

M.A.-Writing Comprehensive Exam Information

General Description: The comprehensive examination for the M.A.-Writing is administered in two parts: written and oral.

I. Written Portion: You will write two 90-minute essays.

Subject Areas: The written portion of the comprehensive examination is not necessarily based on a list of suggested readings; instead, students should draw from works read for courses and while fulfilling the research requirement. The Department maintains master lists of exam questions for the two M.A.-Writing tracks: (1) Rhetoric/Composition and (2) Technical/Professional Writing.

Questions in these subject areas have been established; students will choose 15 of the approved questions from the established lists. Students may choose these areas only if they have done appropriate coursework.

Students should begin preparing for the examination early in their graduate studies. It is assumed that students will have taken significant course work in their subject areas and that their preparation for the examination will also supplement this course work.

Choosing Questions: Before applying to take comprehensive exams and submitting your questions, you might consider consulting a faculty member in your subject area. During this consultation, the faculty member will help you determine the appropriateness of each question for your exam. You may strike questions in areas where you did not have course work. You may also request to write one or two of your own questions. (These will have to be approved by faculty specializing in your track area.)

Application To Take Exam: Each semester the English Department announces a deadline by which applications to take comprehensive exams must be submitted. (In Spring and Fall, this is the first Friday of the semester; students taking Summer exams will apply in the preceding semester—usually by the first Friday in May.) To be eligible to take the M.A.-Writing examination, students must submit (to the Director of Graduate Studies) the following by the deadline:

- the “Comprehensive Examination Application/Results Form” (available on the Graduate College’s webpage, under “Forms”) and
- a list of approved questions (including questions to be struck).

The Graduate Committee’s role in narrowing your questions: The Graduate Director will review your application and questions, asking for assistance from faculty members of the Graduate Committee if necessary. From your list, they will choose two sets of three questions each. From each set of questions, you will choose one on which to write a 90-minute exam essay. (Thus, you’ll be writing two 90-minute essays.) Any of the questions you submitted may appear on the exam.

Exam Day: The exam will take place in a campus computer lab and begin at 9:00 a.m. In the Fall, the exam will be the Friday after Fall Break; in the Spring, the Friday after Spring Break; in Summer, the first Friday of the semester.

On the day of your exam, you will be given two sets of three questions each, chosen from the list submitted with your application. You will have 90 minutes to write each answer.

You may write your essays in longhand or type them on the computer. You may not bring books or notes with you to the exam, and you may not download any information from the computer, the Internet, or a disk.

Exam Evaluation: Each essay is blindly evaluated by two English graduate faculty readers who are familiar with the material. Each essay is rated “high pass,” “pass,” “low pass,” or “fail.” An essay will pass only if it receives some combination of the following ratings: “high pass,” “pass,” or “low pass.” A student must pass both written essays in order to pass the written examination.

II. Oral Portion:

During the oral examination, the student will respond to questions about the student’s portfolio. Questions will be asked by a committee of two members of the graduate faculty in the student’s track (Rhetoric/Composition or Technical/Professional Writing). The student is responsible for asking two appropriate faculty members to serve on the committee and for scheduling the meeting at a mutually agreeable time. The portfolio, a selection of the student’s best written work (which might include materials written outside of class), should be submitted to the student’s examination committee at least one week prior to the date of the oral examination.

The oral portion of the exam accomplishes the following basic goals:

- (1) it determines whether or not the candidate is a competent writer;
- (2) it allows discussion about how exceptional pieces within the portfolio might be revised for publication; and
- (3) it encourages a self-assessment of the candidate’s strengths and weaknesses as a writer and how she or he might continue to develop as a writer.

Students should schedule the oral portion of the comprehensive exam to occur after completing the research requirement (thesis or degree papers) and before the due date for Comprehensive Exam results established by the Graduate College (usually the last day of classes).

To schedule the oral exam, students should consult with faculty in their respective tracks.

It is the student's responsibility to contact faculty regarding the scheduling of the exam, to reserve the Siceluff library for one hour (a reservation book is available in the department office), to submit copies of the portfolio to each exam committee member, and to make sure the exam advisor notifies the Graduate Director of the oral exam results (before the due date established by the Graduate College).