IMBRSEA - THESIS

Thesis Guidelines
Thesis Evaluation
Thesis Timeline

This document provides an overview of all thesis regulations, documents and procedures implemented for the IMBRSea Master Programme

Version June 2026

CONTENT

1. THESIS WORK – AN INTRODUCTION

The thesis work is an integrated part of the IMBRSea Master Programme and is credited for 30 ECTS. All students are expected to perform the individual thesis work during the fourth semester (starting after finishing the courses at the third semester University) in one of the member institutes of the network (main or associated), as long as previously approved by the IMBRSea educational board.

During thesis work, students focus on a specific research subject for a certain amount of time. The students work independently albeit under the supervision of a thesis supervision team. During thesis work, students apply techniques and knowledge they gained during the courses of the three previous semesters. The final product is a written report stating the main results presented in a scientifically correct way. Thesis students must physically present and discuss their results at the IMBRSea Annual Symposium of their respective cohort.

2. THESIS WORK – TIMELINE OVERVIEW *

*exact timing is subject to change on a yearly basis

- November-January Academic Year 1:
    - Partners (full and/or associate) of the IMBRSea network are invited to send new or updated research lines in which they would like to receive thesis students to the IMBRSea Central Coordination Office (see section 3).
    - Thesis research lines are checked and, if corresponding to the scope of the IMBRSea programme, approved by the Main coordinator on behalf of the Educational Board, and bundled in a Thesis Research-line catalogue.
- First half of semester 2:
    - An online info session/thesis webinar will be held to provide information about the thesis process to Ma1 students. The students will be notified of the exact date of the thesis webinar by email. Students should not start planning nor discussing potential thesis proposals in depth prior to attending the thesis webinar. The webinar will be recorded and made available for consultation after the session. All Ma1 students are expected to attend the live session, unless this overlaps with compulsory classes of the second semester. Only if the live session cannot be organized due to exceptional circumstances, a webinar recording will be shared with students only. A Q&A form will be shared with Ma1 students after the webinar.
    - After the thesis webinar takes place, the Thesis Research-line catalogue is published in the IMBRSea-Matix platform. Students should consult it to find a thesis topic that matches their interest, as explained in detail during the thesis webinar. Students should then contact the (potential) thesis supervisors (i.e. the researcher responsible for the published thesis line), discuss the research topic and, if applicable, develop a master-thesis proposal according to the IMBRSea requirements (see further).

      The catalogue provides an overview of potential topics, but students are welcome to negotiate with potential supervisors a topic which is not on the list*.

¨make sure to attend the thesis info session for further details on selection of research lines and the subsequent development of the thesis proposal.

- March – June Academic Year 1:
    - Master-Thesis Open office sessions: virtual-meeting moments with the IMBRSea main coordinator will be periodically organized to clarify additional doubts from students about thesis proposals and thesis work. The exact dates & time will be communicated through students' cohort mailing list in due time".
- May - June Academic Year 1:
    - Students submit a thesis project to the IMBRSea educational board making use of the thesis-proposal form available on the electronic thesis platform (https://matix.imbrsea.eu). Thesis project descriptions include a title, an abstract, a work plan, a references' list, contact details of the members of the supervision team, and an agreement of the main supervisor, welcoming the student to the particular thesis subject.

- The abstract should include:
  - A brief introduction, defining the thesis topic and explaining the purpose of the thesis. Proposals should be written by the student, in agreement with their main thesis supervisor, and co-supervisors if applicable, making sure that the background and context of the proposed scientific research align with the goals of the IMBRSea programme (i.e. focus on marine biological resources), and are well described, including clear scientific goals, research questions and/or hypotheses, and a clear, bullet-point chronogram evidencing the feasibility of execution of the thesis project between January and June of year 2.
  - A methodology section should provide a clear overview of the main methodology to be applied and the material to be used. Alternative methodology plans should be also included, if applicable.
  - A bibliography or reference list of publications consulted for planning the research(only what is cited in the Abstract and/or Methodology sections of the proposal).
  - Evidence of ethical approval, if the research involves human participants and/or animals (see Annex 1). When the evidence is not available at the time of submission of the thesis project, it must be submitted prior to the commencement of the thesis work. Note that the student should provide the ethical requirements of the institution where the thesis work should take place. Therefore, the main supervisor should be consulted.
- Students may submit thesis proposals for revision from a non-IMBRSea partner but must keep in mind that:
  - The institution offering the possibility of thesis placement must timely become an associate partner of IMBRSea and, therefore, must agree with IMBRSea's philosophy and agreements.
  - The thesis proposals will only be evaluated after assessing the institution's request to become an associate partner of the consortium.
- **The following timeline applies to the submission of thesis project proposals:**
  - **<u>Potential new associate partners</u> (i.e. proposals from institutes that are not yet part of the IMBRSea network): 19th May 2026 at 16h CET.**
  - **<u>Active partners of the IMBRSea network</u> (full or associate): 9th June 2026 at 16h CET.**

- July - August Academic year 1:
  - Submitted thesis proposals are evaluated by the Educational Board using the electronic thesis platform (https://matix.imbrsea.eu).
  - Thesis work can only start after approval of the project by the Educational Board.
  - Thesis proposals can be approved, rejected, or conditionally approved. In the event that a

thesis topic is rejected by the educational board, the principal coordinator will discuss alternatives with the student, and a proposal from the IMBRSea consortium may be assigned.

- In case of conditional approval, the student must carry the requested amendments to the proposal as soon as possible and by the first half of semester 3. Failing to provide the requested amendments before the start of the thesis project may affect the final thesis results.
- Depending on the selected thesis topic, students have the possibility to prepare the thesis work prior to sem 4, by collecting samples, literature study, field work, etc. This is only allowed with prior approval by the main coordinator and when there is no interference with compulsory sem 3 activities, including the Summer School. The Coordination Office must be consulted beforehand about these stays to approve (or not) and in order to ensure insurance regulations are taken care of.

- January - June Academic Year 2:
  - Students work full-time on the approved thesis project at the respective thesis institute.
- June Academic Year 2
  - **June 1st 2027 at 16h CET** *(first session examination period)* students submit the thesis manuscript in electronic format (including raw data) on the electronic thesis platform (https://matix.imbrsea.eu). Upon submission, students receive an email of confirmation. Students who do not manage to submit the thesis manuscript by the deadline have a second opportunity to submit it **by August 3rd 2027 at 16h CET** *(second session exam period).*
    - The IMBRSea's Central Coordination Office sends the thesis manuscript and thesis evaluation forms to the Examination/Reading Committee. Each thesis is evaluated by at least two evaluators from the Committee. The members of the Examination/Reading Committee are decided by the IMBRSea Programme Board and must belong to the IMBRSea consortium partner universities. The evaluators must not be affiliated to the host institute of the thesis, and the two evaluators must belong to two distinct IMBRSea consortium partners.
    - The thesis supervisor (or supervisors) is/are invited to provide feedback on the general performance of the student. Thesis supervisor(s) do not directly score the thesis, but their feedback can be used during the deliberation of the final thesis' scores.
    - All the above-mentioned actions are carried out through the online thesis platform (https://matix.imbrsea.eu).
  - **Prior to the start of the IMBRSea Annual Symposium 2027** *(exact date and place to be defined):*

    All students must submit their master-thesis presentations, even if they failed to submit the final thesis manuscript on the first examination-session deadline. Detailed instructions regarding the upload of the thesis presentation will be shared in due time by email to graduating students.

- **End of June or first week of July 2027** *(exact dates and place to be defined)*: All students are expected to be physically present during the IMBRSEa Annual Symposium. At this symposium, each thesis is the subject of an oral presentation, followed by a defense in front of an academic scientific jury, and a public debate. Thesis presentations are evaluated by a Jury of at least three members affiliated to the IMBRSea consortium.
- The IMBRSea Examination Board considered all presentation and thesis scores and feedback reports to assign a final thesis mark (see 4.1).

3. THESIS GUIDELINES

3.1 Publication of Research topics for theses on the IMBRSea-Matix website

- Thesis research lines are collected by the IMBRSea's Central Coordination through an yearly call to the IMBRSea network of full and associate partners (November-January year 1), and are published after revision on the IMBRSea's online thesis platform (https://matix.imbrsea.eu).
- Each research line must be documented with the following information:
  1. Host organisation
  2. Title
  3. Contact person/Main Supervisor
  4. Short description of the thesis research line
  5. Evidence of ethical approval when the research involves human participants and/or animals
  6. Language requirements
  7. Specific competencies required
  8. The location where the thesis research will take place
  9. Accommodation possibilities
  10. Any additional costs to be covered by the student

3.2 Responsibilities of the supervision team

- **Main Supervisor:**
  - This is the **main supervisor** of the **thesis** proposal, and the **essential** figure in the thesis-supervision team. Students may also have a co-supervisor and/or a tutor, but those roles are not compulsory. It is the responsibility of the student to properly inform the main supervisor of the IMBRSea thesis guidelines, especially when the student is submitting a proposal that is not from the IMBRSea thesis-topics' catalogue. The main supervisor is responsible for the implementation of the thesis work and to ensure the student has proper guidance and access to relevant material to perform the thesis.
  - The main supervisor must:
    - have a PhD – in other words, either be a professor or post-doc with at least 3-4 years of relevant work experience;
    - be affiliated with the host institute of the thesis work;
    - the host institute of the thesis work and, therefore, the main supervisor, must be a full- or associate partner of the IMBRSea consortium;
    - ensure that the student has access to relevant material and information to execute the approved thesis project;
    - stimulate critical thinking and independent work, but also organizing regular

meetings to assess the progress of the student;

- be available during the thesis semester (see 3.3), and ensure a safe and stable work environment for the student.
- be responsible for the daily follow-up of the thesis work, unless appoints a co-supervisor for it (see below).

- The main supervisor may include a co-supervisor and/or a tutor in the supervision team of the student. The co-supervisor should have a PhD. It can be affiliated with a full- or associate-partner institution of IMBRSea but does not have to if the main supervisor agrees with it.
- A tutor can be someone with at least 3 years of scientific expertise, who can be assigned by the main supervisor to provide support on the practical activities of the student – Examples: support with fieldwork; literature access; laboratory experiments, etc.

3.3 Preparation of the Thesis

- IMBRSea students may start the preparation of the thesis (literature study, introduction, collection of samples, etc.) during semester 3. However, this must not interfere with the sem 3 compulsory activities. Semester 4 (January to June, year 2) is fully available for the thesis preparation and submission – although it may overlap with some sem 3 exams scheduled for January 2025, depending on the exam schedule of the student sem 3 university. The student should take this into account when developing the proposal with the main supervisor. All thesis-related activities must be supervised by a member of the thesis supervision team. **The students, in agreement with their main supervisor/co-supervisor, must organise the thesis work in a way that enables them to submit the thesis in the first session exam period (June).**
- During thesis work, all students are insured against the consequences of physical accidents and against liabilities towards third parties, via the insurance of Ghent University. The insurance certificate is available on the IMBRSea website (http://imbrsea.eu/insurance).

3.4 Thesis format

The thesis must be written in English and should have the format of a scientific publication.

Structure:

- Executive Summary (max. 400 words)
- Abstract (max. 200 words)
- Introduction & Aims
- Material and Methods
- Results
- Discussion
- Conclusion

- Acknowledgements
- References

The font size should be Arial 11, and spacing 1.5. The legend of Tables and Figures should use font size 9[1].

3.5 Remarks on the thesis format

The expected level and quality of the thesis should equal a scientific publication in a peer-reviewed journal. This means that the thesis is not evaluated on the basis of the number of pages, but much more on the basis of quality and conciseness of the work.

The **Executive Summary** (400 words) contains a summary of all relevant information documented in the thesis (Introduction, M&M, Results, Conclusion).

The **Abstract** (200 words) conforms to the summary but without detailed information about Methods and Results.

The **Introduction** should contain the state of the art of the subject, with references to relevant recent literature; It should naturally guide the reader to the thesis Aims; when the thesis is part of a broader research project, the scope of the project can be mentioned as well. The introduction should be concise and not include an extensive literature review (which is required as part of the compulsory semester 3.

Aims must be clearly presented, followed or combined with working hypotheses and/or research questions. (which should be addressed both in the "Discussion" and "Summary" sections).

The **Materials & Methods** section covers the research design (e.g., sampling and or experimental design), scientific methods applied and required material, a description of the study area when applicable, and a data processing section (that explains how data was processed and the statistical approach applied).

The **Results** section gives an overview of the most important data, both in written text, figures, and tables. All the raw data have to be added in the Annex and submitted in a digital format on the electronic thesis platform (https://matix.imbrsea.eu). The data have to be presented in a logical order; each table and figure must be attended by a legend which contains all necessary information to understand the table or figure. The student should discuss with the supervisor which results will be shown in the main

[1] *Students may, in accordance with the main supervisor, follow the formatting guidelines of a scientific journal of choice related to the thesis topic (only) for formatting aspects that are not specified in these guidelines (e.g. tables & figures formatting settings). That can be applied to all sections of the thesis manuscript, except the Executive Summary and Abstract, with respect to the maximum amount of words. Students still must follow the above-requested structure and guidelines. In the case students opt to follow the guidelines of a scientific journal, this should be indicated, along with the name of the journal, on the back of the thesis manuscript cover page.

manuscript. Certain tables and figures can, for instance, be presented in a supplementary material section, to be included after the references' list. Note that this is different from the Annex package containing your raw data and/or metadata, which must be submitted separately in the corresponding field in Matix.

The **Discussion** section offers a critical analysis of the interpretation of the data/study findings, along with an appropriate comparison to relevant scientific literature.

In the **Conclusions**, a brief summary of the main findings (original data, lesson learned,) is given.

The **Acknowledgements** refer to the funding agencies, field workers, laboratory assistants,...

The **References** should be given following a consistent formatting. Both on the text citations and on the references' list. The References' list is limited to the literature cited within the text.

3.6 Data Ownership

- All data belong to the institute of the thesis's main supervisor/co-supervisor according to the data policy between the collaborating institute partners. Depending on this data policy, IMBRSea students might submit their thesis for publication to a peer-reviewed journal (only after consultation agreement with the thesis's main supervisor).
- The IMBRSea's Central Coordination Office is not responsible for any eventual conflicts within this context.
- Each thesis should contain the following phrase on the inside of the front page: 'No data can be taken out of this work without prior approval of the thesis main supervisor(*)'

3.7 Plagiarism and use of generative AI

Plagiarism is considered a form of fraud and an irregularity within the IMBRSea Study Programme. To commit plagiarism is to present (parts of) a source as original and your own, without adding any acknowledgements. It can relate to different forms of production, such as texts (written, oral), images (photographs, film, graphs, diagrams, figures, etc.), databases, ideas, etc...

This includes the use of generative artificial-intelligence (genAI) tools: if using genAI tools during your project, you must do it in a thoughtful way, applying scientific integrity and critical skills. The use of genAI is not forbidden, but if used it must be done with responsibility, considering the risks and limitations of the chosen tool. The master thesis should be written by the student, and each student is responsible for their text and, therefore, for the submitted master-thesis dissertation. Submitting AI generated texts as their own is considered plagiarism. When fraud is detected in the Master Thesis, the IMBRSea Examination Board will discuss and decide about the consequences for the student, which can result in a zero score for the thesis. For further details on the use of generative AI in written assignments, please

refer to the UGent regulations: https://www.ugent.be/student/en/study-support/genai

3.8 Data Policy

All thesis output is uploaded into the Matix databank of IMBRSea, and will not be shared or made public without previous agreement. Additional information on specific datasets can be included by the student in the submitted manuscript, and/or in the metadata file.

3.9 Thesis Submission/ Presentation/Defense

- **By June 1st 2027 at 16h CET** *(first examination session - the exact date may change yearly)* students submit the thesis manuscript (PDF file) and the raw data (preferably as ZIP file) in electronic format on the thesis platform (https://matix.imbrsea.eu). Raw data (or at least the metadata) must also be submitted within the same deadline and at the same time as submitting the final thesis-manuscript .pdf, in the corresponding field in Matix. Thesis manuscripts up to 50 MB can be uploaded, while the maximum size for the raw data (or metadata) is 10 GB. In case of confidential raw data, students must provide at least the metadata and indicate how to retrieve the data in case this would be necessary. Upon submission, students receive an email of confirmation.Students who do not manage to submit the thesis by the deadline have a second opportunity to submit it by **August 3rd 2027 at 16h CET.** ***However, this must be justified: students who fail to submit the thesis on the first examination period should submit a joint-signed justification with the main supervisor within the deadline of the 1st examination period to the IMBRSea main coordinator (luana.monteiro@imbrsea.eu) and copy to info@imbrsea.eu.***

  Note: only students submitting the thesis in the first examination session are eligible for IMBRSea performance awards (i.e. Best thesis prize, best thesis presentation, and Carlo Heip award for most deserving student).

- **End of June or first week of July 2027** *(exact dates and place to be defined):* All students present the results of their thesis work during the IMBRSea Annual Symposium, through an oral presentation (15 minutes) followed by a defence before a Jury and a debate including the public present (15 minutes). During the presentation, interaction with people who are not physically present in the room is possible through Video Conference. All presentations are recorded and broadcasted in real-time.

Remarks:

- Students submitting their thesis in August will go through the same evaluation process as students who submit their thesis in June. They also give a presentation during the Annual Symposium and will receive a score for this presentation – the rubrics for the thesis presentation

take this situation into account, and the jury of the defense is properly informed; students should not be penalized on the presentation score for submitting preliminary results if the final thesis will be submitted in August due to unforeseen and justifiable reasons. Depending on the rules of the host institute, an extra thesis presentation may be locally organized. During the evaluation period of the second examination session (August-September) a final thesis score is awarded.

4. THESIS EVALUATION

4.1 General information

- The thesis manuscript counts for 60% of the final grade; the oral presentation for 40%. In case students finalize their work in August, they have to present the status of the thesis progress during the IMBRSea Annual Symposium. Even if final results are still missing, the 'oral' part of the presentation will be graded and taken into account for the calculation of the final thesis score (final grading on the thesis will only take place when the thesis work has been finalized).
- Evaluation feedback from the Examination/Reading Committee and from the Jury evaluating the oral presentation will be shared anonymously with the students (comments + score for each item to evaluate (insufficient - sufficient – satisfactory – good – very good – excellent – see section 4.2 Evaluation Criteria).

- Evaluation of thesis manuscripts:
    - The Examination/Reading Committee of the thesis consists of at least two members who belong to one of the IMBRSea consortium partners. The readers must belong to different institutions that also differ from the host thesis institute of the thesis being evaluated.
    - Thesis readers should belong to the IMBRSea network and have a PhD in a relevant scientific area.
    - The names and contact details of thesis readers will not be shared with students.
    - The thesis members of the thesis supervision team are invited to provide a joint, commonly agreed feedback of the general performance of the student during the thesis research period, through the Matix platform.

- Evaluation of oral presentation and thesis defence:
    - Grading of the oral presentation and defence is done by a Jury that will question the student during the defence. The Jury consists of at least three members of the IMBRSea network, with relevant expertise. Jury members must be approved by the IMBRSea educational board.
    - The Jury is composed by the IMBRSea educational board independently of the composition of the Examination/Reading committee. This means that members of the Examination/Reading committee can, but do not necessarily have to, be a member of the defences' Jury.

4.2 Evaluation criteria

The following aspects are evaluated (including their respective weight in the score):

- Thesis manuscript (Written report):
    - Title, Abstract, Summary: 10 %
    - Introduction, Background and Context: 15 %
    - Methods: 15 %
    - Results: 20 %

- Discussion: Interpretation within the research context: 30 %
- Layout: 10 %

- Oral presentation and defense:
  - Visual appearance: 20 %
  - Content: 30 %
  - Presentation: 30 %
  - Contextual awareness and critical thinking: 20 %

In the scoring table below the score band from “insufficient” to “excellent” is explained for each of the above listed aspects.

<u>Thesis manuscript:</u>

		Grade and score band (out of 20):				
Element	**Weight**	**Insufficient**	**Sufficient to Satisfactory**	**Good**	**Very good**	**Excellent**
		0 - <10	10 - 13	14 - 15	16 - 17	18 - 20
Title, Abstract, Summary	**10%**	Omission of either Abstract and/or Summary. Highly improper use of AI, proof-reading of the final text is not sufficient.	Executive summary repeats the Abstract without discernment. Main conclusions are incompletely presented and relevant information is not correctly selected. Purpose is not clear, resulting in a disorganized summary and/or abstract. Use of AI is somewhat proper, but final text was not appropriately reviewed.	Abstract and summary present the main conclusions from the study. The purpose of the study (i.e. hypothesis, objectives, questions) is specifically stated. Summary complicated by inclusion of superfluous material. Possible use of AI, but correct proof-reading	As for Good, but description includes some material of little relevance. The use of AI - if applicable - was correctly applied.	As for Very good, but only material of particular relevance is summarised. Indicative of highly developed skills in discerning and summarising the salient outcomes.
Introduction: background and context	**15%**	No reference to relevant literature. No evidence of library skills. Presents insufficient understanding of the research question/s. Aims and hypotheses are not stated. Highly improper use of AI, proof-reading of the final text is not sufficient.	Presents enough information to identify the topic but with little prioritising. Sparse or irrelevant referencing. Little evidence of library skills. Only some critical awareness of context is displayed but with unclear or limited structure. Aims and hypotheses are not clearly stated. Use of AI is somewhat proper, but final text was not appropriately reviewed.	Description of the topic demonstrates an acceptable grasp of the subject matter. Evidence of a reasonable familiarity with the relevant literature. Presents a proposal for new research, but limited evidence of capacity for original and logical thinking is shown. Possible use of AI, but correct proof-reading	Demonstrates a strong grasp of the subject matter. Comprehensive referencing indicating in-depth research of the topic. Identifies the strengths and limitations of previous work, and presents a logical progression to the research topic. The aims and significance of the new work are clearly stated. Displays some original insights and capacity for creative and logical thinking. The use of AI - if aplicable - was correctly applied.	Displays strong ability to organise, analyse and express ideas and arguments in an original, sophisticated and discriminating manner. Mastery of the subject matter is demonstrated through an interesting and complex account of the significance of the research topic, and the importance of the questions posed. Richly supported by relevant citation. Indicates a foretaste of an original contribution. The use of AI - if applicable - was correctly applied.
Methods	**15% %**	Poor analytical skills. Methods are used inappropriately for the particular research question/s. Formulaic application of methods demonstrates very poor understanding of the procedures used. Level of detail is insufficient to allow reproducibility. Highly improper use of AI, proof-reading of the final text is not sufficient.	Material and Methods are presented without context. Methods are sometimes used inappropriately for the particular research question. Formulaic application of methods demonstrates little understanding of the procedures used. Sufficient detail is presented to allow repetition of the procedure. Use of AI is somewhat proper, but final text was not appropriately reviewed.	Sufficient detail is presented to allow repetition of the procedure. Material and Methods chosen are presented in context. Appropriateness of the methods chosen is established. Use of the methods is mainly correct. Possible use of AI, but correct proof-reading	As for Good, but methods are consistently used correctly. Succession of methods employed demonstrates a clear understanding of strengths / limitations of each procedure. The use of AI - if aplicable - was correctly applied.	As for Very good, but also demonstrates innovative adaptation of methods and procedures, as appropriate to the peculiarities of the research question. Selection and adaptation of methods indicates highly-developed analytical capacity. Relevant references included when needed
Results	**20%**	Results of marginal relevance predominate. Errors in the presentation of results. Random and undisciplined display of the results. Limited structure. Highly improper use of AI, proof-reading of the final text is not sufficient.	Tables & Figures are presented without context. Superfluous results are included. Some errors detected in the presentation of results. Presentation of results demonstrates only a basic understanding of relevance to the topic. Unclear presentation of results, random layout, with some omissions or inaccuracies. Use of AI is somewhat proper, but final text was not appropriately reviewed.	Appropriate Tables & Figures are presented. Important results are highlighted in the text of the Results section. Correct presentation of Tables & Figures (e.g. Title, axis labels, units given, appropriate captions). Few factual errors in the presentation of the results. Possible use of AI, but correct proof-reading	As for Good, Presentation is distilled to exclude superfluous results. Logical sequence to presentation demonstrates a well-developed capacity to analyse issues, organise material, and present results clearly and cogently. The use of AI - if aplicable - was correctly applied.	As for Very good, plus capacity for critical analysis is further demonstrated through presentation of the results in a manner that builds the scientific argument. The results section establishes the basis for discussion without itself becoming discursive.
Discussion: interpretation within the research context	**30%**	Failure to place the topic in context resulting in a largely irrelevant discussion. Inadequate knowledge displayed related to the research question(s). Very serious omissions / errors in logic and/or major inaccuracies included in interpretation. Extreme repetition of results with little to no contextualization. Highly improper use of AI, proof-reading of the final text is not sufficient.	Some relevant points presented, but discussion is descriptive rather than argumentative / analytical. Basic or confused grasp of the context. Somewhat lacking in focus and structure. Conclusions are not well argued or poorly substantiated. Lacking evidence of capacity for original, critical and logical thinking. Use of AI is somewhat proper, but final text was not appropriately reviewed.	Basic contextual understanding indicating average critical awareness and analytical skills. Pros and cons are recognised but without resolution. Ideas are stated rather than developed and are insufficiently supported by evidence and relevant citation. A convincing scientific argument is not made. Weak conclusion or jumps to a conclusion. Possible use of AI, but correct proof-reading	Context well understood. Research outcomes are placed within the scientific context. Well supported by synthesis of evidence and relevant citations. Uses appropriate structure to resolve issues in a convincing argument. Conclusions are balanced and well-reasoned. The use of AI - if aplicable - was correctly applied.	Displays penetrative insight, originality and creativity to make relevant arguments in own voice. Arguments are amply supported by evidence and relevant citation, reflecting deep and broad knowledge and critical insight. Evidence of extensive reading demonstrated through discerning selection and synthesis of relevant literature. Conclusion generates original issues for subsequent study. The use of AI - if aplicable - was correctly applied.
Layout	**10%**	A random layout / underdeveloped structure. Insufficiently planned. Lack of clarity. Confused expression. Poor spelling and grammar or exaggerated and pompous prose, possibly linked to improper use of AI. Inconsistency between reference list and citations within the text.	Ineffective presentation. References incorrectly formatted and improper use. Report not completely written in accordance to standard scientific practice. Little evidence of proof reading.	Report written according to standard scientific practice. Most references are correctly formatted and used correctly in text with only few errors. Writing of sufficient quality to convey meaning but some lack of fluency and command of suitable vocabulary. Few typographic errors.	As for Good, but with consistently correct referencing format and use. Clear evidence of proof reading.	Presentation indicative of an excellent ability to organise, analyse and present arguments fluently and lucidly with a high level of critical analysis. Strong evidence of care in presentation. Free of grammatical errors and typographic errors. Scholarly prose and writing style, perfectly suited for a scientific publication.

Presentation and defense:

Element	Weight	Grade and score band (out of 20):				
		Insufficient	Sufficient to Satisfactory	Good	Very good	Excellent
		0- < 10	10 - 13	14 - 15	16 - 17	18 - 20
Visual Appearence	20%	o Presentation is not visually appealling or engaging o Poor planning; no proper organisation and/or logical flow; o Text size is not appropriately proportionate to the slide lay out: too small to view comfortably OR too large, taking too much space; o Too much text: The slides demand an overwhelming amount of reading, OR, o Not enough text: The audience cannot readily understand the relevance of the graphics/media. o Graphics/media are not used, OR, superfluous, irrelevant graphics/media are used; elements organisation in each slide does not support slide visual appearance. o Figures and tables layout is not correct (lack of title and/or legend) o Many errors in grammar, punctuation, and spelling.	o Presentation is not immediately visually appealling or engaging o Little logical order is apparent in the organisation and flow. o Main text size is OK, but some text remains too small to read by a conference audience. o Use of Graphics and Media are somewhat out of balance: unnecessary graphics/media are included, complicating the interpretation of crucial ideas. o Limited evidence of proof reading - Many errors remain in grammar, punctuation, and spelling.	o Overall appearance is visually appealing and interesting. o Informative title presents the main argument of the presentation. o Organisation and flow are implicit: headings or other devices imply organization and flow. o All text is easy to read by a conference audience. o Text, Graphics and Media are well-balanced. o Graphics and Media generally relate to the text and oral presentation. o Figures and Tables included present enough detail to be understood by itself with visual representation, clear title and legend o There is evidence of some proof reading, but several errors remain in grammar, punctuation, and spelling.	o As for Good, and: o Organisation and flow are explicit: text, numbers or graphic devices direct the flow. o Use of color, space and design helps communicating the purpose, and attracting attention to major ideas. o Only clear and relevant Graphics and Media are used to complement the text and presentation. o Presentation indicative of a sound ability to present arguments clearly in oral paper format. o There is clear evidence of proof reading - very few errors exist in grammar, punctuation, and spelling	o As for Very good, and: o Appropriate and relevant audio-visual aids are used to enhance visual presentation. o Visual appearance indicates an exceptional ability to organise and present information for oral presentation. o There is strong evidence of care in presentation, prose and writing style. o Free of grammatical & typographic errors.
Content	30%	o Author is not identified. o Does not clearly identify the question being addressed. o The aims of the project are not identified. o Irrelevant information is included: elements included in each slide are not correctly selected for a concise read of the slide. o Basic understanding of the topic is not demonstrated. o Irrelevant results (tables and figures) are included suggesting a lack of understanding of the subject	o Author identification is incomplete: There is insufficient information presented to contact the author. o Concept and ideas are loosely connected, but the content lacks clear transitions, flow and organisation. o Enough information is presented to identify the question but little critical awareness of the context is displayed. o The aims of the project are identified, but only implicitly. o Important details are omitted, OR, o There are so many details that the main idea is lost. o Selection of results included (tables and figures) is not the most relevant for the presentation	o Author identification is complete: There is sufficient information to contact the author without further research. o Content is mostly presented in a logical sequence and generally very well organised. o The objectives of the project are identified. o The relevance of element included is clear and jsutified. o Main conclusions or assertions are made, but only implicitly.	o As for Good, and: o A strong grasp of the research question is demonstrated. o The objectives of the project are identified explicitly. o Main conclusions or assertions are made explicitly.	o As for Very good, and: o The organisation is logical: a clear flow of ideas links one section to the next. o The relevance and importance of the project objectives are made extremely clear. o Key assertions or conclusions are given prominence, yet the presentation is free of unnecessary detail.
Presentation	30%	o Presentation is grossly too long OR too short. o Audience cannot understand presentation because there is no logical sequence of information. o Often inaudible or too loud. o No eye contact with the audience, speaker reads off note cards or directly from the screen. o There is no sign of previous preparation of the speech. Oral expression is not organised nor structured and does not match the elements presented in the slides	o Presentation is made within a minute of the allotted time. o Audience has difficulty following presentation because the sequence is disjointed. o The significance and relevance of the project are mentioned without emphasis. o Mostly presented facts with little or no imagination. o Sometimes inaudible, OR too loud. o Little eye contact with audience, speaker often reads from the screen o Some signs of incorrect improvisation in oral expression that impeed with the flow of the presenation OR slides full of text were merely read out loud	o Presentation is made within the allotted time. o Audible and clear articulation but not polished. o Presentation follows a logical sequence, matching the order of the slides presented; the audience can easily follow the presentation. o The presentation was reliant on notes, OR made to the screen rather than to the audience.	o As for Good, and: o Articulation is audible and clear, with some enthusiasm or expression. o The audience was engaged with eye contact and energy - infrequent reading or use of notes. o Props used during presentation sometimes aid understanding. o Clear effort made in preparing the speech in advance (even if improvised, the structure and flow is kept clear and logical)	o As for Very good, and: o Oral presentation was logical, calm and persuasive. o The audience was engaged with eye contact and energy - the presenter was not reliant on notes. o Relevant props always aid the presentation. o Oral expression is clear, concise, to the point and complete.
Thinking	20%	o The context of the topic is not presented resulting in a largely irrelevant presentation. o Inadequate knowledge displayed related to the research question(s). o Very serious omissions / errors in logic and/or major inaccuracies included in the presentation. o Response to questions demonstrates poor preparation and anticipation, and a poor grasp of information: student cannot answer questions about subject.	o Some relevant points presented, but the presentation is descriptive rather than argumentative / analytical. o Basic or confused grasp of the context. o Somewhat lacking in focus and structure. o Conclusions are not well argued or poorly substantiated. o Response to questions demonstrates little preparation or anticipation: student is uncomfortable with information and can only answer questions superficially.	o Basic contextual understanding indicating average critical awareness and analytical skills. o Ideas are stated rather than developed and are supported by evidence from the research context, but only . o Response to questions demonstrates some preparation and anticipation: Student is at ease with expected answers to all questions, but fails to elaborate.	o Context well understood. o Research proposal and/or outcomes are placed within the scientific context. o Well supported by synthesis of evidence and relevant citation. o A convincing argument supports sound conclusions. o Response to questions demonstrates good preparation and anticipation, and some knowledge of the subject, and its context.	o Displays penetrative insight, originality and creativity. o Use of evidence and relevant contextual reference demonstrates deep and broad knowledge and critical insight. o Response to questions demonstrates substantial preparation, anticipation, knowledge of the subject, and its context: Student can answer all class questions with explanations and elaboration.

5. AGENDA FOR THESIS SUBMISSION AND DEFENSE FOR COHORT 2024

5.1 First session exam period

- Manuscripts of the thesis (in .pdf format) should be submitted to the IMBRSea Central Coordination Office **by June 1st 2027 at 16h CET through Matix.** Guidelines on the submission procedure will be communicated by mid-May, 2026, or earlier.
- Oral presentations and defences are organized during the IMBRSea Annual Symposium that will take place at the **end of June or the first week of July 2027** *(exact dates and place to be defined, and will be communicated to graduating students by email)*. Participation in the Annual Symposium is mandatory to all graduating students.

5.2 Second session examination period

- Thesis manuscripts should be submitted **by August 3rd 2027 at 16h CET**
- Oral presentation about the preliminary results of the thesis will be physically presented during the Annual Symposium that will take place at the **end of June or the first week of July 2027** *(exact dates and place to be defined)* together with all first-session students.

ANNEX 1: ETHICAL APPROVAL OF RESEARCH

1. When applicable, students must provide evidence of ethical approval/exemption when the master-thesis scientific research involves human participants, and/or animals' assessments or other living resources that require so, in writing, according to the thesis-host institution where the research will be performed, when submitting the thesis proposal. Alternatively, when not possible to submit the approval within the thesis proposal, a declaration that evidence of ethical approval will be submitted to the IMBRSea Educational Board prior to the commencement of the research, jointly signed by the student and the main supervisor, must be submitted along with the thesis proposal.

The student must consult with the thesis-proposal main supervisor over the international, thesis-host institution, and/or collaborating institution (if any), country regulations applicable to the project.

This stipulation is required to ensure that IMBRSea MSc thesis research is conducted in accordance with ethical standards in research.

2. Students and the members of their thesis supervision team are required to ensure that the IMBRSea MSc thesis research is conducted in line with the terms of the corresponding ethical approval.

3. Where an IMBRSea MSc thesis student's main supervisor presents ethical approval from an associate partner, this must be submitted to the IMBRSea Educational Board for approval. Where local approval is deemed insufficient by the Educational Board, ethical approval from the IMBRSea coordinating university must be obtained.

4. All research involving animals, whatever its nature, carried out in the context of IMBRSea master thesis must consider the following:

- Replacement (to the use of animal cells or if possible non-animal alternatives)
- Reduction (using fewer animals)
- Refinement (minimise pain and enhance welfare throughout an animal's life)

5. As a minimum, EU Directive 2010/63/EU applies to any species of living vertebrate or cephalopods where an intervention is likely to cause the animal pain, suffering, distress or lasting harm equivalent

to, or higher than, that caused by the introduction of a needle in accordance with good veterinary practice. It also applies to embryonic and fetal forms of mammals, birds and reptiles once they have reached the final third of their gestation. Larval forms of fish and amphibians are also protected once they are capable of feeding independently.

6. The following is a non-exhaustive list of the types of procedures that might be performed in the context of being ‘sub threshold’ i.e. not “likely to cause the animal pain, suffering, distress or lasting harm equivalent to, or higher than, that caused by the introduction of a needle in accordance with good veterinary practice” and therefore not require ethical approval

- research involving invertebrates (apart from cephalopods, other local regulations may include other invertebrates as requiring ethical approval);
- mammals, birds and reptiles within the first two-thirds of gestation;
- larval forms of fish and amphibians before they are capable of independent feeding;
- ringing, tagging or marking animals primarily for identification purposes if the method causes no more than momentary pain and no lasting harm;
- non-experimental practices for the purposes of recognized animal husbandry as long as they comply with other animal welfare legislation or regulations;
- Euthanasia of animals by approved methods;
- Non-invasive observation of unrestrained animals, or any research intervention that is unlikely to cause the animal pain, suffering, distress or lasting harm equivalent to, or higher than, that caused by the introduction of a needle in accordance with good veterinary practice.

7. In all instances, members of the thesis supervision team should be guided by their own institutional ethical requirements.