

Advisory Committee Meeting Guidelines

For Students in the Department of Chemistry

List of Revisions:

October 2026, September 2022, 2014

Overview

Timing

Advisory committee (AC) meetings are a regular part of your graduate program and should take place at least **every 12 months**. The graduate program coordinator will notify both you and your supervisor when you are due for an AC meeting and help with scheduling.

You (or your supervisor) may also request an AC meeting any time you want to discuss something with your committee. If you'd like to request a meeting, contact the graduate program coordinator (chem.grad.program@usask.ca).

Format

There are three components to a regular AC meeting: a **report**, a **presentation**, and a **discussion**.

Report	Presentation	Discussion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A written update on your progress toward research goals and program milestones • Plans for future work (short and long-term) • 3,000 words maximum (not including references) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A presentation describing your research goals, program progress and future plans • The audience is your advisory committee • 15 - 20 min 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity for you to ask questions or seek advice • Questions / comments from your committee in an open format, moderated by the chair • Approx. 30 - 60 min

Figure 1. Components of an AC meeting.

An AC meeting may also be held to deal with a specific issue (e.g., approving a leave of absence). For these special AC meetings, the graduate program coordinator will notify you if a report or presentation is required as part of the AC meeting.

Special note for students transferring from the MSc to the PhD program

If you are proposing to transfer from the MSc to the PhD program, your AC meeting will be slightly different from what is described below. The purpose of this meeting is for you to demonstrate to your AC that you have the necessary writing and oral communication skills, research skills, and disciplinary knowledge to successfully complete the Candidacy Exam and to complete a PhD. To do this, you should present evidence of significant research progress during your MSc program and provide a clear outline of how your current MSc research will be expanded or modified to become sufficient in scope for a PhD thesis. You should also present a timeline for completion of any remaining courses and the Candidacy Exam within the required 36 months of initial registration in the graduate program. This should be included in both your written report and in the presentation to your AC.

Writing the Report

Deadlines

When you are due for an AC meeting, you and your supervisor will be contacted by the graduate program coordinator regarding scheduling. Once you have a day and time for your AC meeting, you should start preparing your AC report. Your report is due **one week** before your AC meeting.

Length and Format

The report should be **3000 words maximum**, not counting references, tables, figures, schemes, equations, or appendices. It should adhere to the following general formatting guidelines:

- Main text should be in 12 point, Times New Roman font and double spaced.
- Pages should be 8 ½" × 11" (letter size) with minimum margins of ¾".
- All pages should be numbered in the bottom-right corner, except for the cover page.
- Citations and references should be in *Journal of the American Chemical Society* format; references should include titles.
- Use the following headings:
Introduction, Research Goals, Research Progress, Future Work, References, Appendix (optional)

Before you start writing, discuss the format of your AC report with your supervisor.

Introduction

Introduce your topic and its importance. What are the unanswered questions or unmet challenges? How have other researchers approached similar problems? Cite and briefly discuss the relevant literature. Ultimately, your committee wants to see that you have done the background reading on your topic, that you understand the field, and that you can place your own work into context.

This is meant to be a concise introduction to your research area, not a lengthy review. Introductions may vary in length, but most will be between **300 – 600 words**. Compared to a qualifying exam report, this will be a much more focused and concise introduction to the topic.

Research Goals

Clearly and concisely state the overall (long-term) goals of your PhD research and describe shorter-term objectives. For each project that you propose, consider framing it in terms of a **research question** and a **hypothesis**:

"Project 1. Old-fashioned vs. Jam-filled Doughnuts. In this project, I will determine whether chemistry students prefer old-fashioned or jam-filled doughnuts. My hypothesis is that there will be a preference for jam-filled doughnuts."

In this example, there is a question and hypothesis and it is clear what the research is trying to achieve.

Your research goals may change and evolve as you progress in your program. Some projects will have been completed (or abandoned), while new ones might have been started since your last AC meeting. This is your chance to update your AC on your current goals and objectives.

Research Progress

What experiments have you done since your last AC meeting? What were the results, and what conclusions can you draw from them? If you've published new papers since your last meeting – congratulations! Summarize the results and be sure to tell your AC that the work has been published (you could include the .pdf of the published work as an Appendix). But this is also the place to discuss failed reactions and experiments, things that just don't seem to work, and other problems that you've been having. In short – give your committee an idea of what you've been doing since your last AC meeting.

Future Work

What are your short-term work plans (for the rest of the term)? Do you have key experiments planned? If so, what are they, and what do you hope to achieve? Are you getting ready for beamtime? Embarking on a 12-step synthesis? Writing a paper? Preparing for your comprehensive exam? Let your committee know!

What about medium-term plans (rest of the year)? Do you hope to start new projects? Start writing manuscripts?

What about long-term plans (rest of your program)? Do you have a plan for finishing projects and wrapping up experimental work? Do you still have to complete any major program milestones (<https://artsandscience.usask.ca/chemistry/graduates/program-timelines.php>)? If so, when will you complete them?

Appendix

If you have lengthy experimental details to report (e.g., synthetic procedures and characterization data for new compounds), put them in an appendix rather than including them in the main text. If you've published peer-reviewed papers since your last AC meeting, you can also include those in the appendix.

Presentation

At the start of the meeting, you will give a **15 – 20 min presentation** summarizing your research progress and plans for future work.

Your presentation should succinctly introduce your research topic, remind your committee of your research goals, describe your research progress, and discuss your plans for future work. You won't have time to go through everything in detail but remember that your committee has already read your report. Summarize, using carefully selected examples to highlight your points.

The primary audience for your presentation is your advisory committee.

Discussion

At the end of your presentation, the meeting chair will ask you if you have any questions for your committee or if there are topics you want to focus the discussion on. This is a great time to seek advice on a wide range of topics – anything from technical skills and experimental design to effective writing and time management.

At this point, the meeting chair will ask your committee if they have any questions for you or if there are topics that they want to discuss. This is an open and informal discussion, moderated by the chair. Your committee may want clarification on aspects of your report or presentation, or they may have research suggestions, technical questions, or suggestions for improvement. The length of the discussion period is variable, but **typically runs 30 – 60 min.**

Advisory Committee

The composition of your advisory committee will depend on whether you are a PhD or a MSc student.

PhD Students	MSc Students
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• AC Member• Cognate Member• Supervisor	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• AC Member• Supervisor

Figure 2. Advisory committee composition.

Your committee will also have a chair who will oversee the running of the meeting.

After the Meeting

Outcomes

An AC meeting is not an exam – it's not pass or fail! Most of the time, AC meetings are just routine check-ins with your committee to make sure you're on track in your program.

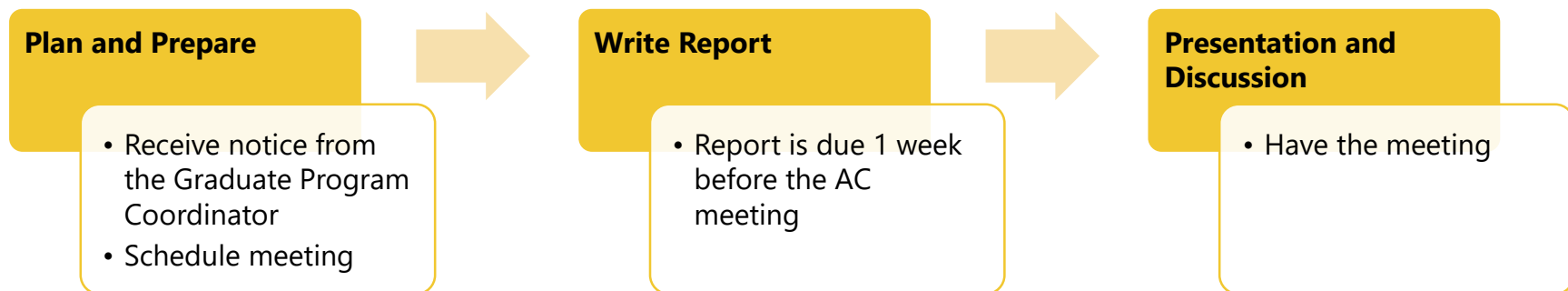
Sometimes AC meetings are convened for a specific purpose: to approve a program of study, a leave of absence, or some other aspect of your program. In these cases, your supervisor will advise you of the meeting outcome.

AC Meeting – Quick Reference

Meeting Components

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