

**GUIDELINES AND PROCEDURES
ADMISSION TO CANDIDACY (ATC) EXAMINATION****What is the Admission to Candidacy (ATC) Examination?**

The ATC is an opportunity for the student to present their proposed research, to defend it to their supervisory committee and to receive feedback. It is both a formal meeting of the supervisory committee and an opportunity for the input from the Graduate Studies Office.

When does the ATC have to be done?

The ATC must be done within the first six (6) months of beginning the MSc Agriculture. It is preferable to do the exam within the first four (4) months. The ATC should be completed before actual experimental work is begun, although students may have done a pilot study.

For students who begin their program in May and are doing field work, it is recognized that actual project work may need to start before the ATC is completed. However, students should be developing their ATC document at the same time and be able to justify the work done in the context of their overall project.

Why do the ATC so early in the program?

The discussion of the committee may identify areas that can be improved and/or suggest additional resources. The committee may find that the student is lacking in some background and recommend a course or additional reading that would help carry out the research.

What happens if the ATC is not done in the first six months?

The student must submit an *ATC Extension Request Form* with a detailed timeline for completion and the reason why the ATC has to be delayed. The form must be signed by the supervisor and be submitted to the Graduate Studies Coordinator, who may allow for a certain period of extension after consultation with the supervisor.

Students who have not completed the ATC by the end of their second semester will need to meet with the Graduate Studies Coordinator. Students who have not completed the ATC by the end of the third semester may be required to withdraw on the basis of non-completion of an academic requirement.

What needs to be done for the ATC research proposal?

The student prepares a research proposal following the format given below. The proposal is prepared in consultation with the supervisor and supervisory committee members. It should include the rationale for the proposed research, the general outline of the planned project, the resources available and any practical limitations to the project, and the timeline for the student to complete the project and defend the thesis. The document is not expected to have a complete and thorough literature review; the literature

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cited should set the framework for the project. The methods used should give the broad outline; it is not necessary to include every aspect of methodology.

It is recommended that students have all members of their supervisory committee review, comment and edit, and critique the proposal before submission for the ATC exam. The supervisor is required to sign the planning form to indicate agreement that the student is ready to come forward for the ATC. A student may choose to bring the ATC document forward without this signature, but arrangements will not be made without discussing this decision and approval by the Graduate Studies Coordinator.

Who is on the ATC examination committee?

As of January 2026, the ATC examination committee will be the student's supervisory committee and be chaired by the supervisor. It is important that the supervisory committee be defined well in advance of the ATC and it is strongly recommended that the committee meet as a whole before the ATC.

What is the process to schedule the ATC?

- 1) The student registers for the *AGRI 9410 Admission to Candidacy – Master's* administrative course in the semester they plan to take the exam before the course add/drop deadline.

The student consults with their supervisory committee to choose a date for the exam and completes the ATC Planning Form & Part 1. This form must be signed by all members of the supervisory committee.

- 2) The completed and signed form is submitted to the Graduate Studies Office by email (gradagri@dal.ca) at least three weeks before the proposed date of the ATC, along with the research proposal.
- 3) For virtual and hybrid exams, the Graduate Studies Assistant will send the supervisory committee and student a Teams invitation with the meeting details and link. For in-person and hybrid exams, the Graduate Studies Assistant will book the room, but it is the student's responsibility to bring and set up the necessary technical resources. It is recommended that a tech test be performed prior to the exam.

All forms are available on the Faculty of Agriculture [Graduate support and advising](#) webpage.

Format of the Examination

The student will make a 15-minute oral presentation of the proposal, highlighting the goals and objectives of the research, the research strategy/methodology, and the impact, significance, or benefit of the proposed research.

The supervisory committee members will question the student on the proposal and concepts relevant to the proposal. There are typically two rounds of questions.

The examination is expected to be completed in two hours.

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What is being evaluated?

The ATC examination committee will consider the following:

- The merit and feasibility of the project for a two-year master's program and a master's thesis;
- Whether the resources are available for the project;
- If the student has the right background to be able to do the project, including the methods to be used, the literature, and the general academic background.

The student is expected to have put together a viable research project, to justify the background for the project and the general methods and be able to relate the methods and protocol to the objectives. This should be justified with appropriate reference to the literature, but a full literature review is not expected at this time. The examiners should keep in mind that this is not a comprehensive examination. Questions will arise from the scientific content of the work, but will not range randomly over the entire field.

The examiner's questions should be consistent with the purpose of the ATC examination.

Who makes the final decision and what are the possible outcomes?

The evaluation decision is by consensus. The decisions will be Pass or Fail.

A Pass may be accompanied by recommendations and/or by conditions. These may include requirements to take additional courses or to do supplementary reading. Required courses must be defined in the context of available courses and, normally, must be completed by the end of the next academic year.

A student may be required to re-write the research proposal if this is not satisfactory.

A recommendation is to be considered by the student and supervisor in consultation with supervisory committee members.

A condition will be verified by the Graduate Studies Coordinator. This must be completed before the student will be allowed to proceed to thesis defense.

A student who Fails the ATC is required to withdraw from the program. A failed examination can be appealed to the Graduate Studies Coordinator within three (3) working days. The student has the option to request to be re-examined. This re-examination will be organized by the Graduate Studies Coordinator, and will be held within two (2) weeks, and will include the student's supervisor and three (3) faculty not on the original examining committee.

Is it possible to change the research proposal after the ATC is completed?

The broad format of the proposal must be followed. However, any scientific study may require alteration of methods as the study progresses. Such changes are made by consultation between the student, supervisor, and supervisory committee.

If it becomes necessary to make major changes to the proposal or if the timeline of the project is affected, the supervisor and student should consult with the Graduate Studies Coordinator. A new ATC may be required.

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Format of the research proposal

The research proposal is a documented account of the project that the student wishes to undertake for the MSc Agriculture. The proposal should be no more than 25 pages, single sided, including all attachments. It should be written in 12-point font in the main body text, with 1-inch margins, and be double spaced. It is to be submitted as a Word document.

The proposal should include:

- 1) a cover page;
- 2) a table of contents;
- 3) a reference list;
- 4) any necessary figures or tables;
- 5) and the timeline for completion.

The timeline should include all requirements for the MSc degree. The format and referencing should be consistent with publications in the student's area of study.

Students may also wish to consult the [Dal AC Writing Centre](#) for general assistance, located in the [MacRae Library](#).