

Guidelines, MA English Comprehensive Examination

Purpose:

The MA comprehensive examination represents the culmination of the abilities you have been developing in the MA English program. It demonstrates your proficiency in close reading, research, theoretical framing, and argumentation, and it shows that you can identify, understand, and contribute to critical conversations on some aspect of literature or literary studies.

Scope and Length:

Students will work with their first and second reader to develop an appropriate list of primary and secondary sources (about 50 total) for their comprehensive reading hours in EN 689. Students will be tested on their understanding of these readings during a comprehensive examination. They will not know examination questions in advance. The examination consists of four questions; faculty will develop six questions and students will answer four. Students are allotted one hour for each question, or four hours total. The examination will be taken in a private office on a laptop with a lockdown browser.

What an examination demonstrates:

- That the student is capable of a thorough understanding of and broad familiarity with their chosen area of literary studies.
- That the student has advanced level knowledge of this particular topic that would enable them to teach their subject area to an undergraduate-level audience. This is demonstrated through synthesis of ideas and analysis of multiple texts.
- That the student is aware of the scholarly conversation in their subject area and knows how their idea fits into this conversation.
- That the student can identify and apply an appropriate critical methodology and historical and cultural frameworks to primary works of literature.
- That the student can closely analyze primary texts while still demonstrating a breadth of knowledge in the field.

Exam day preparations:

Faculty will upload the examination questions on the Canvas course shell at the beginning of the exam period. Faculty will ensure that the lockdown browser is enabled and will be present in the building for the duration of the exam in case there are technical difficulties.

Scoring the examination:

Each response will be scored based on the following rubric. The scores of both faculty readers will be averaged together. Students must receive a total average score of 8 or above to pass the examination.

	3-Strong	2-Moderate	1-Weak
Breadth	Response uses at least four primary texts to address the prompt through a logical argument.	Response uses fewer than four primary texts or lacks some logical coherence.	Response does not use a sufficient number of primary texts and/or lacks serious logical coherence. Prompt is not addressed.
Depth	Response uses sufficient examples and close reading strategies to show a sustained engagement with primary texts.	Response uses examples and close reading strategies to show engagement with primary texts, but could be developed further.	Response does not use sufficient examples or close reading strategies to demonstrate engagement with primary texts.
Historical and cultural context	Response shows historical and cultural awareness of how literature is situated in place and time, citing secondary texts where appropriate.	Response shows limited historical and cultural awareness of how literature is situated in place and time.	Response does not demonstrate historical and cultural awareness of how literature is situated in place and time. Response contains inaccuracies and confusions.
Critical context	Response demonstrates awareness of critical conversations in the field, citing secondary	Response demonstrates limited awareness of critical conversations in the field.	Response does not demonstrate awareness of critical conversations in the field. No secondary

	texts where appropriate.		texts are cited and/or critical conversations are misrepresented.
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Retaking the examination:

If a student receives a failing score, they will be given an entirely new examination with a fresh set of questions. There must be a minimum of one week (five business days) in-between attempts to allow faculty time to generate a new exam. Any exam attempt must be completed before the last day of classes; no exams will be given during the final exam period. Students must get special permission to take EN 696 during the summer term. Students may attempt the exam twice during the semester in which they have enrolled in EN 696. Students who receive a failing score on both attempts may register for EN 696 again the following semester. Students who are unable to pass the exam after two subsequent semesters are dismissed from the program.