

**SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY EDWARDSVILLE
DEPARTMENT OF SPEECH COMMUNICATION
COMPREHENSIVE MASTER'S EXAM STUDY GUIDE**

What is the Comprehensive Examination?

The comprehensive exam is a written and oral examination covering material common to all Master's degree candidates and material specific to the courses the candidate personally took in his or her *Program of Study*. Students electing the comprehensive exam exit option for their M. A. program must complete a written comprehensive examination. In addition, an oral defense of written answers before the candidate's graduate assessment committee is also required.

Who is Eligible?

To be eligible for the comprehensive exam, the candidate must have:

- Satisfactorily completed, or be scheduled to complete, the last course(s) listed on their program of study; and
- Obtained the approval of the Graduate Program Director and his or her Graduate Adviser.

When is the Examination Offered?

The comprehensive exam is offered once every fall and spring semester, divided across a morning and afternoon session. The exam is not offered during the summer sessions. The dates for the examination are announced by the middle of each term. Generally, the common or “core” portion of the written exam is administered in the morning session, and the specialized portion administered in the afternoon session. The dates for the candidate's oral defense are negotiated with the candidate's graduate assessment committee, and should occur within 1-2 weeks of the completion of the written exam.

What is the Content of the Comprehensive Exam?

The comprehensive exam is divided into two parts: The “Core” curriculum (3 hours) and the “Individual” curriculum (3 hours). The core, or first part of the exam, covers the core curriculum common to all candidates, and tests mastery of material in SPC 500 (Seminar in Communication Theories) and SPC 501 (Seminar in Communication Research Methods). The Graduate Program Director, in consultation with the graduate faculty, prepares the core portion of the exam for all candidates in any given semester. The individualized, or second part of the exam, covers content specific to each individual candidate's program of study, in areas negotiated by the student with the student's graduate assessment committee members, and typically reflects courses from the student's program of study, as well as specialized areas of candidate interest.

Who is Part of the Graduate Assessment Committee?

The candidate's graduate assessment committee performs the following functions:

- Generates questions for the individual portion of the candidate's exam;
- Reads and evaluates written answers on all questions;
- Convenes and conducts the oral examination; and
- Makes a determination of the candidate's success or failure in demonstrating mastery of the content of his or her program of study.

With few exceptions, the candidate may only request the participation of full-time, tenure-track faculty to serve as graduate assessment committee members. The committee must consist of at least three such faculty members. If a non-graduate faculty member serves on a graduate assessment committee, he or she may serve only as the fourth member on a committee with 3 tenure-track faculty members. One graduate assessment committee member may come from a department other than the Department of Speech Communication

What Are the Procedures Prior to the Comprehensive Exam?

Candidates are responsible for accomplishing the following steps prior to the exam:

- Contact the Graduate Program Director to indicate intent and readiness to take the comprehensive examination.
- Contact the graduate assessment committee in order to seek their consultation for preparation of and studying for the exam; and arrange a meeting time for the oral defense (no more than 2 weeks after the written exam).

What Type of Preparation is Necessary for Taking the Comprehensive Exam?

A good study strategy is to review course notes and all books and other materials read for courses the candidate has taken. Candidates are free to ask instructors for guidance in study strategies, particularly with regard to individualized questions. Instructors may point to areas for review, though the extent of specificity and guidance offered by individual faculty prior to the exam is up to the discretion and testing philosophy of committee members. Core questions may ask the candidate to explicate a theory or compare one theory to another, apply a theory to a specific "real world" situation, unravel a methodological problem, or describe the methodological procedures appropriate for a given research problem. Please note that core questions must be answered without the benefit of books or notes, but responses to individual questions may be guided by books and notes brought into the testing facility by the candidate. However, no electronic or on-line sources may be used.

What is the Process of Taking the Comprehensive Exam?

The comprehensive exam is a written test, taken in two parts over two sessions, typically on the 11th Friday of the Fall and Spring semesters at 8:00 AM and again that same day at 12:30 PM, followed by a one-hour oral defense on a third day to be determined. Exams are administered in a computer lab on campus. Students wishing to familiarize themselves with the computers and software in advance may do so with permission. At the end of the exam, candidate's answers are photocopied and distributed to the graduate assessment committee. The original is turned in to the Graduate Program Director. Candidates may also retain a copy of exam questions and answers to prepare for the oral defense. However, answers to the comprehensive exam questions are confidential. Candidates are expected not to share questions or answers with other students in the Department.

How Is Academic Integrity Assured?

The student is assumed to have read and understood and will fully abide by all SIUE policies and procedures regarding student conduct, test-taking, ethics, plagiarism, and grievances.

In the event that a student's written answers raise suspicions regarding academic integrity issues, all members of the graduate assessment committee are charged to meet to perform the following duties:

- Upon any member's suspicion of an academic integrity violation, that member shall notify the Department of Speech Communication's Graduate Program Director.
- Upon determining that an *a priori* case exists that a violation of academic integrity may have occurred, the Graduate Program Director will contact the student's remaining committee members, distribute copies of relevant materials, and convene a meeting for review.
- It is the responsibility of the committee to determine whether and what violations of academic integrity, if any, in fact occurred;
- It is the responsibility of the committee to document all violations as fully as possible for the student's file;
- It is the responsibility of the committee to meet with the student to postpone the exam defense indefinitely, present the case of academic integrity violation to the student, hear the student's response, and then meet in closed session to reach a decision outcome. The decision outcome may take any of several forms:
 1. Upon evidence of justification or faculty error, permit the student to schedule the oral defense of written exam;
 2. Give the student a conditional fail, identifying the conditions that must be fulfilled and the timeline for fulfillment of those conditions, including that the student is disallowed to redirect her or his program of study to the Thesis option;
 3. Give the student an unconditional fail, identifying the implications of that decision, including that the student is disallowed to redirect his or her program of study to the Thesis option;

4. Decide to, in addition, seek the probation and/or disqualification of that student in the academic program and/or university.
- If violations are determined to have occurred, they supersede any merits of the exam answers, and therefore there is no basis for oral defense of those answers.

What is the Oral Defense?

Candidates are encouraged to review their written answers extensively prior to oral defense. At the beginning of the oral defense, candidates are often provided an opportunity to add to or correct any points in their written answers. Candidates are urged to limit their opening or preliminary comments to no more than a few minutes. Committee members follow the student's opening comments with questions of their own. These follow-up questions can cover the range of theories and methods studied throughout the graduate program. Questions from the written exam that candidates elected **not** to answer are not included in the defense. There are a number of generic questions that candidates may be asked about communication research, trends, the candidate's personal and professional interests, and the overall quality and usefulness of the candidate's graduate education. There are generally no right or wrong responses to these types of questions. However, the graduate assessment committee expects candidates to communicate competently about such issues.

How is the Exam Evaluated?

The written portion of your exam will be independently evaluated by all members of your graduate assessment committee using the first six items on the scoring rubric attached to the end of this document, and scores will be averaged using the scale indicated on the bottom of the rubric. You must obtain at least a conditional pass to be scheduled for an oral defense. Your graduate assessment committee will use the last two items on the rubric to score your oral defense. This section will be scored by the group as a whole immediately after the completion of your oral exam, and these numerical scores are averaged in with your written exam scores to determine a final numerical score.

What Constitutes Passing or Failing the Exam?

There are 4 possible decisions that the graduate assessment committee may make, based on combined written responses and the oral defense. The committee signs a form specifying its decision for each candidate. The form is forwarded to the Graduate School through the Graduate Program Director.

- Unconditional pass—The candidate passed the exam without further need to demonstrate mastery of content.
- Conditional pass—The candidate demonstrates passing performance on some parts of the examination while not passing other parts of exam. The candidate has the option to demonstrate mastery of those sections not passed. At the graduate assessment committee's discretion, this may involve rewriting one or more answers from the written portion of the exam. Sometimes the committee will add

additional language to the original question, clarifying the committee's area of concern. At the discretion of the graduate assessment committee, the rewritten answer or answers are submitted to either the chair of the graduate assessment committee or the full committee by a deadline specified at the time of the oral defense. The graduate assessment committee Chair and/or committee reviews the rewritten answer(s) and makes a decision as to the candidate's mastery of the material. A second oral defense may also be required at the committee's discretion. On some occasions, the committee may direct the candidate to turn in substantial rewrites the following semester. Under such circumstances, the candidate must reapply for graduation the following semester.

- Conditional fail—The candidate did not demonstrate mastery of Program material, but the committee thinks the candidate should be given another chance to do so in a subsequent semester. At the graduate assessment committee's discretion, such candidates are directed to take additional coursework or individual directed studies prior to retaking all or part of the comprehensive examination the following semester.
- Unconditional fail—The candidate did not demonstrate mastery of program material and the committee does not see any basis for another attempt.

Candidates who conditionally or unconditionally fail the comprehensive exam may not reconstitute a new committee for the purpose of retaking the exam. A member or members of the original graduate assessment committee may be excused from the committee and a new member or members added only with the advance written permission of the graduate assessment committee member, the committee chair, and the Graduate Program Director.

Upon successful passage of all areas of the comprehensive exam, the recommendation of the committee is forwarded to the Graduate Program Director by the graduate assessment committee Chair. In turn, the Graduate Program Director forwards all necessary paperwork to the Graduate School.

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SAMPLE TEST

Part I Directions: You must receive (at a minimum) a grade of “pass” on (at a minimum) two of the four questions listed below. You may **NOT** use any books (except a dictionary), notes, or other resources to complete this portion of the exam. You have three hours to finish this portion of your exam. If using a blue book, please write neatly, use a separate booklet for each answer, indicate the number of the question to which you are responding, use only one side of each page, and put your last name and the page number in the top right corner of each page of your answer. If using a computer, please put a header on your exam that includes your last name and the page number, indicate the number of the question to which you are responding, and put a page break between each response. You must arrange for a one-hour meeting with your full committee during the next 2 weeks to defend your responses. We wish you well!

Sample Core Questions:

Theory:

Is there really any such thing as speech communication theory – or are the theories used in our discipline simply adaptations (to the contexts and relationships that we study) of work by theorists in psychology, sociology, anthropology, etc.? Write an essay in which you either demonstrate that there is such a thing as speech communication theory or in which you demonstrate that our theories are derived from concepts and models developed in other disciplines.

Methodology:

Imagine that you have just been awarded a relatively unrestricted grant for \$100,000. The money is yours to spend as you see fit, as long as it is used for a piece of field or laboratory research that would have the potential to make a significant contribution to our understanding of some aspect of human communication. On what sort of project would you spend the money? Provide an outline of the project that you would undertake. Include (1) a brief rationale for the project, (2) a statement of major research questions and/or hypotheses that it would address, (3) a clear and detailed statement of methods and procedures that would be used and (4) a forecast of the impact that the project might have if it were successful.

Part II Directions: You must receive (at a minimum) a grade of “pass” on (at a minimum) two of the four questions listed below. You **may** use any books, notes, or other resources necessary to complete this portion of the exam, **except** for on-line resources. You have three hours to finish this portion of your exam. If using a blue book, please write neatly, use a separate booklet for each answer, indicate the number of the question to which you are responding, use only one side of each page, and put your last name and the page number in the top right corner of each page of your answer. If using a computer, please put a header on your exam that includes your last name and the page number, indicate the number of the question to which you are responding, and put a page break between each response.

Sample Individual Question:

We note that you have taken classes in research methods (SPC 501 and PAPA 412 & 420), and also that you have taken a Sociology class in Inter-group Relations (SOC 502) and Speech Communication classes in Intercultural Communication (SPC 511) and Group Communication (SPC 510). Write an essay in which you reflect upon the role that research methodology has played in the sorts of things communication scholars have come to know about inter-group interactions. Do you feel that scholars have made sufficient use of the variety of methods available to them? Why or why not? What, if anything, would you do differently, and why?