

FAQ Comprehensive Exam Procedures

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Policy concerns

Q: There is no policy in the handbook stipulating whether exam questions can be changed from the ones submitted by students. Some committees are operating on the assumption that they can change the questions while other committees are operating on the assumption that the questions will not be changed. Can you please clarify the expectations for this procedure?

A: *Graduate Handbook*: The student will then submit the exam statement—narrative, reading list, and **suggested questions** to the advisory committee for approval. The advisory committee may add readings to the list and/or comment on the student’s suggested questions.

A student’s approved narratives, reading lists, and **draft questions serve as guidelines for the advisory committee members to use in finalizing the exam**. Generally, students will not be asked exam questions outside of the reading lists. Students should be given at least two questions to choose from for each of the question types. Students will answer one of two theory questions, one of two methods questions and two of three or four general mastery questions. (p.12)

Further explanation: The student works with the chair of their advisory committee to create draft questions. The committee can use the draft/suggested questions as written, revise the draft/suggested questions, or write new questions that are based on the reading list. The draft questions are intended to serve as a guideline and also help the student think about what types of questions might be asked.

Q: The current handbook says 100 pieces of literature may serve as a rough guideline, but some people have closer to 200 readings. Some narratives have ranged from 1 to 5.5 pages excluding suggested questions. Could the range for the expected number of articles/books on reading lists and expected page length for narratives be clarified?

A: *Graduate Handbook*: Although there is no specific requirement for the number of academic books and journal articles on the reading list, **100 pieces of literature** may serve as a rough guideline. (Handbook, p.11)

Further explanation: The guidelines indicate 100 pieces of literature. If a student identifies three areas of focus, they should have about 30-35 pieces of literature for each area. They might have additional literature on methods. 200 readings are beyond the current guidelines.

Graduate Handbook: Students should prepare a narrative that briefly outlines how their research focus fits into each of the areas/subareas and a rationale for the types of literature included on the reading list. The discussion of each area (and relevant subareas) **should be limited to 500 words**. A diagram is appropriate to include.

Q: In the handbook (p. 12) it states, “The advisory committee members will submit questions to the chair of the committee at least six weeks before the scheduled beginning of the examination.” Could you clarify if this is the chair of the advisory committee or of the graduate committee (right now it is inferred as the chair of the advisory committee)? Also, are these brand new questions submitted by the advisory committee, or are they picking the questions they want from the list of suggested questions we as students have created?

A: The chair refers to the chair of the advisory committee. The chair of the graduate committee will always be identified as DGS. The student works with the chair of their advisory committee to create draft questions. The committee can use the draft/suggested questions as written, revise the draft/suggested questions, or write new questions that are based on the reading list. The draft questions are intended to serve as a guideline and also help the student think about what types of questions might be asked.

Q: Can the roles of committee members be clarified?

A: The role and responsibilities of the committee chair, committee members, and the doctoral candidate are outlined on pages 21-23 of the Handbook.

Q: In the handbook (p. 12) it states, “A student must formally notify the Director of Graduate Studies that they wish to sit for the comprehensive exam by the second week of a given semester.” It was unclear what day this was specifically.

A: The end of the week refers to the end of the business week (i.e. Friday by 5 pm.)

Form concerns

Q: It was unclear whether the outside examiner also needed to sign the Comprehensive Exam Committee Form. Could this requirement be noted specifically?

A: All committee members need to sign the form.

Timeline concerns

Q: When is the proposed list of questions supposed to be turned in? We ask that they should be turned in some time after the narrative and reading list are approved because we would not yet have a clear idea on what would be good to be tested on until we have read a fair amount of the literature.

A: *Graduate Handbook:* In addition, students will work with their committee to draft suggestions for possible exam questions as part of their exam statement. Comprehensive exam statements (narrative, reading list, and suggested questions) should be developed through a close collaboration between the student and the chair of the advisory committee.

Further explanation: The timeline for developing draft questions is a decision made between the student and the committee. The student should discuss the timeline and expectations with the committee chair.

Q: Could you please create a timeline for when narrative, reading list, and suggested questions are due and to whom they are due?

A: *Graduate Handbook:* After the student’s chair approves the student’s comprehensive exam narrative the chair distributes the narrative to all members of the advisory committee. Once the student receives approval from the advisory committee, the advisory committee chair submits the student’s narrative to the department’s graduate committee for final approval. It is expected the student does not move forward in the comprehensive exam process until the narrative has been approved by both the advisory committee and the graduate committee. The narrative should be approved by the advisory committee and the graduate committee at least one semester before students plan to take the comprehensive exam.

The student will submit the exam statement—narrative, reading list, and suggested questions to the advisory committee for approval. The advisory committee may add readings to the list and/or comment on the student’s suggested questions. (p.12)

Further explanation: The student works with their advisory committee to create the reading list and draft questions. The student should discuss the timeline and expectations with the committee chair. Additional information on timelines, procedures, and forms can be found [here](#).

Q: Is there a deadline for when oral exams need to be taken after written exams? Currently the handbook (p. 14) says exams will be graded within 10 business days of the regular semester, but does not say when the oral exam must be taken by (e.g., within two-three weeks of finishing the written exam). Nor does it say how long before the last day of finals week that oral exams must be scheduled.

A: *Graduate Handbook:* The written part of the comprehensive exams will be graded within 10 business days of the regular semester. The written part of the exam provides an assessment of students’ ability to effectively engage with a topic in a written medium. The oral exam is considered the second part of the comprehensive exam process. The student may take the oral exam only if they have passed the written part of the exam. (p.14)

Further Explanation: It is expected that students schedule the oral exam shortly after the 10 business day window of when the exam is graded. The student should discuss the timeline and expectations with the committee chair.

Graduate Handbook: Once a student has requested to sit for the exam and both the advisory committee and the graduate committee have approved the exam questions, they must complete the exam that semester. (p.13)

Further Explanation: The semester ends on the last day of finals week. The student should discuss the timeline and expectations with the committee chair.

Q: Do we need to book a room for the oral exam?

A: *Graduate Handbook:* A student must formally notify the Director of Graduate Studies that they wish to sit for the comprehensive exam by the second week of a given semester. The comprehensive committee declaration form is due to the department program assistant at this stage. If the student plans to sit for the exam at the beginning of a semester, they must notify the DGS by the mid-semester point of the previous semester. **At that time, they should schedule their written exam as well as their oral defense with the department liaison.** (p.12)

Further explanation: When you schedule the oral defense, you should also have the department liaison reserve a room. (Same as for the thesis and dissertation defense.)

Q: How long are oral exams supposed to be? Current times for booked rooms include 1 hour, 1.5 hours, and 2 hours.

A: The length of oral exams is at the discretion of the committee. Students should talk to their committee chair about expectations. Generally, oral exams last approximately one hour. Students should reserve a room for more than an hour to allow sufficient time.