



# Northeastern University

## DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

### **DIRECTIONS FOR DOCTORAL COMPREHENSIVE EXAM PLAN FORM**

#### Overview of the Comprehensive Exam

The Doctoral Comprehensive Exam serves two primary purposes: to provide students with in depth knowledge of particular fields, and to orient students toward work on their dissertation. The balance of each comprehensive exam and its constituent parts will vary in each case: some will be more oriented toward the dissertation, others more towards general knowledge of the field. The Comprehensive Exam Approval Form is intended to lay out the shape of the student's work on the exam for the student, the committee, and the GSC.

Each student's Comprehensive Exam will be supervised by a committee, consisting of the faculty members with whom the student is working on the three field and focus papers. One of these faculty members will chair the committee, usually the anticipated dissertation chair.

The exam consists of:

- I. Three separate field and focus papers. These include:
  - i. A reading list on which the papers are based.
  - ii. A paper which first outlines the field studied, and then, in a more focused section, performs a specific inquiry into a smaller group of texts from the list or into a specific issue concerning the field.
- II. An oral exam, at which the student's committee will ask the student questions about the lists, the papers, and the plans for the dissertation going forward.

Please note that the student does not "pass" the pieces of the exam separately, but only at the final exam when all members of the committee review the papers and discuss the work with the student. Individual advisors approve papers for submission to the exam, but this does not yet constitute passing the paper or a piece of the exam.

For more detailed description of the Comprehensive Exam, please see the description in the PhD Guide.

#### Completing the Comprehensive Exam Approval Form

In the early spring of the student's last semester of coursework (Year 2 for students entering with the BA, Year 1 for students entering with the MA), the exam committee should meet once with the student to go over the plans for the different papers together. At this meeting, the committee should confer about the length and structure of the lists, and how each field and focus paper is envisioned. Which will feed directly into the dissertation? If some do not feed into the dissertation, how do they benefit the student's preparation for teaching and preparing for the job market?

Once this meeting has taken place, the student should fill out and submit the attached form first to all members of the exam committee and its chair for their signatures, and then to the GSC for final approval by April 10<sup>th</sup>.

In filling out the form, the student should, first, offer a sense of the dissertation they intend to write. Who is the likely chair? In what field will the student be working? On what topic? This is an important moment to begin to think, even if speculatively, about what the dissertation will be. With that in mind, as the student names the field and focus papers that will be written, the purpose of those papers should also be stated. Which papers are

envisioned as feeding directly towards the dissertation? If some papers do not feed into the dissertation, why are they being pursued? To provide expertise in teaching for use on the job market, or to further other research projects? This is a moment for students to articulate not just what they will work on, but why. This is the core of having a research agenda. In addition to laying out the scope and purpose of the comprehensive exam, the form asks students and faculty to make a schedule for the completion of the papers and the overall exam.

EXAM TIMELINE – for more details, see p. 21 or p. 24 of the [PhD Guide](#)

Exam Year 1: -Discuss fields and possible committee members during Annual Review meeting (typically taking place in **January/February**)

-Identify a committee chair and discuss a set of Comprehensive Examination fields

-Confirm remaining committee members

-Complete the Comprehensive Exam Plan Form by **April 10<sup>th</sup>**

Exam Year 2: -Complete Field and Focus #1-3 by the due dates decided upon in the Comprehensive Exam Plan form

-Take oral exam **no later than May 1** and submit results to [gradenglish@northeastern.edu](mailto:gradenglish@northeastern.edu)

-Submit approved prospectus **within six months** after completing the comp exam

**Reminder: the Comprehensive Exam must be completed and passed within 12 months of finishing coursework for the student to remain in good standing in the program.**



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## DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

### GRADUATE PROGRAMS – COMPREHENSIVE EXAM PLAN

① File this form with the Graduate Programs Office, email [gradenglish@northeastern.edu](mailto:gradenglish@northeastern.edu)

**Student:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Exam Chair:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Exam Committee Members:** \_\_\_\_\_

#### FIELD AND FOCUS PAPER #1

**Title:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Advisor:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Due Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

Briefly outline the field and focus of this paper, and state how the paper will either contribute to the development of the dissertation or towards future teaching and other research.

#### FIELD AND FOCUS PAPER #2

**Title:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Advisor:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Due Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

Briefly outline the field and focus of this paper, and state how the paper will either contribute to the development of the dissertation or towards future teaching and other research.

**FIELD AND FOCUS PAPER #3**

**Title:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Advisor:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Due Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

Briefly outline the field and focus of this paper, and state how the paper will either contribute to the development of the dissertation or towards future teaching and other research.

**Intended Area and Topic of Dissertation**

Briefly describe what field you expect to write your dissertation in, with which faculty members, and on what topic. You are not wedded to this dissertation plan, but having a dissertation in mind will help you orient yourself in the Comprehensive Exam.

**ORAL EXAMINATION**

**Anticipated Exam Date (Month, Year):** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Student Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Committee Chair Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Graduate Program Director Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Reminder: the Comprehensive Exam must be completed and passed within 12 months of finishing coursework for the student to remain in good standing in the program.**