

## **Guidelines for the Master's Qualifying Examination in English Revised Spring 2025**

By the beginning of the **eighth** week of your final semester (or your penultimate semester if you are graduating in the summer), you must make arrangements to take your Master's Comprehensive oral examination. This examination is an hour-long conversation between you and three members of the Graduate Faculty (with the Graduate Director also present) about the work you have done in your program. You must pass this comprehensive examination in order to complete your degree requirements.

### **Scheduling**

By the end of the eighth week of your final semester, you must provide to the Graduate Director the names of three Graduate Faculty members you would like to serve on your committee and propose several possible dates and times for your examination, which must be completed **no later than** the end of the eleventh week of your final semester. Normally these faculty members are chosen from the faculty who have taught you or supervised your research, and can include the Graduate Director. A list of all current members of the Graduate Faculty may be found on the Graduate School's website.

### **Reading List**

You must submit a reading list for your comprehensive exams to your committee **no later than two weeks before the scheduled exam**. You **must** discuss the reading list with the Graduate Director before finalizing it.

The reading list is designed to allow you to demonstrate your mastery of key concepts, ideas, works, and related information from the coursework you have completed in pursuit of your degree. Since you will be evaluated on your ability to synthesize ideas, make connections across national boundaries and time periods, and provide specific information about the works you choose, you should make selections that will give you the best opportunity to show your command of your learning. The following requirements cover the selections you should make:

- Each three-hour course taken in fulfillment of the master's degree in English must be represented on the Reading List, including those you are enrolled in during your final semester.
- The overall list must represent at least two national literatures. The courses on the list should be categorized (American, British, world, other).
- Specific works should be listed by course number and title (lowest course number to highest); if you have received transfer credit for any course or exemption from any course requirement, this should be indicated at the beginning of the list.
- The list must include at least three major works or three groups of shorter works (each shorter work grouping must contain at least three works) from each course that you have taken.
- At least three of the following types of literary genres must be represented: fiction, poetry, drama, and nonfiction.
- One selection in the nonfiction category must represent a school of literary criticism/theory (e.g. "post-colonialism" or "feminism").
- In classes where the reading material is composed of anthologies, individual reading selections, and your own research (such as courses in professional preparation, rhetoric,

pedagogy, creative writing, and your thesis), your instructor will usually indicate appropriate readings or groups of readings to choose by indicating them on his/her syllabus with an asterisk. If your instructor has not done so, you should consult with that instructor on your selections so that you can identify appropriate works to choose.

- Examples of suitable texts follow:
  - Fiction: *Moby Dick* would be a major work; three of Melville's short stories would be a group of shorter works.
  - Poetry: *Paradise Lost* would be a major work; "Lycidas," "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity," and three of Milton's sonnets would be a group of shorter works.
  - Nonfiction: *Walden* would be a major work; three of T.S. Eliot's essays would be a group of shorter works. (*The Signifying Monkey* is an example of a major work of literary criticism; three journal articles or book chapters would be a group of shorter works.)
  - Drama: *Hamlet* would be a major work; three one-act plays would be a group of shorter works.
  - Rhetorical Praxis: *Teaching Composition* would be a complete work; three significant readings on prewriting techniques would be a group of shorter works.
  - Creative Writing: *The Writing Life* would be a complete work; three craft essays on sentence acoustics would be a group of shorter works.

If you have questions about appropriate choices for your Reading List, please consult the Graduate Director or the Graduate Studio instructor.

### **The Portfolio**

At the time of the oral examination, students are expected to turn in their Assessment Portfolio; if you are taking your qualifying examinations in the spring before the summer of graduation, then you should turn the portfolio in by the midway point of the summer semester in which you will complete your coursework.

### **The Examination**

The exam usually takes place in Bancroft 244 and lasts about an hour; the Graduate Director will let you know if another location has been selected. This is a "closed-book, closed-computer" examination; you are expected to be able to talk about the works you selected without reference to notes or other materials (you may have a copy of your reading list to use as scratch paper). You should plan to talk about the works you have chosen with some specificity; you should be able to discuss specific characters, scenes, and ideas, not just say something like "when what's-her-name is standing there with that thing on her chest." This is in keeping with the nature of the examination as a scholarly conversation; your job is to demonstrate that you can carry on such a conversation about your selected works with the level of specificity expected of someone who is completing a graduate degree.

During your examination, your examiners will take turns asking you questions about the works you have selected, assessing your ability to discuss them orally and to demonstrate your mastery of the [goals for graduate study in English](#). The examiners may ask about any of the works on your list, individually or in combination, and will not necessarily only ask about the works in their area of specialization. You may also get questions about major critical or scholarly works related to the works on your list, for instance something like "If you had to consult a scholarly

biography of Shakespeare, what one would you choose and why?” or “If you had to pick an influential scholar who writes on the American Renaissance, who would you select?”

### Grading and Results

At the conclusion of the exam, passing students will receive a grade of “pass” or “pass with distinction” based on your three examiners’ individual assessment of your performance, which is collated by the Graduate Director and reported to the Graduate School. The ranking of “pass with distinction” must be assigned by all three examiners in order to be awarded. The Graduate Director will report these results to you in writing and to the Graduate School. Students who receive a ranking lower than “pass” will be given information about remediation and re-examination options. Ultimately, you must earn at least a grade of “pass” to complete your Master’s Degree.

### Calendar for Spring 2025

<b>Monday, March 3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Last Day to Submit Request for Oral Exam Date Preferences to Graduate Director</b></li> <li>• <b>Last Day to Submit Request for Oral Exam Faculty Committee Members</b></li> </ul>
<b>Friday, March 14</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Deadline for Submitting Reading Lists to Graduate Director (after Director approval, lists must be sent to exam committee)</b></li> </ul>
<b>Monday, March 31 – Friday, April 11</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Oral Comprehensive Exams Take Place in this Period</b></li> <li>• <b>Completion of Qualtrics Survey</b></li> <li>• <b>Portfolio Submitted by the oral exam</b></li> </ul>
<b>Monday, April 21</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Record of Comprehensive Exams due in Records and Registration by 5 PM</b></li> </ul>

Candidate's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Rating Sheet for the Master's Oral Examination**

3 = Pass with distinction

2 = Pass

1 = Failure

<b>GOAL</b>	<b>Ranking</b>
Student shows knowledge of major periods, works, and figures in <b>at least two national literatures</b> . Comments:	
Student shows <b>ability to identify connections</b> among British, American, and other national literatures. Comments:	
Student shows knowledge of <b>literary terminology</b> . Comments:	
Student shows <b>ability to synthesize material</b> among courses taken and works read, thus demonstrating mastery of the program of study. Comments:	
Student shows familiarity with a variety of <b>critical perspectives</b> and secondary scholarship, and can apply them to primary texts (i.e., s/he can apply theory to literature and other appropriate materials). Comments:	
Student can discuss works/practitioners of <b>literary/rhetorical/creative criticism and theory</b> (i.e., s/he can discuss relationships between/among critics/theorists). Comments:	
Student shows <b>speaking ability</b> by responding to questions clearly, confidently, and in conformity with current standards of usage. Comments:	
<b>Totals</b> <u>Tabulation:</u> Add the totals and divide by 7; the student's score must be at least 2.0 for a pass and at least 2.5 on <b>all sheets</b> for a pass with distinction. All raters must agree on the rank of "distinction." (A total of 14 or higher is a pass; a total of 18 or higher is required for distinction.)	

**Comments:**