% of the final mark: 10% for the presentation, 30% for the defence)**

This will be presented for examiners (jury) with readers / jurors, an audience of scientists (peers) and a general public, followed by a discussion with the members of the examination commission and the audience. Anyone present may ask questions. All enrolled students of the second master year are expected to attend all thesis defences on the day on which they are defending.

**General timing issues**

Notwithstanding the thesis being programmed for the second year, the students must already confirm their chosen topic by the end of the first semester of their first year of the MSc programme. Additionally, they must already complete the literature review in the second semester of the first year.

If fieldwork is part of the research, information about the location (country and place) and kind of activities (e.g. cruise on a research vessel, snorkelling, diving) has to be provided by the promoter/supervisor. This allows students to prepare for fieldwork that might be carried out during the summer months (July/August).

A student must have passed for 48 ECTS in the first master year before they can register for the Master thesis in the 2nd year. If a student is not enrolled for it, they can already do field work in Belgium, and be insured by the university. For fieldwork abroad before being enrolled into the course, it is advised to get an additional travel insurance. Fieldwork abroad must also be registered in the VUB Mobility Online tool (before departure). The master thesis topic and supervisor must also be registered at the start of the 2nd master year at the Faculty of Sciences and Bioengineering Sciences of VUB.

For the full timing schedule, see the next page.

## Timing schedule (*)

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| ***First master year*** | |
| Call for subjects among lecturers and research groups | 1 October |
| Deadline for submitting subjects + info-moments | 31 October |
| Announcement of subjects to the students | 6 November |
| Students sign in for info-moments/contact supervisor | 6 November – 6 December |
| Students send top 3 of topics (+motivation) | 7 December |
| Topic confirmed to students (Matix) | 11 January |
| Student and supervisor sign thesis charter | 1st day of second semester |
| Contact promoter/supervisor to discuss literature review timeline and draft content | 1st day of second semester |
| Initial discussion of work plan for master thesis with promoter/supervisor | Before June exams |
| Submit draft literature review for feedback | After Easter holidays |
| Submission of final literature review | 1st day of exams: 31 May or 16 August (for January graduation: last Friday before Christmas break) |
| Start of fieldwork of master thesis (facultative) | July or later depending on topic |
| ***Second master year*** | |
| Start of laboratory work (or equivalent) | September-October |
| Submission detailed work plan (template) | 2nd week of academic year |
| Submit thesis topic to VUB Faculty (via Canvas) | 15 October |
| Send thesis update to Oceans & Lakes programme coordinator | Start of Easter break |
| Submission of manuscript | 1st day of exams: 31 May or 16 August (for January graduation: 4 January) |
| Defence | 29 Jan.; 24 and 25 June; 1, 2, 3 Sept. |

**(*) timing here is typically for a first evaluation session defence in June, or second evaluation session in September. Exceptionally, the defence can be scheduled in January. Please be aware of regulations regarding defence sessions, unless requested otherwise, students are scheduled for June or September (if not graduated in July) automatically. First or second session have equal academic value. Students graduating in January must register for this (via the faculty's website – VUB)**