

THE DEPARTMENT OF CURRICULUM, TEACHING AND LEARNING
Language and Literacies Education Graduate Program (LLE)
Comprehensive Exam Overview and FAQs

PURPOSE

The comprehensive examination is the gateway to the thesis journey. The purpose of the comprehensive exam is to demonstrate to program faculty that you are ready to design, conduct, and write up a doctoral thesis. “Being ready” assumes that:

- 1) You have a compelling research topic to pursue;
- 2) You understand how your topic relates to relevant extant literature and to language and literacies education broadly;
- 3) You understand different theoretical perspectives on your topic, that is, different theoretical perspectives for defining or understanding your topic *and* different theoretical perspectives on researching your topic; and
- 4) You are proficient in different approaches to research design, and understand the affordances and constraints different design options present.

These topics, theoretical perspectives and approaches to research are addressed from various perspectives in individual LLE courses. The examination process is intended to provide an opportunity to address them in a systematic and coherent manner. A further aim of the examination is to encourage the composition and writing of concise, well-argued statements about LLE. As a result of this experience, it is hoped, students will go on to graduate not only as specialists in their chosen areas but also as informed and participating members in the community constituted by inquiry, scholarship, and practices in the field of language and literacies education in Canada and internationally.

OVERVIEW AND PROCEDURES FOR PREPARING FOR THE EXAM

In consultation with your intended thesis supervisor, who will become the first reader on your comprehensive exam, you will determine when you are ready to write the exam. If you are a full-time PhD student you must successfully complete the comprehensive exam by the end of your 3rd year, and if you are a flex-time student you must complete your exam by the end of your 4th year, along with all other requirements to achieve candidacy.

When you are ready, you will complete the Comprehensive Examination Notice of Intention, which must be signed by both you and your intended supervisor. The form contains critical information on expectations concerning the roles, responsibilities and timelines (for full and flex-time students) for you and your intended supervisor/first reader on your comprehensive examination. A completed and signed

copy of the form is to be submitted to the LLE Program Assistant to officially initiate the comprehensive examination timeline. Students who have special accommodations must provide the Program Assistant and the Comprehensive Examination Committee (CEC) a copy of the accommodations letter at the time they hand in the Comprehensive Examination Notice of Intention.

The LLE Program Assistant will go over the exam process with you; will inform your intended supervisor that s/he has met with you and that the comprehensive examination process has been officially initiated; and will provide the CEC and your intended faculty supervisor with a signed copy of the form.

Once the comprehensive examination process has been initiated, you will have 3 months to complete the exam, at the end of which you must submit the completed comprehensive exam to the LLE Program Assistant. The LLE Program Assistant will then forward it to the first reader (your intended thesis supervisor) and to the CEC, which will assign a second reader for marking. First and second readers will have a specified period of time, outlined in the form that both you and your intended supervisor have signed, to evaluate the comprehensive examination. Their evaluations will be returned to the LLE Program Assistant for processing, and the results will be disseminated to you and to the CEC. In the event that Readers 1 and 2 disagree the CEC will assign a third reader.

There are three possible outcomes to the comprehensive examination: Pass, Revise and Fail. An examination which meets expectations will be graded as Pass, an examination which partially meets expectations will be graded as Revise and an examination which does not meet expectations will be graded as Fail. A rubric, which will be provided to you, will describe the three categories of Expectations Met, Expectations Partially Met, and Expectations Not Met.

EXPECTATIONS

In order to complete the comprehensive examination successfully, it is expected that you will have developed an extensive bibliography of academic literature applicable to your field of study and with which you are well acquainted. Based on this literature, write an essay in which you describe your research topic and why it is compelling and/or significant. Situate your topic in relevant literature and describe how your topic relates to and is important for some aspect(s) of language and literacies education. Identify different theoretical perspectives in the field for defining and/or researching your topic, and justify why one (or perhaps more than one) theoretical perspective is most appropriate. Provide a brief analysis of research designs that have been used to investigate topics similar to yours in this discussion, demonstrating your understanding of research design and the affordances and constraints associated with different methodological choices.

Your comprehensive exam should be 7,500 to 10,000 words, excluding references. Your essay may not exceed the 10,000 word limit. Your essay must be formatted according to APA guidelines (for formatting, in-text citations and referencing). You are also strongly encouraged to use headings and subheadings to organize your essay. The following link is a great online resource for APA format guidelines: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQS)

1. What is the difference between my comprehensive exam and my thesis proposal?

The comprehensive examination typically tests your breadth of knowledge of your subject area in order to determine your eligibility to continue your course of study and to ensure you are familiar enough with your area of research to make original contributions. In contrast, the thesis proposal is an emergent document, negotiated between you and your thesis committee, describing what will ultimately be your final doctoral thesis. The thesis proposal is the road map that will guide you as you work through and complete your thesis, and ultimately demonstrates to your supervisor and committee that you understand and are able to conduct independent research based on your chosen theoretical and methodological frameworks within specific and reasonable time-frames. It is a specific plan between you and your committee that is directly connected to the ethics review submission process. The comprehensive examination is the initial step in exploring your field of study, which will be expanded upon in the proposal, and will culminate in the development of your thesis/dissertation.

2. Do I have to address all the questions in one paper or may I write two?

You must respond in one paper, but we encourage you to use headings and subheadings to help organize your paper.

3. How much help/support can I expect from my intended supervisor before the 3-month comprehensive examination writing period?

Before the 3-month writing period commences, your intended supervisor may provide feedback related to questions about the following: the comprehensive examination process, literature you should consult, your research question(s), and general writing strategies. Your intended supervisor will not review or provide feedback on any parts of your draft, before or during the 3-month period. Once the 3-month writing period has been initiated you will no longer receive any feedback or assistance in writing your exam from your intended supervisor. While peer review of your draft essay is not strictly prohibited, it is expected that the paper you turn in is a single-authored essay and is representative of solely your ideas, research and writing.

4. When can I write my comprehensive exam?

Doctoral students normally take the comprehensive exam at the end of their coursework but not before completing 12 months in the program. Successful completion of the examination is a prerequisite for proceeding to the official formation of a thesis committee.

5. If I am ready, may I submit my comprehensive exam before the end of the 3-month period?

Yes. However, your readers have the discretion not to review your comprehensive exam until the date originally agreed upon.

6. What happens if I do not hand in my comprehensive examination within the 3-month time period?

Failure to hand in the comprehensive examination within the specified 3-month period will result in automatic failure of the exam.

7. What happens if I receive an “Expectations Partially Met” grade?

If you receive an Expectations Partially Met grade on your comprehensive examination you can re-initiate the comprehensive examination process as outlined by the Comprehensive Examination Committee. An Expectations Partially Met grade means that you did not fail the comprehensive examination but, based on the feedback from the readers, you will have to make significant revisions to the essay in order to pass.

In the event of receiving an “Expectations Partially Met” grade, you may meet once with your intended supervisor to review the feedback you received. You will have one month from the date of the letter from the CEC conveying your grade to turn in your revision. Your revised essay should address all of the feedback from the first exam. In addition, provide a separate summary or outline of how, why and in what ways you responded to and incorporated the feedback into your new essay. In grading your revised exam, the first and second readers will consider their original feedback, your revision, and the outline of how you responded to their original feedback. You can expect to receive your results on the revisions in approximately 2 weeks.

If you do not revise your examination within the 1-month period this would constitute a failure. If you fail the comprehensive exam you would then have one opportunity to reinitiate as explained in Question 8.

8. What happens if I receive a “Fail” grade?

“Expectations Not Met” grades constitute a failed comprehensive examination. Students who have failed the comprehensive examination must wait a minimum of 4 months after the 3-month exam period before they may re-initiate the comprehensive examination process. Failure to pass a second time will result in no longer being eligible to proceed in the program.

Before re-initiating the examination process, you may meet once with your intended supervisor (the first reader) to review the feedback you received on your failed exam.

9. Do I have a say in who the second reader will be?

No. The Comprehensive Examination Committee will assign the second reader to your comprehensive exam once you turn in your paper.

10. Will a rubric be used to evaluate my comprehensive examination?

Students will be provided with a copy of the rubric in order to have an understanding of how their exam will be evaluated. At the end of the rubric there is a section for faculty readers to provide extra feedback, should they wish/decide to do so. Some faculty readers may also choose to provide feedback by way of comments/track changes directly on your essay. As the first reader on your comprehensive examination is your intended supervisor, it is assumed that s/he will provide you with feedback that will be helpful before you re-take the exam (in the event of failure) or prepare your thesis proposal.

11. What happens if the person I want as my supervisor is not able or willing to work with me?

It is your responsibility to identify early which faculty member you intend to approach with a request to be your thesis supervisor, as this person will be the first reader for the comprehensive examination. It might be helpful to think of an alternative faculty member as a prospective supervisor in case the preferred faculty member is not available to work with you.

12. Will my intended supervisor (the first reader of my Comprehensive Examination) be my thesis supervisor after I have completed the exam?

The comprehensive examination is not a means to an end but rather serves as a critical component in transitioning from coursework into independent research and in the completion of a dissertation. As such, your intended thesis supervisor is intended to be not only the first reader of your comprehensive exam, but also your thesis supervisor.

Early in your program you should identify who you wish to invite to be your thesis supervisor. While it is often the case that your assigned faculty advisor will become your thesis supervisor, depending on the nature/direction of your research focus you may elect to be supervised by another faculty member. In such cases, it is your responsibility to communicate this intention to your faculty advisor, and an agreement should be put in place with the new intended supervisor before the end of the second year for full-time students and by the end of the third year for flex-time students.

13. What does it mean to make your research topic “relevant to some aspect(s) of Language and Literacy Education”?

The audience for your comprehensive examination is the LLE faculty. We are an intellectually diverse faculty. We do not expect you to connect your research topic to *everything* encompassed by language and literacies education. Rather, the exam asks you to demonstrate your knowledge of a specific topic and how you might go about researching it, but *also* to communicate your knowledge to a broader audience. This is similar to challenges that professors face: we have become experts in a specific area of inquiry, but also have to be able to communicate that expertise to broader audiences (e.g., we have to pitch research grant proposals that show we are experts in a specific area, but those grant applications are reviewed by committees of broader scholarly expertise). The first reader of your comprehensive exam will be your intended supervisor; he/she will have expertise in your research area. The second reader will be drawn from the entire LLE faculty so his/her area of expertise may be different from the one your exam focuses on; however, an effort will be made to choose a second reader whose area of research is not too removed from your research interests.

14. Since the authorship of our exam is known to the evaluator, what should I do if I have concerns with one or more faculty members being the second reader of my essay due to incompatibilities which could result in a potential bias?

Should you have concerns about who the second reader might be, you are advised to discuss it with your intended supervisor who will relay this information to the LLE Program Assistant. Your intended supervisor and program assistant will work with the CEC to ensure your paper is assigned appropriately and that this information is handled discreetly.



THE DEPARTMENT OF CURRICULUM, TEACHING AND LEARNING
Language and Literacies Education Graduate Program (LLE)
Comprehensive Examination Notice of Intention

STUDENT INFORMATION

Name: _____ Student ID: _____
Surname First Name Title

Address: _____
Street Address Apt. City Province Postal Code

Phone: (____) _____ E-mail: _____

Degree Program: (Ph.D.) (Ph.D. Flex) Session of Initial Enrolment (i.e., Fall 2015): _____

Current Year of Study: _____ Faculty Advisor: _____

Name of Intended Supervisor (First Reader): _____

Please check (✓) to indicate that, having read, you confirm the following statements:

- I understand that once a completed and signed copy of this notice of intention is submitted to the LLE Program Assistant, it will initiate the comprehensive examination process in the Language and Literacies Education Graduate program and will be due 3 months from the date submitted (i.e., Sept.1 – Dec.1, 2016).
- I have met with my intended supervisor (first reader) to discuss the LLE examination process, including the responsibilities, expectations and timelines for the completion of the exam.
- I have developed a bibliography of academic literature applicable to my area of study.
- I understand that my intended supervisor and the second reader will read and mark my final exam but *will not* be working with me or providing feedback during the comprehensive examination writing process.
- I have timed my exam to ensure I will have met the candidacy requirements by the appropriate deadlines (successful completion of the comprehensive exams by the end of Year 3 for full-time students and by the end of Year 4 for flex-time students).
- I understand that failure to hand in the completed comprehensive examination within 3 months of submitting my notice of intention will result in an automatic failure of the exam.
- I confirm that I am the sole author of this essay and have not employed assistance that would be deemed questionable.

EVALUATOR INFORMATION (TO BE COMPLETED BY INTENDED SUPERVISOR)

Please check (✓) to indicate that, having read, you confirm the following statements:

- I agree to be the intended supervisor and first reader for the comprehensive exam submitted by:
_____.
- I have explained the purpose, process and expectations of the exam and have provided clarification where necessary.
- I have provided oversight on the responsibilities, expectations and timelines of both the student and evaluators.

Intended Supervisor (PRINT NAME) Signature Date

TO BE COMPLETED BY LLE PROGRAM ASSISTANT

A completed and signed copy of this notice of intention was submitted on: _____

The completed exam must be sent electronically to the LLE program assistant by: _____

Exam results will be sent to the student by (3 weeks from the date of receipt): _____

By signing this form, I confirm that all information stated above is accurate and that I am ready to proceed with the LLE comprehensive examination.

Student (PRINT NAME) Signature Date

LLE Program Assistant (PRINT NAME) Signature Date

NAME OF SECOND READER (DETERMINED BY CEC) *COMPLETED AFTER THIS FORM IS SUBMITTED

2nd Reader (PRINT NAME) Signature Date

THE DEPARTMENT OF CURRICULUM, TEACHING AND LEARNING
 Language and Literacies Education Graduate Program (LLE)
 Comprehensive Exam Rubric

STUDENT NAME: _____

STUDENT NUMBER: _____

RUBRIC	Expectations Met (2)	Expectations Partially Met (1)	Expectations Not Met (0)
Topic coverage and adequacy of research	The chosen topic/concept is compelling. The paper shows understanding of how the topic relates to relevant extant literature and has a wealth of details that are treated thoroughly on the basis of a solid literature review. The paper is thus appropriately targeted, fully up to date and informative.	The chosen topic/concept is interesting, relevant and takes some account of the extant literature. The paper has some details that are treated with some depth. Although the paper is generally informative, the topic and related research is treated mainly at a surface level.	The chosen topic/concept is questionable. The paper lacks consideration of the extant literature. It does not have enough details and the topic is treated superficially. The paper is not informative or thought provoking.
Theoretical perspective and framework	The paper shows admirable understanding of the different theoretical perspectives for defining and researching the topic. The chosen theoretical framework is fully appropriate.	The paper shows an effort to present different theoretical perspectives for defining and researching the topic. However, the chosen theoretical framework is not the most appropriate for the research envisaged.	The paper shows little effort to take account of different theoretical perspectives and the theoretical framework chosen is clearly inadequate.
Research methodology	The paper shows proficient knowledge of different approaches to and options in research design. It demonstrates deep understanding of the chosen research methodology/ies and an appreciation of why each one (if more than one are addressed) is relevant to the research domain.	The paper shows general familiarity with different approaches to research design. It demonstrate acceptable understanding of the chosen research methodology and some understanding of its possible relevance to the research domain.	The paper does not demonstrate sufficient knowledge of different research approaches, or proper understanding of the chosen research methodology nor why it may be relevant to the research domain.
Organization, structure and clarity	The paper is very clear and very well-structured. There is virtually no section in the paper that causes ambiguity for the readers.	The paper has clarity and /or organization challenges that require occasional re-reading. It needs more explanations and clarifications from the writer in order to demystify several sections in the paper that are confusing to the readers.	The paper is not clear and leaves the reader puzzled and unable to comprehend the writer's message. It needs significant re-working to be stronger in clarity and structure.
Relevance for the field and personal reflection	The chosen topic/concept is relevant to the research field and to language and literacies education broadly. The paper demonstrates a high degree of relevant, personal reflection	The chosen topic has a certain relevance to language and literacies education. The paper shows initial personal reflection on the topic, and parts of the paper are relevant to research field.	The topic is only partly relevant to the field of language and literacies education. The paper is mainly descriptive and is void of personal reflection. The chosen topic/concept is not relevant to the research field.

Additional Feedback/Comments for Revision: