

MASTER IN COGNITIVE SCIENCE

VADE-MECUM

Dear Student,

This *vade-mecum* is designed to guide you throughout your academic journey within the Master in Cognitive Science at the University of Neuchâtel.

This program offers a demanding interdisciplinary training at the intersection of biological sciences and the humanities, with a strong research-oriented focus.

Beyond academic content, your success will primarily depend on your ability to:

- adopt an active and autonomous approach
- integrate into a research environment
- interact with professors and researchers

👉 **Key Point** : One of the major strengths of this Master is the availability of professors and their research teams. Students who succeed are those who actively use this resource early-on.

2. Understanding the Structure of the Master.

The Master (120 ECTS) is completed over 4 semesters and aims at progressively leading students to acquire scientific autonomy.

◆ Year 1 (Semester 1 and 2) : Foundations

- Interdisciplinary modules
- Research methodology
- Scientific seminars
- Development of conceptual and analytical foundation



◆ **Year 2 (Semesters 3 and 4): Research**

- Mandatory research training semester (internal or external laboratory)
- Research project
- Master thesis writing and defense

👉 This programme requires increasing involvement and proactive planning on your part.

3. Roadmap of your academic path

◆ **Semesters 1–2 : Build your foundations**

You are expected to use this phase to identify your research direction.

Main objectives:

- Acquire theoretical and methodological foundations
- Explore different disciplines
- Identify your research interests

Key actions:

- Actively attend seminars
- Identify 2–3 areas of interest
- Observe researchers and their work

✓ **Checklist :**

- ☐ Have I identified my research interests?
- ☐ Have I interacted with at least one professor or assistant?
- ☐ Have I identified relevant research labs or teams?



♦ Semester 3 : Enter the Research Phase

You are expected to transition into a research-oriented approach.

⚠ Critical phase of the program: Students may encounter difficulties at this stage due to a lack of anticipation.

Main objectives :

- Choose a thesis supervisor
- Define a research topic
- Start the research training semester

✓ Checklist :

- ☐ Did I identify a field of research and a theme suitable for my interests ?
- ☐ Have I contacted at least one professor to discuss my project?
- ☐ Have I chosen my thesis supervisor during Semester 2?
- ☐ Has my research training semester been discussed and validated with my supervisor?

♦ Semestre 4 : Produire et finaliser

You are expected to demonstrate scientific autonomy.

Main objectives :

- Finalise the research training semester
- Write the research training report if separate
- Write the thesis
- Prepare the defense (60 minutes)



✓ **Checklist :**

- ☐ Have I advanced my research enough?
- ☐ Have I contacted my supervisor when facing difficulties or doubts?
- ☐ Is my writing progressing effectively?

4. The research training semester

The research training semester is a mandatory and structuring component of your training.

Objectives

- First concrete immersion in research
- Development of practical skills
- Preparation for the thesis

Organisation

- Starting in Semester 3
- Supervised and validated by your thesis supervisor
- Dual supervision :
 - academic supervisor (UniNE professor)
 - research training supervisor (if external)

Requirements

- 📄 Written report (separate or integrated into the thesis depending on the field)
- 📄 Internship international agreement if needed by a partner institution is available upon request from Rachel Sanchez

Mistakes to avoid

- Starting the research too late
- Choosing a research training semester completely unrelated to the thesis domain
- Lack of communication with the supervisor



5. The Master Thesis

The thesis represents the culmination of your Master's degree.

Objective:

To demonstrate your ability to conduct an independent research project.

Organisation

- Topic defined with the supervisor
- Format and requirements determined by the supervisor
- Written in English

Key Steps

- Topic selection
- Validation by the supervisor
- Project development
- Data collection and analysis
- Writing
- Defense (60 minutes)

👉 Key point:

The quality of your thesis strongly depends on your level of engagement and the quality of your interactions with your supervisor

6. Ressources

This Master provides a rich academic environment:

- Available professors and researchers (academic aspects)
- Programme coordination: Rachel Sanchez (administrative aspects)
- Scientific seminars with international researchers
- Personalised supervision within the University of Neuchâtel

👉 **Your success depends directly on your ability to actively use these resources.**



7. Common Difficulties

The most frequent difficulties are linked to a passive approach:

- ✗ No daring to contact professors
- ✗ Waiting instead of anticipating
- ✗ Being passive within the program
- ✗ Lack of strategic decision-making
- ✗ Delaying the search for an internship

8. Success strategies

To optimize your academic journey:

- ✓ Be proactive
- ✓ Contact researchers early
- ✓ Use seminars as strategic opportunities
- ✓ Build your project progressively
- ✓ Ensure alignment between internship and thesis



9. Useful Resources

- **Course descriptions** : <https://www10.unine.ch/descriptifs/master-en-sciences-cognitives>
- **Students Information** : <https://www.unine.ch/iscc/pour-les-etudiant-e-s/>
- **Study Plans** : <https://www.unine.ch/lettres/formations/plans-detudes/>
- **Schedule**: <https://planif.unine.ch/pidho/>
- **Internship and MA thesis: overview and procedure** : <https://www.unine.ch/iscc/pour-les-etudiant-e-s/>
- **Guide on Original Academic Work and Scientific Integrity** : <https://www.unine.ch/iscc/wp-content/uploads/sites/93/Guide-on-Original-Academic-Work-and-Scientific-Integrity.pdf>
- **Guidelines for the Master Thesis in Cognitive Sciences**: <https://www.unine.ch/iscc/pour-les-etudiant-e-s/>

Programme director

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