

Guidelines for the Doctoral Programme and Dissertation Writing

PhD Programme in Political Science
Department of Political and Social Sciences
University of Catania
(updated version – 17 May 2026)

Overall Structure of the Doctoral Programme

The doctoral programme, which lasts three years, is organised into a series of progressive stages, supported by continuous monitoring throughout the entire period:

1. Development of the Research Project **(Year 1)**
2. Research Monitoring and Development **(Years 1–3)**
3. Definition of the Dissertation Structure **(end of Year 2 – beginning of Year 3)**
4. Dissertation Completion and Evaluation **(Year 3)**

Each stage is supported by a set of specific documents and supporting tools.

1. Development of the Research Path

During the first year, doctoral candidates develop their research project in agreement with their supervisor, generally between the fourth and sixth month of the programme.

The project:

- defines the research topic and research questions;
- outlines the theoretical and methodological framework;
- identifies objectives and expected outcomes.

The document is prepared using the **Doctoral Research Project** template and serves as the reference framework for the development of the research trajectory.

To support this process, candidates are also required to prepare a **Career Development Plan**, to be completed in June of the first year in consultation with the supervisor and using the designated template. The document may be updated annually throughout the doctoral programme.

The plan:

- identifies skills and competences to be developed;
- maps out training and scholarly activities;
- supports career planning and postdoctoral placement.

2. Research Monitoring and Development

Throughout the doctoral programme, PhD candidates are required to submit an annual progress report, prepared using the **Annual Doctoral Progress Report** template, according to the timeline established by the programme calendar.

The report documents:

- the status of the research (theory, methodology, data, and analysis);
- any changes to the original research project;
- preliminary and research progress;
- academic and scholarly activities (including conferences and publications);
- public engagement and knowledge exchange activities;
- supervisory arrangements and research guidance.

The report is accompanied by supporting materials demonstrating doctoral candidates' research progress, which vary depending on the stage of the programme (e.g. their updated research project, a chapter or article draft, the dissertation structure, draft chapters or sections of the dissertation, or a partial or full dissertation draft).

Participation in training activities is monitored through the **Training Activities Logs** (covering both required and optional activities), to be completed and updated throughout the doctoral programme using the relevant Excel templates.

3. Definition of the Dissertation Structure

(End of Year 2 – Beginning of Year 3)

At the end of the second year, in preparation for progression to the third year, doctoral candidates are required to prepare and present the dissertation structure to the Doctoral Board for assessment.

The document is prepared using the **Doctoral Dissertation Structure** template and developed in consultation with the supervisory team (supervisor and co-supervisor), who ensure its scholarly coherence before submission to the Doctoral Board. The purpose of this document is to:

- define the overall structure of the dissertation;
- assess the internal coherence of the dissertation;
- support planning for the writing process.

The proposed structure may be revised over the course of the doctoral programme in consultation with the supervisory team.

4. Dissertation Completion and Evaluation

At the final stage of the programme, upon submission of the dissertation, doctoral candidates are required to submit a **Final Doctoral Report**, using the designated template.

The report must be sent to the PhD Coordinator well in advance of the Doctoral Board meeting at which eligibility for the final defence is assessed, and in any case no later than **seven days before** the Board's deliberation.

The report:

- summarises the doctoral research process;
- presents the main findings and scholarly contributions;
- documents the activities undertaken during the doctoral programme.

Only in exceptional circumstances may doctoral candidates request an extension for dissertation submission, with the agreement of their supervisor. The request must be submitted using the **Doctoral Dissertation Extension Request** template.

Requests must be duly justified and may only be granted in cases of substantiated circumstances preventing completion of the dissertation within the prescribed timeframe. Extensions are approved by the Doctoral Board and may be granted for **six or twelve months**.

An extension **does not entail renewal of the doctoral scholarship**. For scholarships funded by external bodies (e.g. PNRR, regional funding schemes, or other programmes), the granting of an extension is subject to the rules and conditions of the relevant funding scheme or sponsoring institution.

In the event of an extension, at the end of the third year doctoral candidates are required to submit both:

- the **Third-Year Doctoral Report (Extension case)**, to be submitted at the end of the third year; and
- the **Final Doctoral Report**, to be submitted at the end of the extension period together with the final dissertation.

Final Procedures and Timeline

The concluding phase of the doctoral programme is regulated by specific procedures and deadlines outlined in the **Third-Year Handbook** and the official programme documentation.

In particular, the timeline for dissertation submission to external reviewers and the final examination is as follows:

- **By the 10th day of the month preceding completion of the doctoral programme**, the Doctoral Board decides whether the dissertation may be submitted to external reviewers;
- **By the 10th day of the final month of the programme**, external reviewers provide their recommendation regarding admission to the final defence;
- **By the 20th day of the final month**, doctoral candidates submit their application for admission to the final defence to the PhD Coordinator;
- **By the last day of the final month**, doctoral candidates upload the dissertation to the [University online platform](#) and submit a copy to the PhD Coordinator.

The final defence is held in two annual sessions:

- **December / February**
- **June / July**

The procedures for the final defence are set out in the **University of Catania Doctoral Regulations**.

Recommendations for Submissions

When submitting any of the documents listed above, doctoral candidates are requested to use a **clear and standardised email subject line**, clearly indicating the type of submission (e.g. *PhD Programme: Extension Request – Rossi*; *PhD Programme: Annual Progress Report – Rossi*).

All documentation must be sent to the PhD Coordinator's email address (mara.benadusi@unict.it), with the doctoral candidate's supervisor and the doctoral programme secretary, Dr Sonia Iolanda Ardizzone (sonia.ardizzone@unict.it), copied in CC.

List of Documents

- **Doctoral Research Project**
Initial document outlining the doctoral research project (*Year 1*)
- **Career Development Plan**
Document for planning training activities, skills development, and future career pathways (*Year 1, updated annually*)
- **Annual Doctoral Progress Report**
Monitoring document on research progress (*required in Years 1 and 2*)
- **Curricular Training Activities Log**
Record of training activities required by the programme
- **Open Training Activities Log**
Record of independently undertaken training and scholarly activities
- **Doctoral Dissertation Structure**
Document outlining the overall structure of the dissertation (*end of Year 2 – beginning of Year 3*)
- **Final Doctoral Report**
Final document accompanying dissertation submission
- **Third-Year Doctoral Report (Extension Cases)**
Document required in the third year when an extension has been requested
- **Doctoral Dissertation Extension Request**
Form for requesting an extension to dissertation submission deadlines
- **Third-Year Handbook**
Guide to final-year procedures and dissertation submission deadlines

- **University of Catania Doctoral Regulations**
Regulations governing doctoral programmes at the University of Catania
- **University of Catania PhD Programmes Webpage**
For further information on the organisation and regulations of doctoral programmes at the University of Catania, please consult the dedicated University webpage: [link](#)
- **PhD Programme in Political Science Webpage**
For programme-specific information, including academic activities, deadlines, documentation, and updates, please consult the webpage of the PhD Programme in Political Science: [link](#)

Templates and forms are available on the PhD Programme in Political Science Teams classroom and can also be downloaded from the programme webpage.