

The MIT thesis template

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SUMMARY

This \LaTeX class formats theses according to the requirements of the MIT Libraries. The template is suitable for MIT theses of all types and at all levels. The title and abstract pages are automatically laid out from information provided by the user. The template includes options to use a variety of typefaces, and it is compatible with either pdfTeX or unicode engines such as LuaLaTeX. When using LaTeX formats dated November 2022 or later, with Lua\TeX, the resulting pdf file meets the PDF/A archivability standard. A standard $\text{\TeX} \text{ Live}$ installation includes all other packages required by the template. This document provides instructions for installation and use of the template.

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1 BACKGROUND

The original MIT Thesis template was written \LaTeX 2.09 by Stephen Gildea in the late 1980s (in CTAN, [here](#)). That template was edited by many later students.

\LaTeX has changed greatly since the original MIT thesis template was written. \LaTeX 2.09 was replaced by $\text{\LaTeX} 2_{\varepsilon}$ in 1994. New engines were developed, particularly pdfTeX during the 1990s and Unicode-aware engines in the decades that followed. Many packages and fonts were developed to accompany the original platform, particularly after 2000; and major updates to the \LaTeX kernel began in 2018. Over the years, the MIT Libraries changed the required format several times, especially as electronic thesis submission became the norm. The original template served MIT well; but by the early 2020s, it was substantially out of date. That situation motivated the creation of a new template.

This new MIT thesis template was developed in 2023 at the request of the MIT Libraries. The title and abstract pages strictly follow the current [requirements of the Libraries](#). The underlying code is entirely new, with extensive use of `expl3` syntax.

2 SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS AND INSTALLATION

The new `mitthesis` class uses the features of \LaTeX as of 2022, with limited backward compatibility. An up-to-date \LaTeX system is therefore necessary when using this template.

\LaTeX is a free, open source system. The entire system is distributed through the \TeX Live platform (<https://www.tug.org/texlive/>), including the basic format, packages, and user interfaces. The system operates on Windows, MacOS, and Unix/Linux. \TeX Live is formally updated each year in the spring, and the associated utility package allows users to download the most current codes more frequently if they desire. (At the time of this writing, the commercial platform Overleaf.com provides a similar functionality.)

If you are missing a package or documentation, you may obtain it at no cost from CTAN (ctan.org).

2.1 Downloading the template

The files needed for preparing your thesis are in the CTAN repository: <https://ctan.org/pkg/mitthesis>. Copy the subdirectory `MIT-thesis-template` onto your system. That directory contains files you can modify into your own thesis.

If the most current version of `mitthesis.cls` is installed in your system (e.g., if you use an up-to-date version of \TeX Live), you are all set. If not, copy the file `mitthesis.cls` into your working directory. If you plan to use fonts other than the default fonts, ensure that the subdirectory `fontsets` is present in your working directory.

2.2 File structure

The new MIT thesis template consists of: `mitthesis.cls`; a root file `MIT-Thesis.tex`; a file to load the abstract, `abstract.tex`; a file for design options, `mydesign.tex`; and an optional file to change the fonts (see the subdirectory, `fontset`). You should change the name of the root file to something more descriptive of your own work (e.g., `JohnsThesis.tex`, `MagnumOpusScientiae.tex`,...). In addition, files must be loaded for acknowledgments, an optional biosketch, chapters, optional appendices, and bibliography.

2.3 L^AT_EX engine

The template works with either pdf_T_EX or the unicode engine L_ual_T_EX. With the latter, unicode fonts can be used in your thesis. L_ual_T_EX also enables the direct use of Lua code in your .tex file. With Lua code, you can automate plotting, table generation, and other numerical computations. L_ual_T_EX will become the primary _L_T_EX engine over time, and it is necessary for producing tagged PDF documents with `mitthesis.cls`.

2.4 PDF/A compliance and PDF accessibility

PDF/A-2b compliance is automatic if `\DocumentMetadata{pdfstandard = a-2b, pdfversion=1.7}` is issued before the `\documentclass{...}` command.

Recent _L_T_EX formats (e.g., November 2025) have implemented *accessible* PDF/A. Depending upon the packages loaded, the MIT Thesis template run with the L_ual_T_EX engine can produce “well-tagged pdf”: PDF/UA-2 or PDF/A-4F. In this case, use:

```
\DocumentMetadata{ pdfstandard = { ua-2 , a-4f } , tagging = on }
```

(_L_T_EX now provides PDF version 2.0 by default.) PDF/A compliance can depend on your fonts and figures, e.g., PDF figures must also be compliant. Not all _L_T_EX packages have been upgraded for compliance. In particular, the `listings` package, used in `appendixa.tex`, is not compatible as of Oct. 2025; and it can cause a compilation error if tagging is on.

Accessible PDF files can be rendered accurately as HTML files. See, for example, ngpdf.com. As of v1.21, a CSS style sheet can be embedded in the MIT Thesis pdf to control web styling. See `mitthesis-style.css`.

PDF/A compliance can be tested at demo.verapdf.org. Most of the files in the `examples` directory are PDF/UA-2 compliant (the ones that aren't were generated with pdf_T_EX owing to font limitations).

3 SETTING UP TITLE PAGE, ABSTRACT, AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

Various fields and commands must be changed to your own information in the preamble of `MIT-Thesis.tex` and immediately after the `\begin{document}` command. This information includes the title, author, degree and other essential information. With the comments in `MIT-Thesis.tex`, this step should be self-explanatory. Nevertheless, some explanation follows.

1. In the `\hypersetup{...}` command, change the sample file to match your own information (e.g., keywords, subject, etc.). These commands generate metadata that are incorporated into the pdf file.
2. `\title{the title of your thesis}`
3. `\Author{author full name}{author department}[1st PREVIOUS degree][2nd...`
Note that third, fourth, fifth, and sixth arguments are optional [...] and may be omitted. Use once for each author.
4. `\Degree{name of degree}{department giving degree}`. Use once for each degree fulfilled by the thesis.

If two departments jointly issue a single degree, leave the degree name blank for the *second* degree: `\Degree{}{2nd department name}`. If the thesis satisfies two degrees from one department, leave the department argument blank for the *second* degree: `\Degree{2nd degree name}{}`.

If you wish to cause a line break in a very long degree name, you can insert `\backslash` at an appropriate point. Department names should not break across lines. For example:

\Degree{Doctor of Philosophy \\ in \\ Electrical Engineering and Computer Science}{Department of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science}

5. \Supervisor{supervisor name}{supervisor title}[supervisor department]. Use once for each supervisor. The optional supervisor department is required when generating the thesis committee page. See §6.2 if your supervisor has more than one title or sits in more than one department.
6. \Acceptor{acceptor name}{acceptor title}{thesis related position}. Professor who accepts theses for your department (e.g., the Graduate Officer). Use once for each department.
7. \DegreeDate{Month}{year}. Date degree is awarded (February, May, June, or September).
8. \ThesisDate{date}. Date that your final thesis is submitted to the department.
9. \Reader{acceptor name}{reader title}{reader department}. For thesis committee members other than the supervisor. Using this once will cause the generation of a thesis committee page between the title and abstract pages. See §6.2 if a reader has more than one title or sits in more than one department.

3.1 Copyright license

By default, the thesis template reserves all rights to the author, with a carve-out for MIT. If you wish to make your thesis available under a Creative Commons License, issue the following command between \begin{document} and \maketitle: \CClicense{license type}{license url}. For example,

\CClicense{CC BY-NC-ND 4.0}{<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>}.

MIT thesis copyright options and policies and Creative Commons licenses are discussed on these links:

<https://libraries.mit.edu/distinctive-collections/thesis-specs/#owner>

<https://creativecommons.org/share-your-work/cclicenses/>

3.2 Bibliography

You may generate your bibliography using either biblatex/biber or natbib/bibtex. The template is set up for biblatex by default, rather than the older, less flexible natbib. The biblatex package is very powerful, and you can customize most aspects the reference list and citations to suit your needs. See the documentation for details: ctan.org/pkg/biblatex.

The style of citations and references can be set in your .tex file. For numerical citations of references (e.g., [1]), you can do

```
\usepackage[style=ext-numeric-comp,giveninits=true,sorting=none,
language=american]{biblatex}
```

For IEEE style citations and references, you might do

```
\usepackage[style=ieee,maxbibnames=10,sorting=none]{biblatex}
```

For author/year style (Smith, 2024), you might do

```
\usepackage[style=authoryear, maxbibnames=10]{biblatex}
```

In the author/year style, \cite{...} commands do not automatically produce parentheses. Instead, you can do \parencite{...} to get "(Author, year)."

Table 1: Options to the document class

Class option	Effect
fontset	is a keyvalue, <code>fontset = <name></code> , which selects the set of fonts used for the thesis. See description below.
lineno	loads the <code>lineno</code> package, which provides line numbers, as for editing. The <code>lineno</code> package provides additional commands to control line numbering.
mydesign	loads the file <code>mydesign.tex</code> , which in turn loads code or packages that change the style of titles, headings, captions, margins, lists, and so on. You may edit <code>mydesign.tex</code> as you prefer or use the option as a key value to load a different file, <code>[mydesign=some-file]</code>
twoside	gives facing-page behavior for two-sided printing; omitting it will eliminate the even-numbered blank pages.

4 CLASS OPTIONS

Class options may be specified for `\documentclass[. . .]{mitthesis}`. These options are described in Table 1 and the subsections that follow.

4.1 Font loading

By default, `mitthesis.cls` will load the traditional \LaTeX typeface, Computer Modern (for pdfTeX) or Latin Modern (for `unicode` engines). By using the key value `fontset=...` in the `\documentclass` command, you can select a different set of fonts.

Eleven font sets are predefined, including the default set (see Table 2). Three work only with pdfTeX , four work only with `unicode` engines, and four work with either. These options include a mixture of serif or sans serif text and math fonts, as shown in the table. To access the predefined font sets, you *must* have the directory `fontsets` as a subdirectory of your working directory, including its files as named. The relevant fonts must also be on your computer; but all (except `Lucida`) are included in `TeX Live` and will be present in a complete \LaTeX installation.

Among the predefined font sets, `Termes` and `NewTX` are serifed typefaces similar to the digital typeface `Times New Roman`. `STIX Two` is more similar to the original metal-type `Times` typeface. `Libertinus` (a fork of `Linux Libertine`) is a serif typeface inspired by 19th century book type. `Lucida` is a serifed typeface designed for high legibility at small size or on low resolution devices. `Lucida` is excellent for mathematics and includes a complete bold-face math font, but it is not free. `Heros` and `NewTX-sans` are sans-serif text typefaces similar to `Helvetica`. `NewTXsf` is a sans-serif math font which draws upon glyphs from the `STIX` fonts. `Fira` is a humanist sans-serif text typeface designed in conjunction with the `Firefox` operating system. Finally, `Computer Modern` (and its extension `Latin Modern`)—the traditional \LaTeX typeface—is a Didone typeface, with high contrast between thick and thin elements. The `lmodern` fontset replaces `Computer Modern` by `Latin Modern` when running pdfTeX .

You may also place your own font-set file, say `Myfontset.tex`, in your working directory, and load it with: `\documentclass[fontset=Myfontset]{mitthesis}`.

4.2 Design options

The thesis will follow the default styles of the \LaTeX report class for sections, headings, captions, and lists. If you prefer different styles you can use the class option `[mydesign]` which loads the file `mydesign.tex`. The

Table 2: Predefined font sets

fontset	pdf \TeX	unicode	text font	math font	details
fira-newtxsf	yes	no	sans	sans	included in \TeX Live
newtx	yes	no	serif	serif	included in \TeX Live
newtx-sans-text	yes	no	sans	serif	included in \TeX Live
default	yes	yes	serif	serif	CM & LM fonts are included in \TeX Live
libertinus	yes	yes	serif	serif	included in \TeX Live
lmodern	yes	yes	serif	serif	included in \TeX Live
lucida	yes	yes	serif	serif	the Lucida fonts are available from the \TeX User's Group, https://tug.org/store/lucida
heros-stix2	no	yes	sans	serif	included in \TeX Live
stix2	no	yes	serif	serif	included in \TeX Live
termes	no	yes	serif	serif	included in \TeX Live
termes-stix2	no	yes	serif	serif	included in \TeX Live
Typewriter (monospaced) fonts are also loaded for unicode					Inconsolata (sans serif): included in \TeX Live Cursor (serif): included in \TeX Live

`mitthesis` class will insert the content of `mydesign.tex` at the appropriate point (prior to loading `babel`, `fonts`, or `hyperref`). You should not need to edit the class file.

With `mydesign.tex`, you can set options for a package that manages color, such as `xcolor`. You can change the margins with `\newgeometry{...}` from the `geometry` package, say, to create a binding margin for two-sided printing. You can insert any other code to change the design, for instance, you can renew the definition of `\section` to change fonts, font color, or font features (using commands from the `fontspec` package with `Lua \TeX`). You can also load other packages.

As distributed, `mydesign.tex` will set caption labels in bold face type. For example, “Figure 1.1:” is made bold. If your \TeX format is dated 2025/11/01 or later, the code uses \TeX ’s socket and plug mechanism to change the label. If your format is older, the `caption` package is loaded to change the label.¹ \TeX ’s hook mechanism can change the style of the caption *text* for recent formats and the `caption` package can do so for older formats (see `mydesign.tex`).

The class option `[mydesign]` can also be used as a key value, in the form `[mydesign=some-file]`, where `some-file.tex` will be loaded if it is in your working directory. Two examples of design files are in the `examples` directory. One, `mydesign_redsans_headings`, puts chapter headings, section headings, and caption labels in dark red, sans-serif type. This option pairs well with fontsets like `newtx` and `heros-stix2`. The second, `mydesign_libertinus_headings`, uses stylistic alternate characters and ligatures in chapter titles and section headings, and it puts caption labels in bold type. This style only runs with the `libertinus` fontset; by editing this file, you can limit the use of alternates to chapter titles to provide a more restrained design. These are simply examples, not official MIT styles.

Hyperlink colors and pdf bookmark or viewing options from the `hyperref` package can be changed by using `\hypersetup{...}` in the preamble or using `\AtBeginDocument{ \hypersetup{...} }` in the `mydesign.tex` file.

¹As of version 1.22, `mitthesis.cls` includes its own implementation of `\subfigure` and `\subcaption`, without loading the `subcaption` package.

4.3 Single-sided vs. double-sided layout

The sample template uses the option `[twosided]`, which starts major sections (abstract, table of contents, chapters, etc.) on odd-numbered pages. This arrangement is suitable for two-sided printing, but can lead to empty even-numbered pages. If you do not wish to have this behavior, omit that option. By default, even and odd page margins are the same; this can be changed in `mydesign.tex` if necessary.

4.4 Additional commands

The class also provides `\DegreeYear`, `\DegreeMonth`, and `\CopyrightAuthor`. The latter combines all author names into a single token list, e.g., “Joseph O. Hirschfelder, Charles F. Curtiss and R. Byron Bird”; a period at the end of the final name (e.g., as in “John F. Nash Jr.”) is removed.

4.5 Nomenclature

An optional nomenclature environment is provided by the class. This environment can support either chapter-by-chapter nomenclature (at the section level) or a single nomenclature for the entire thesis (at the chapter level). The environment has four optional arguments: [1] adjust space between symbol and definition (default is 2 em); [2] title of the nomenclature list (default is “Nomenclature”); [3] level, which can be “chapter” or “section” depending on whether you have one nomenclature list for whole thesis or one for each chapter (the default is `section`); and [4] the style of the entry in the table of contents, which can be given as “frontmatter” or “backmatter” if you are using a single nomenclature for the whole thesis (default is to match [3]).

A single-column nomenclature list is produced by `\begin{nomenclature}`. A two-column nomenclature list is produced by `\begin{nomenclature*}`, provided that `\usepackage{multicol}` is added to your preamble.

For example, with `\usepackage{multicol}` in the preamble, the following code

```
\begin{nomenclature*}[2em][Nomenclature for Chapter 1][section]
\EntryHeading{Roman letters}
\entry{$\mathcal{C}$}{material curve}
\entry{$\mathbf{r}$}{material position [m]}
\entry{$\mathbf{u}$}{velocity $[\text{m s}^{-1}]$}
\EntryHeading{Greek letters}
\entry{$\Gamma$}{circulation $[\text{m}^2 \text{s}^{-1}]$}
\entry{$\rho$}{mass density $[\text{kg m}^{-3}]$}
\entry{$\omega$}{vorticity $[\text{m s}^{-1}]$}
\end{nomenclature*}
```

produces the two-column nomenclature list below:²

Nomenclature for Chapter 1

Roman letters

- C** material curve
- r** material position [m]
- u** velocity [m s^{-1}]

Greek letters

- Γ** circulation [$\text{m}^2 \text{s}^{-1}$]
- ρ** mass density [kg m^{-3}]
- ω** vorticity [m s^{-1}]

²The command `\cramped` is from the `mathtools` package; it sets the superscript slightly lower. The command `\symbfup` is from the `unicode-math` package, which is automatically loaded when running `LuaLaTeX`; in `pdfTeX`, use `\bm{\omega}` instead.

5 PACKAGES FOR MATH, CHEMISTRY, CODE, TABLES, AND MORE

The `mitthesis` class loads the `amsmath` package and its extension `mathtools`. These packages provide many useful macros for typesetting equations and symbols, such as: environments for aligning and splitting equations or groups of equations; tools for matrices; a wide variety of operators and symbols; tools to define new math operators and paired delimiters; and much, much more. If you are including equations, look at the documentation for these packages: <https://ctan.org/pkg/amsmath> and <https://ctan.org/pkg/mathtools>.

Specialized packages for many disciplines can be found in [CTAN](#). These include subjects like `chemistry`, `linguistics`, and `physics`. As examples of such packages, the sample thesis template uses the package `mhchem` to set chemical equations and the package `listings` to list computer code.

Several packages focus on table and tabular environments. The `booktabs` package, used in the sample thesis template, produces better quality horizontal lines (called *rules*) for separating material in tables. The `array` package (also used) provides additional options for column formats in tabular environments, the `dcolumn` package (also used) aligns columns of numbers on the decimal separator, and the `longtable` package (also used) formats multipage tables with automatic page breaking.

When selecting a package, check that it is currently maintained (with relatively recent updates), and compare it to other packages that perform similar functions. Some packages are better than others, and some obsolete packages remain online.

The packages called by `mitthesis` are listed in Table 3 on page 9.

6 TROUBLESHOOTING AND MODIFICATIONS

6.1 Listing thesis committee members or using a signature page

Listing committee members (with or without signatures) is not required under MIT's thesis specifications. Only the thesis supervisor should appear on the title page, not a list of committee members. However, some departments may require a separate committee or signature page. That page can be inserted by the author between the title and abstract pages. Check with your department about this page and any associated formatting requirements.

6.2 Dealing with multiple titles in the signature block

When a thesis supervisor has multiple titles (which will not fit on one line), you can obtain a line break with proper horizontal spacing by doing

```
\Supervisor{name}{first title and \\ & second title}
```

The same trick works in the `\Acceptor` command. **TEXhackers note:** The signature block is typeset as a LATEX tabular environment as of version 1.18 (in earlier versions, a tabbing environment was used).

6.3 Overflowing title page: managing space

If your title page overflows the vertical space (from too many authors, degrees, previous degrees, etc.), you can use some or all of the following techniques. The commands must be given before `\maketitle`.

1. Reduce the 12 pt and 18 pt skips between the various blocks of text to 6 pt with this command:

```
\Tighten
```

Table 3: External packages used. For documentation, visit CTAN, <https://ctan.org>. Alternatively, if you have **TeX Live** installed, you can open a terminal window and type `% texdoc package-name`.

Package	Purpose in class file	How it can be used
bm	defines commands to access bold math symbols (loaded for default fonts)	with pdfTeX, the command <code>\bm{...}</code> produces a bold math symbol
bookmark	is loaded automatically by <code>\DocumentMetadata</code>	customize pdf bookmarks
doi	support for hyperlinking DOIs	hyperlink a doi number: <code>\doi{...}</code>
etoolbox	extend or modify other macros	can use in preamble to modify macros, if needed
geometry	set page size and margins	can use <code>\newgeometry</code> in <code>mydesign.tex</code>
graphicsx	support for inserting images	use to include graphics
hyperref	support for hyperlinks and metadata	must complete metadata setup in preamble
mathtools	loads and extends amsmath	many useful math macros available. See documentation for amsmath and mathtools
kvoptions	key value fallback for systems older than 2022/11/01	—
lineno	class option to add line numbers	keyvalue <code>lineno</code> will give line numbers; <code>lineno</code> package adds commands to control numbering
xcolor	could also be loaded in <code>mydesign.tex</code>	support for colors, including colored fonts
array	—	additional options for formatting table columns
booktabs	—	better quality tables, with additional commands
dcolumn	—	align number columns on selectable separators
longtable	—	multipage tables with automatic page breaking
microtype	—	typographical refinements: character protrusion, font expansion, letter spacing (tracking), etc.
babel	—	if you use multiple languages, load <code>babel</code> in a fontset file before loading fonts
biblatex	—	sample template uses this bibliography tool. Change to <code>natbib</code> if you prefer
fontenc	—	load this in a fontset file if using pdfTeX
fontspec	—	load this in a fontset file if using a unicode engine (unicode-math loads <code>fontspec</code> by default)
lipsum	—	create filler text (see sample template, Chapter 1)
listings	—	for listing computer code (see sample template, Appendix A)
mhchem	—	to format chemical formulæ (see sample template, Chapter 1)
multicol	—	used in two-column nomenclature list
setspace	—	can be loaded to change the default line spacing, if desired (e.g., for “double-spacing”)
unicode-math	—	load in a fontset file if using a unicode engine

2. Reduce the font size in the signature block with this command:

```
\SignatureBlockSize{\small}
```

3. Put the acceptor name and title onto two lines, rather than three, by putting the acceptor's position into the second argument and leaving the third argument blank:

```
\Acceptor{Tertius Castor}{Professor and Graduate Officer, Department of Research}{}{}
```

4. Reduce the font size of the the author name[s] from `\large` to `\normalsize` with this command:

```
\AuthorNameSize{\normalsize}
```

5. Omit previous degrees from the title page, instead mentioning them in the biographical sketch.

6.4 Push title page text toward top

If you prefer to keep the text toward the top of the page with most white space at the bottom, you can use this command to squash the vertical glue (TeX's stretchy space):

```
\Squash
```

This command is useful when the text has not already reach the bottom of the page, since the glue gets squashed automatically when the page is too full. This command must be given before `\maketitle`.

6.5 Overflowing thesis committee members page: managing space

Reduce the 56 pt skips at top to 32 pt with this command:

```
\CMPShortenTop
```

This command must be given before `\maketitle`.

6.6 Changing paragraph separation

If you prefer to denote paragraph breaks by vertical space rather than indentation, you can try the `parskip` package: ctan.org/pkg/parskip. See that package's documentation for details.

6.7 Non-standard usage

To adapt this template for use at a different institution, or for specific departmental needs, you can put the following commands in your preamble.

- Use `\Institution{Your Institution}` to change MIT to your own institution on the title page.
- Use `\maketitle*` (in place of `\maketitle`) to drop the MIT copyright permission statement.
- If your institution issues degrees in months other than February, May, June, or September, you can still put those months into the `\DegreeDate` command. To suppress the resulting error message, put `\SuppressMonthError` before `\maketitle*`.
- Omitting `\Acceptor` commands will drop the “Accepted by:” field. To suppress the resultant error message, put `\SuppressAcceptorError` before `\maketitle*`.
- To change “Thesis Supervisor” to something else, use `\SupervisorDesignation{..}`.

- To change “Thesis Committee” to something else, use `\ThesisCommitteeName{...}`.
- To change “Committee member” to something else, use `\ThesisReaderName{...}`.

Please do not remove the license/copyright text from the sources files — this code took me some time write!

7 RESOURCES FOR \LaTeX

\LaTeX documentation is easy to find online. A few useful resources, among many, are these:

\LaTeX Wikibook. <https://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/LaTeX>. An online tutorial book.

$\text{\LaTeX}2e$: An unofficial reference manual. <https://latexref.xyz/dev/latex2e.html>. A comprehensive explanation of each \LaTeX command, from the \TeX User’s Group.

\TeX Stack-Exchange. <https://tex.stackexchange.com/>. More than 250,000 answered questions, and you can ask your own!

ChatGPT. At the time of this writing, ChatGPT, a chatbot based on a large language model, could sometimes accurately answer \LaTeX -related questions or write acceptable \LaTeX and `expl3` code.

Good luck with your thesis and your thesis defense!