

The Qualifying Examination in Areas of High Competence

The purpose of the qualifying exam is to demonstrate competence as a specialist in an area of psychology. The qualifying exam should demonstrate both breadth and depth of understanding. A student who passes the exam in a field should be qualified to teach courses in that field at all levels. Although students may have more than one field, the fields are usually related. There is both a written and oral component to the exam. For the written component, students usually submit two qualifying exam papers, one to satisfy the depth requirement and another to satisfy the breadth requirement. The depth component should demonstrate depth of understanding of the student's core area of research. Among other things, this might be the Specific Aims and Research Strategy from a grant or fellowship application or a review or theory paper. The typical length of a grant application is 5-6 pages, single-spaced. The breadth paper should reflect knowledge of adjacent literatures. Among other things, this might be a review or theory paper about an area related to the student's core research literature. The typical length of a review paper is 5000-7500 words, excluding references, tables, and figures. Other types of written documents may be acceptable for both the depth and breadth components (e.g., book chapters), if approved by the committee (see below). Students can also demonstrate breadth or depth with a written exam (for additional information, [see here](#)). A student can set two oral defense dates (one for each document; an hour each) or one oral defense date for both documents (two hours). The written documents can be submitted and the oral defense(s) can be scheduled at any time before the end of the third year, but must occur no later than the deadlines specified in the Graduate Calendar. Written documents should be submitted to committee members at least two weeks in advance of the defense date (or by the date specified in the Graduate Calendar).

No later than six months before the oral component of the examination is to be completed, the student must submit an initial examination proposal to his or her Advisory Committee, with a copy to the Graduate Chair. (See Chapter 4, on administrative details for a discussion of the general function and composition of the Advisory Committee.) The qualifying exam proposal should briefly describe (a) the gap in knowledge the qualifying exam will fill, (b) the research question(s) that will be answered with the qualifying exam, (c) the methods the student will use to answer the question(s), and (d) a reading list. If students fulfill the breadth and depth requirements in two separate papers, they must submit two separate proposals. In rare cases, students fulfill the breadth and depth requirements in a single exam, in which case only one proposal is necessary. Each proposal should be no longer than 2-4 pages, double-spaced. After a period of consultation (with input from the Graduate Chair, if needed) which should not exceed four weeks, the student and committee will submit a final proposal to the Graduate Chair. The

Advisory Committee and the Graduate Chair must approve the final plan, taking into account the student's preferences. All final proposals will be available (from the graduate chair) for reading by any faculty member or graduate student. The examination should be planned so that, over the course of the academic year, the student should be able to spend roughly as much time on research as on preparing for the examination.

The Advisory Committee chair must notify the Graduate Group Chair in writing whether the student has passed or failed this examination. A student has at most two opportunities to pass the Qualifying Examination. If a second examination is necessary, the student must submit a new proposal within two weeks of the failure of the first exam. A student who fails the qualifying exam for the second time will be asked to leave the graduate program. Passing requires unanimity of three committee members, or if the committee has more than three members, a majority (not a tie).

While preparing for the written exam or writing the papers, the student should consult frequently with his or her advisor and with other committee members. Advisors and committee members may provide general comments on drafts, especially about literature that should be included in a review, but not close editing. Their involvement should not be so great as to warrant the status of co-author or co-principal-investigator. Because this is an examination, it must reflect the student's knowledge, some of which may be acquired from input while working on the exam. If the student wants to submit a portion of the qualifying exam for publication or to meet a fellowship application deadline prior to the defense, the student must submit a version of the document that reflects his or her work (with general comments from advisors or committee members) to the DGS. The student and advisor may then work more closely to prepare the work for submission to a journal or funding body.

For a sample timeline for the qualifying exam, please click the following link:

[Sample Timeline](#)