

Information for graduate students in English who wish to take the M.A. Comprehensive Exam in Rhetoric and Composition

M.A Comprehensive Exam in English
Rhetoric and Composition Option

The M.A. Comprehensive Exam in Rhetoric and Composition consists of two parts:

- Part I** A three-hour exam based on a reading list of selected texts.
- Part II** A 7-10 page essay written during the two weeks following the three-hour exam. Part II is based on a specific area of specialization, which the student develops in conjunction with his or her Exam Advisor

Timeline for Students Wishing to Take the Exam

1st week of classes of semester in which you wish to take the exam:

- Register for exam with the Graduate Secretary (ST 705) Intent to take exam must be turned in by second week of semester.
- Ask an English Department faculty member to be your Exam Advisor and discuss the area of interest you wish to address in the second part of your exam, after consulting with the Director of Composition.

2nd week of classes of semester in which you wish to take the exam:

- Give your Exam Advisor a reading list of at least four texts (books and/or articles) in your specialization area (your Exam Advisor may modify your reading list).

12th Week (Day of exam):

- Write Part I of exam (three hours).
- Receive your question for Part II

14th Week (2 weeks after day of exam):

- Turn in Part II of exam

Overview

The exam consists of two parts, a timed exam and a take home essay. In order to pass the exam, you must receive a score of 2 (low pass) or higher on each part of the exam from each faculty member assigned to evaluate your exam (one of these faculty members will be your Exam Advisor). If there are differences in scores received from members of the exam committee, a majority vote will determine your final score. If you fail one part of the exam, you must retake that one part. If you fail both parts of the exam, you must retake both parts.

Part I: In-Class Exam

Part I of the exam is a general examination of your knowledge of the fields of rhetoric and composition, of your ability to think critically about and articulate this knowledge, and of your ability to apply concepts and theories you have studied. This part of the exam is based on a common reading list, and you are expected to be familiar with the readings and to refer to the readings in your responses to the exam questions.

You will be given three hours to answer two essay questions. The exam will be held in a computer lab, and your responses must be typed. (Necessary accommodations will be made for students with documented disabilities.) The computers will not have Internet access, though you will have access to grammar and spelling tools. You are not permitted to bring any notes or books into the exam. At the end of the exam, you will be given your question for the Take Home Essay (see Part II below).

The exam questions are concerned with both rhetoric and composition, and you must answer a question in each category (one Rhetoric and one Composition question). Within each category, there will be various types of questions. Some may be historical, some analytical, some applied, etc.

Part II: Take Home Essay

Part II of the exam gives you the opportunity to write about your specialized area of interest in the fields of Rhetoric and Composition Studies. Some possibilities for your specialized area are listed below; however, you are free to develop your own specialty in consultation with your Exam Advisor.

Possible Specialties:

- Argument
- Classical rhetoric
- Composition studies and teaching in secondary schools
- Connections between composition theory and literary theory
- Connections between creative writing theory and comp/rhet theory
- Developmental writing studies
- Disabilities and composition (including deaf studies)
- Feminism and composition
- Genre
- Issues in grammar
- Linguistics and composition
- Modern rhetoric
- Political issues and composition and rhetoric
- Queer rhetoric
- Reading/Writing Connections
- Rhetoric and race
- Working with ESL students
- Writing across the curriculum
- Writing Centers

At the beginning of the semester in which you plan to take your exam, you will choose your specialization area in consultation with your Exam Advisor, who will help you develop a reading list of least four items (books and/or articles). Based on that list, your Exam advisor will create your exam question (Part II), which you will receive after you complete Part I of the exam. After you receive the question for Part II, you will have fourteen days to complete a polished 7-10 page typed response to the question. Your response should engage with the texts on your specialization area reading list.

Rubric for Grading Comprehensive Exam essays Rhetoric/Composition Option

4=High Pass

Exam questions assigned this score show **very strong ability** on the part of the examinee to provide a detailed, substantive, and insightful discussion about the area under focus. Exams in this category may be marked by all or some of the following features:

- impressively substantive in material selected for discussion
- noteworthy integration/synthesis of material, ideas, and/or concepts from more than one perspective in rhetoric/composition (as befits the question)
- thorough use of specific, relevant and well-chosen examples
- well-structured and convincing argumentation
- good balance between specific and general discussion

3=Pass

Exam questions assigned this score show **good ability** on the part of the examinee to provide a detailed, substantive, and insightful discussion about the area under focus. Exams in this category may be marked by all or some of the following features:

- consistently substantive in material selected for discussion
- some integration/synthesis of material, ideas, and/or concepts from one or more areas in rhetoric/composition (as befits the question)
- good use of specific, relevant and well-chosen examples
- generally well-structured and convincing argumentation
- adequate balance between specific and general discussion

2=Low Pass

Exam questions assigned this score show **adequate but undistinguished ability** on the part of the examinee to provide a detailed, substantive, and insightful discussion about the area under focus. Exams in this category may be marked by all or some of the following features:

- inconsistently substantive in material selected for discussion
- thin integration/synthesis of material, ideas, and/or concepts related to the question and little or no attempt to draw on more than one area in the field
- uneven use of specific, relevant and well-chosen examples and/or absence of sufficient detail
- some convincing argumentation
- some balance between specific and general discussion
- occasional misrepresentation of relevant concepts

1=Unacceptable/Fail

Exam questions assigned this score show **little or no ability** on the part of the examinee to provide a detailed, substantive, and insightful discussion about the area under focus in the exam question. Exams assigned this score might also show absent or inaccurate understanding of basic thinkers or basic concepts in the field. Exams in this category may be marked by all or some of the following features:

- absence of enough material to sustain a substantive discussion
- superficial response to the question that does not integrate/synthesize material in standard academic format
- failure to provide details or specifics for claims made
- frequent or egregious misrepresentation of ideas or concepts accepted in the field
- weak writing skills that lead to difficulty in a reader processing the exam as a whole

Rhetoric/Composition M.A. Exam Reading List 2007

Rhetoric:

Bizzell, Patricia, and Bruce Herzberg, eds. *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings From Classical Times to the Present*. 2nd ed. Boston: Bedford St. Martins, 2002. Read selections by Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Quintillian, Burke, Perelman, and Anzaldúa.

Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. (Any edition.)

Williams, Patricia J. *Alchemy of Race and Rights*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992.

Composition:

Clark, Irene. *Concepts in Composition: Theory and Practice in the Teaching of Writing*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2003. Read chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, and 9, including the readings at the end of each chapter.

Horner, Bruce. *Terms of Work for Composition: A Materialist Critique*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000.

MacNealy, Mary Sue. *Strategies for Empirical Research in Writing*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1999. Read Chapters 1, 3, 5, 7, 11, and 12.