

Department of English  
Oral Comprehensive Examination Procedure

At the end of the third year or the beginning of the fall semester of the fourth year, each student will take a two hour oral comprehensive examination. Students will be examined in six fields for twenty minutes each. Three (or, on rare occasions, four) members of the faculty will examine each student. No standardized list of texts is issued for this examination. The following provides guidelines for the creation of the lists of works for which each student will be responsible.

- 1) Each student chooses eight fields out of those listed in the graduate brochure. (Old English Literature, Medieval Literature, Sixteenth-Century English Literature, Seventeenth-Century British Literature, Eighteenth-Century British Literature, American Literature Before 1820, Nineteenth-Century British Literature, Nineteenth-Century American Literature, Twentieth-Century British Literature or Twentieth Century British and Irish Literature, Twentieth-Century American Literature, Literary Critical Theory, Contemporary World Literatures in English)
- 2) Students will fulfill two of the eight necessary fields through course work. Any graduate course can count toward a field, as long as it does not duplicate a field chosen for the oral exam. The course need not be a “survey,” and it can cover materials in more than one field, although students may not fulfill two fields with a single course. In order to sign off on a graduate course taken at another institution, for an MA elsewhere or a consortium course, students must bring a record of the grade and the syllabus for the course to a faculty member in the field of the course.
- 3) **Twelve** authors or topics constitute a list for a field. For each author or topic, the student must specify a number of representative works according to the following minimum requirements:
  - ◆ **Novels:** no fewer than two
  - ◆ **Poetry or short stories:** A specific edition of selected poems or stories representing the range of the author’s career (including pertinent non-fiction prose or critical writing – e.g. T.S. Eliot’s critical essays)
  - ◆ **Plays:** no fewer than three
  - ◆ **Non-fiction Prose/Critical Writing:** either a complete volume, an edition of selected writings, or no fewer than five substantial, individually selected essays or pieces of non-fiction prose. In general it is not acceptable to use an autobiography as the sole representative text. The principle here, as throughout the examination, is that students should choose figures and texts that represent the range and variety of important aspects of the fields and the authors that they select.
  - ◆ **Film:** May be included on Twentieth-Century British Literature or Twentieth Century British and Irish Literature, Twentieth-Century American Literature, and Contemporary World Literatures in English lists, but only within thematic or generic combined topics, which must also include non-filmic texts. The exception to this is the “special field” list, which may contain both film and other visual media where deemed appropriate in consultation with the committee chair.
- 4) Eight out of the twelve topics on each list must be author-based; the other four may be thematic or generic combined topics (e.g. captivity narratives, women’s satires of the eighteenth century, etc.)
- 5) For each field, the student will also compile and be held responsible for a short bibliography of critical or contextualizing works, containing no fewer than four books, one of which must be an anthology of essays or a selection (of no fewer than five articles) made by the student.
- 6) Students have the option of designating one of the six fields a “special field,” which they design in collaboration with a member of the faculty. It is allowable for the field to overlap temporally and contextually (though not in the selection of texts) with another field. For example, a student could opt to include the Nineteenth-Century British field on her orals while also including a special field in the Victorian novel, but none of the texts could be the same on the two lists, and there would be an expectation that the Nineteenth-Century British list would emphasize other areas and genres. It is essential that this field be constructed with at least as much rigor as the traditional fields. It could (and perhaps should) include more criticism, theory, and historical secondary sources than traditional topics. It is understood that in certain instances the special fields will not break down neatly into 12 topics and that some flexibility is necessary in the structure of the list. It is essential, however, that the overall weight of the list (as in the total number of texts included) be equal to or greater than that of a traditional field, so that a hypothetical Shakespeare field would need to include 36 plays (12 topics X 3 plays per topic) or their equivalent.
- 7) Students are required to gather approval signatures for each of their lists on this form. The form must be returned to the Director of Graduate Studies for final approval at least three months prior to the anticipated examination date. Only one signature is required for each field. In most cases, no one faculty member should be asked to sign for more than two fields.
- 8) Faculty should be advised that once lists have been approved, examination questions should be restricted to authors and texts included on those lists.
- 9) It is understood that students asked to retake part of all of the comprehensive exam will be examined by the same committee within six weeks of the original examination date.

## Orals Approval Form

This form must be signed and dated by the faculty member approving each field of study, and by faculty members approving each of the two courses that will count as categories. Forms must then be returned, with six signed fields, course-waiver signatures, and completed lists, to the Director of Graduate Studies for final approval **at least three months** prior to the anticipated examination date.

Name:
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<b>Category</b>	<b>Signature:</b>	<b>Date:</b>
Old English		
Middle English		
16 <sup>th</sup> Century British		
17 <sup>th</sup> Century British		
18 <sup>th</sup> Century British		
19 <sup>th</sup> Century British		
20 <sup>th</sup> Century British or 20 <sup>th</sup> Century British and Irish		
American Literature before 1820		
19 <sup>th</sup> Century American		
20 <sup>th</sup> Century American		
Contemporary World Literatures in English		
Literary Critical Theory		
Special Category		

Graduate Director:
Date Approved: