

MA 3-Essay Comprehensive Exam

The English MA program will begin piloting a new Comprehensive Examination process starting Spring 2026. Students who wish to pursue this option should familiarize themselves with the requirements (below) and seek out a Chair, who will inform the MA GAR of their interest. To be included in this pilot, students must have their drafts completed and student-selection portions of the reading lists approved by their committee by Week 11 of the semester before the exam. Students who do not meet this deadline will default to taking the Traditional Examination.

MA Comprehensive Examination (overview):

The MA Comprehensive Exam consists of both Written and Oral components. For the written component students submit 3 scholarly essays. They should be revisions of essays previously written and submitted for a grade in courses applicable to their MA degree program. Essays may only be newly composed if the committee chair grants special permission. All essays must exist in draft form by the tenth week of the semester before the exam. For the oral component, students will be asked to clarify and/or defend the positions they articulate in their essays and also field questions relating to the texts on their list (see below).

The Written Exam:

Students will submit 3 scholarly essays. Each essay must be 12–20 pages long in proper MLA format and should rally evidence and reasoning in the service of a viable analytical thesis. All three essays must contend with existing scholarship, and at least one essay must overtly articulate the specific critical approach being applied. Each essay must have attached a “Works Cited” list containing at least 5 citations/texts. Collectively the essays must attend to more than one literary genre and demonstrate awareness of a range of historical contexts. Students will need to be able to provide copies of all scholarly articles/chapters they cite in their essays to their committees upon request..

Students are expected to finalize these essay revisions independently. Until the end of the fall or spring semester preceding the term they are scheduled to complete the exam, students may solicit advice from their committee members and/or from previous instructors. After that time, they must forego outside tutoring. Turning in AI-generated text is strictly prohibited.

During the revision period, students may add or remove texts from their “Works Cited”; however, no items can be removed from the final reading list, and any sources added to the works cited must be added to the final reading list.

Deadline: Students must submit Final Drafts of their 3 essays to their committee by the 9th Friday of the semester they complete the exam (this calculation excludes the week of spring break).

Written examinations will be assessed according to the following criteria:

- 1) Does the writer effectively rally evidence and reasoning in support of a viable thesis, one that articulates a clear argument/analysis?
- 2) Does the writer contend with existing scholarship, including scholarship that challenges their arguments?
- 3) Does the writer in at least one essay overtly articulate/acknowledge the critical lens they are applying?
- 4) Does the writer in at least one essay attend to more than one literary genre by articulating some substantial insight about generic distinctions?
- 5) Does the writer demonstrate awareness of a range of historical periods and their contexts?
- 6) Does the writer properly cite sources using MLA format?

The Oral Exam:

The oral examination shall focus on the arguments/analyses contained in the student's essays, with students being asked to clarify and/or defend their positions. Students will also prepare for questions relating to all texts included in their Reading List (see below).

Deadline: All Oral Exams should be scheduled by week 12 of the semester and scheduled to take approximately 1.5 hours to complete.

The Oral Examinations will be assessed according to the following criteria:

- 7) Did the student adequately defend the arguments they put forth in their essay revisions?
- 8) Did the student demonstrate adequate awareness of relevant scholarship and theoretical perspectives?
- 9) Did the student demonstrate awareness of the how specific historical contexts informed the texts in their bibliographies?
- 10) Was the student able to articulate connections between texts published in different centuries?

Procedures for Forming Committees and Finalizing The Reading List:

Students are encouraged to recruit an examination chair early in their degree program but should do so at least by week 5 of the semester preceding the term they plan to graduate. In consultation with their chair, the student will create a Provisional Reading list that includes:

- I. The "Works Cited" lists from their 3 essay drafts (min 15 texts)
- II. 6 texts the student chooses

At least 2 texts on the student's portion of the reading list must have been written before 1700. Students may also formulate a "wishlist" of other texts they would like to their committee to consider assigning to them. This "wishlist" will be provided to the exam

committee members who may consider it when determining the texts they add to the list (see below).

The committee chair shall be responsible for forming the Exam Committee. Where an essay was previously submitted for a class, every effort should be made to have that faculty member serve on the committee. In all cases, the committee must include faculty who have areas of specialization relevant to each essay. If faculty with necessary expertise are not available, the student will need to submit a different essay, one for which there is a subject specialist available.

The chair will forward the provisional reading list described above to the committee members along with the students' essay drafts. Each committee member will be responsible for adding 6 more texts to the list. Committee members may make suggestions about the works cited, but the student's exam chair will ultimately decide whether to incorporate these additional suggestions. **The Final Reading list must contain at least 39 texts, to include the "Works Cited" and the texts chosen by the student and their committee.**

Deadline: The committee chair shall submit the Final Reading List to the MA GAR and to the committee no later than the end of week 13.

APPENDIX

A) TIMELINE:

Semester before graduation

Week 5	Student recruits chair and formulates provisional reading lists
Week 9	Chair forwards essay drafts and provisional lists to committee
Week 11	Committee members assign 6 additional texts to the student's list (and may provide additional suggestions regarding works they think should be cited in the essays that have not yet been included).
Week 13	Committee Chair distributes final reading list to GAR and Committee Members.
Week 15	By end of term students should email pdfs of any/all scholarly essays/chapters requested by the committee.

Semester of the exam/graduation:

Week 9	Student Submits Final Essay to committee via email along with pdf copies of any scholarly essays/chapters that the committee requests.
Week 11	Oral Exam should be conducted no later than Week 11 but can be scheduled any time during the semester presuming the committee is amenable.

B) Final READING LIST Headers (at least 36 texts in total)

Essay 1: Title

Works Cited (at least 5 texts)

Essay 2: Title

Works Cited (at least 5 texts)

Essay 3: Title

Works Cited (at least 5 texts)

Additional Texts chosen by:

Student (6)

Chair (6)

Committee Member (6)

Committee Member (6)

C) FINAL CHECKLIST:

Each essay:

- ☐ spans 12-20 pages (not including “Works Cited”)
- ☐ contains a thesis driven analysis/argument
- ☐ effectively rallies evidence and reasoning in the service of its point
- ☐ contends with existing scholarship and/or theory
- ☐ demonstrates proper use of MLA citation method
- ☐ includes a “Works Cited” lists (minimum of 5 sources, not including references like dictionaries and encyclopedias).

Other requirements:

- ☐ At least one essay articulates the specific critical approach being applied
- ☐ Collectively the essays attend to text representing at least two literary genres
- ☐ At least 2 texts cited in the essays were written before 1700
- ☐ Collectively the essays must address texts from 3 different centuries (can’t be successive centuries).
- ☐ Student has provided pdfs of all Scholarly Articles cited in their essays.

**MA 3-Essay Comprehensive Exam Pilot Program
Admission Form**

Students who wish to enroll in the new 3-Essay Comprehensive Exam Pilot Program should start by discussing it with the faculty member they'd like to have chair their exam. If that faculty member is amenable, they should fill out this form and submit it to the MA GAR along with the materials indicated below.

Student Name: _____

Semester/Year for the Exam: _____

Proposed Chair: _____

Proposed Alternate Chair: _____

Proposed Committee Member: _____

Essay 1 Title: _____

If essay was submitted for a course in the MA program, provide the instructor's name.

Essay 2 Title: _____

If essay was submitted for a course in the MA program, provide the instructor's name.

Essay 3 Title: _____

If essay was submitted for a course in the MA program, provide the instructor's name.

Along with this form, I have provided:

- ☐ Drafts of the 3 essays I intend to revise and submit for the exam (including a "Works Cited" for each.)
- ☐ A list of all of their Works Cited (at least 15 texts) and 6 additional texts they'd like to include in their reading list, written in MLA format.

I understand that if my proposal is approved, I will be enrolled in this new pilot program and will be required to meet the requirements as specified. If I do not pass the exam, I will have opportunity to retake it with the option of moving out of the pilot program, however, I will have used up one of my two attempts.

Signed

Date

OFFICE USE:

APPROVED

Chair

Date

Alternate Chair/Member

Date

Committee Member

Date