

Effective as of September 1, 2022

Language and Literacies Education (LLE) Comprehensive Exam

Approved on April 20, 2022

This version will apply to all students who began their doctoral program in Fall 2021 and afterwards. Students who began the program prior to Fall 2021 have the option of completing the pre-existing comprehensive format, or new version.

Program Context for the Comprehensive Exam

The LLE Comprehensive Exam is one of three required benchmarks students must meet in order to achieve candidacy. To be considered a doctoral candidate, PhD students must:

- successfully complete required coursework;
- receive a “pass” on Parts 1 and 2 of the LLE Comprehensive Exam; and
- form a doctoral thesis committee.

Full-time PhD Students

Per the School of Graduate Studies, full-time PhD students have three academic years in which to achieve candidacy. As such, they should write the comps exam *within two sessions* after completing required coursework. However, students are strongly encouraged to write the exam as close as possible to finishing their coursework, with approval from their advisor.

One example of a timeline to thesis work for *full-time students* starting in Fall 2024 would be:

- Complete coursework by December 2025;
- Initiate the Comprehensive Exam process in January 2026;
- Form a thesis committee and complete their thesis proposal by August 2026.

Flex-time PhD students

Flex-time PhD students have four academic years in which to achieve candidacy. Flex-time PhD students should write the comps exam *within three sessions* after completing courses. However, students are strongly encouraged to write the exam as close as possible to finishing their coursework, with approval from their advisor.

One example of a timeline to thesis work for *flex-time students* starting in Fall 2024 would be:

- Complete coursework by April 2026.
- Initiate the Comprehensive Exam process in May or September 2026
- Form a thesis committee and complete their thesis proposal by May 2027.

A Note on Advising

All doctoral students have been assigned an advisor to support them in achieving candidacy in the program. Students are encouraged to meet with their advisor early to determine when it makes the most sense to begin the exam process, while keeping in mind the stated deadlines. No student may begin the exam process without their advisor's approval.

Exam Purpose

The LLE Comprehensive Exam is a milestone in the doctoral student's development toward carrying out independent, original dissertation research. It serves as a mechanism that helps ensure the student is prepared to do so successfully. This two-part, written exam provides an opportunity for the student to demonstrate a *broad* understanding of various issues related to language and literacies education, as well as a *focused* understanding of a specific topic within language and literacies education, which is likely related to the research they will conduct for their dissertation study.

In each part of the LLE Comprehensive Exam, students must demonstrate preparedness in the following four dimensions:

- Synthesizing relevant literature.
 - This dimension focuses on the ability to critically review and synthesize a wide range of scholarly literature. Synthesizing relevant literature plays multiple roles in the research process. It helps researchers to: a) demonstrate the significance of a field of research and/or specific research questions; b) identify gaps in existing research, or new ways to approach accepted findings in the field; c) articulate theoretical ways of framing the field and/or a specific study; d) justify epistemological and methodological choices we make in research; and e) formulate and substantiate scholarly positions on debates in the field. The two parts of the LLE Comprehensive Exam are designed to allow students to demonstrate their ability to critically review and synthesize relevant literature in these ways.
- Theoretical frameworks in their field.
 - This dimension focuses on students' understanding of the meaning and significance of theory, and how theory informs how knowledge is generated and deemed to be warranted. An array of theoretical positions and traditions can help us define, frame, and conduct inquiry into language and literacies education. For example, past LLE theses have engaged theoretical frameworks rooted in sociocultural theory, complexity theory, cognitive approaches to language acquisition, Indigenous and/or Southern epistemologies, Afrofuturism, post-structuralism, feminist and queer theory, affect theory, and more. Importantly, students are *not* expected to know all of these traditions. Rather, students will demonstrate theoretical expertise by assessing the

potential strengths, weaknesses, and appropriateness of various theoretical positions using relevant literature.

- Research methods and modes of inquiry.
 - This dimension focuses on students' understanding of the relationship between the empirical and/or conceptual questions asked within language and literacies education and the range of research designs used to consider them. Notably, the phrase “range of designs” includes social science (i.e., quantitative, qualitative, post-qualitative) and humanities-oriented traditions of research. Therefore, akin to the intellectual diversity of theoretical frameworks, there are multiple research traditions that can support scholarly inquiry in language and literacies education. Doctoral students completing the LLE Comprehensive Exam should use relevant literature to assess the strengths, weaknesses, and appropriateness of diverse methods and modes of inquiry for given research questions and in alignment with guiding theoretical frameworks.

- Academic discourse appropriate for communicating scholarly research.
 - This dimension focuses on students' ability to produce scholarly work appropriate for knowledge mobilization in written form. Responses to each part of the LLE Comprehensive Exam should be organized, coherent, logically developed, and understandable. With that in mind, the LLE faculty are keenly aware of the tension inherent in naming “academic discourse.” There are consequential reasons scholars use their communicative practices to intentionally disrupt “standard” academic discourse and challenge ideological assumptions embedded in “appropriateness.” Part of conducting “independent, original dissertation research” (as articulated earlier as one of the purposes of this exam) is taking ownership of the kinds of discourse we use to communicate our inquiry and for what purposes.

Ultimately, the LLE Comprehensive Exam expects students to display the independence, problem-solving, and requisite writing skills that are crucial for successful completion of a doctoral degree.

Exam Structure

There are two parts to the exam:

- **Part 1: Individual Paper** – Students demonstrate their expertise in a specialist field, often related to their dissertation research; this paper is prepared in advance of completing Part 2 and *is not* a timed exam.
- **Part 2: Program Paper** – Students demonstrate their broad understanding of an area within language and literacies education; this paper is completed at a scheduled interval and *is* a timed exam.

We define each part in greater detail below.

Part 1: Individual Paper

All students respond to a single, standard prompt.

Part 1 Prompt

Select a specialist field related to language and literacies education. Identify a current debate or an explicit question within that field. Then, write a critical analysis of the issue(s), articulating your stance on the matter.

In your analysis, use relevant literature to consider: Why is this question important? What is at stake? Who are the key scholars and/or practitioners working on this question, and what are their positions? Finally, be sure that your discussion of this question addresses theoretical, empirical, and methodological considerations.

Format

Part 1 should be no longer than **5,000 words** (excluding references). The paper should also include **5 keywords** that indicate the topics addressed in the paper. The paper should be formatted according to the most recent APA style guidelines. Students may wish to visit the [Purdue OWL website](#) to view a sample APA paper, should they have formatting questions.

Timing

Part 1 is *not* a timed exam. It is due two weeks before students begin Part 2 of the LLE Comprehensive Exam process. Students should work on Part 1 well ahead of this deadline, and organize their writing and submission of Part 1 in accordance with the schedule for Part 2 of the exam process (see the table below with key dates).

Advisor Guidance and Approval — Initiating Part 1 of the Exam

In advance of writing Part 1, students must meet with their advisor. During the meeting, students provide their advisor with information about the general topic they anticipate writing about for Part 1 of the exam. Students should provide a 250-word abstract to discuss at this meeting.

Following this meeting, the student will fill out [this “notice of intent” form](#). The form will be automatically forwarded to the advisor for their signature. This form, and the accompanying signature from the advisor, documents that the student a) has an approved Part 1 topic, and b) may begin writing Part 1, and c) that the student is committing to writing Part 2 of the exam *within the same session*. This form must be completed, signed and submitted by the first day of classes for either winter or summer session (see table below with key dates).

Beyond receiving this initial feedback from their advisor, students must complete Part 1 of the exam on their own, without additional developmental or editorial support. That is to say, neither advisors nor anyone else can review or offer feedback on outlines or drafts of the paper. Moreover, students may not seek feedback or assistance from other outlets (such as a writing consultant). However, they may choose to use writing-based support platforms such

as Grammarly or HemingwayApp in addition to review functions included with typical word processors.

Part 2: Program Paper

Part 2 of the Comprehensive Exam consists of six prompts created by the Comps Committee. Students choose one of these prompts to respond to in Part 2 of the exam.

Part 2 Prompts

The six prompts will represent diverse topics within language and literacies education. At least two prompts will focus more specifically on issues related to language education, and at least two will focus more specifically on literacies education. These prompts will be released at 9 AM ET on the first day of Part 2 of the exam (see table below with key dates). Students are encouraged to review each question closely before making a final determination about which one they will address in their exam. Please note: To ensure equity, six new prompts will be offered for each administration of Part 2.

Format

Part 2 should be no longer than **3,000 words** (excluding references). The paper should be formatted according to the most recent APA style guidelines. Students may wish to visit the [Purdue OWL website](#) to view a sample APA paper, should they have questions related to formatting.

Feedback Before and During the Exam

Students must complete Part 2 on their own, without developmental or editorial support from other sources. Neither advisors, peers, nor anyone else may offer feedback on: a) prompt selection, b) readings to cite, or c) writing. Students may not seek feedback or assistance from other outlets (such as a writing consultant), but they may choose to use writing-based support platforms such as Grammarly or HemingwayApp in addition to review functions included with typical word processors.

Timing

Part 2 of the exam is offered twice each academic year. When students initiate the Part 1 process as described above, they are also committing to writing Part 2 of the exam *within the same session*. Please see the table below with more exact details on times and dates.

Students must submit Part 1 of the exam no later than 5pm Eastern time two weeks before the Part 2: Program Paper begins. Students who do not submit by this deadline will not be permitted to complete Part 2 of the exam.

Once Part 2 of the exam begins, full-time PhD students will have 14 days to complete their Part 2 paper, whereas Flex-time PhD students will have 28 days to do so.

Comps Exam Registration Deadline Full-time & Flex-time PhD Students	Part 1: Individual Paper Submission for Full-time & Flex-time PhD Students	Part 2: Program Paper Exam Start Date for Full-time & Flex-time PhD Students	Part 2: Program Paper Submission for Full-time PhD Students Deadline	Part 2: Program Paper Submission for Flex-time PhD Students Deadline
1st Monday of the winter session classes in January, 5pm ET	3rd Monday of February, 5pm ET	1st Monday in March, 9am ET	Monday, 14 days after, 5pm ET	Monday, 28 days after, 5pm ET
1st Monday of intersession classes in May, 5pm ET	3rd Monday of June, 5pm ET	1st Monday* in July, 9am ET	Monday*, 14 days after, 5pm ET	Monday*, 28 days after, 5pm ET
Additional information about examinee actions related to the dates above				
By this deadline, examinees will have met with their advisor to complete & submit this notice of intent form .	By this deadline, examinees will submit Part 1: Individual Paper via a Quercus dropbox; be sure to include 5 keywords as well.	On this date, examinees will gain access to Part 2: Program Paper prompts via Quercus.	By the deadline, <u>Full-Time</u> examinees will submit Part 2: Program Paper via a Quercus dropbox.	By the deadline, <u>Flex-Time</u> examinees will submit Part 2: Program Paper via a Quercus dropbox.

**Depending on when Canada Day falls in a given year, Part 2 might begin on the first Tuesday of July*

Please note that we will provide students with an updated version of this table each academic year with the exact dates for that year. For the purposes of this overview, however, we have left these more general references to timing and deadlines.

Exam Procedures & Policies

This section reviews much of the information already provided above, but organizes it more chronologically and includes important details of the forms and platforms used for the LLE Comprehensive Exam. Also included here are important exam policies.

The first step is for students to meet with their advisor to talk about the exam process, review a 250-word abstract about the intended Part 1 paper, and to gain the advisor’s approval to begin the exam process. Once the meeting is over and the advisor has agreed that the student is ready for the comps exam and approves of the topic for the Part 1 paper, the student should fill out [this “notice of intent” form](#). The form will automatically be forwarded to the advisor to get their signature indicating approval.

Once this form has been submitted and approved by the student’s advisor, students will receive an email to register themselves in the Quercus space for the “LLE Comprehensive Examination.”

The rest of the exam process is administered within this Quercus space.

- Students will submit their Part 1 paper to the relevant Quercus assignment space.
- Students will gain access to the Part 2 prompts in this space.
- Students will submit their Part 2 papers to the relevant Quercus assignment in this space.

Students should not include their names in any part of either Part 1 or 2 papers, including the cover page. The LLE program administrator will remove student names before the evaluation process begins.

Language of the Exam

Exams may be written in English or French. Students should indicate on [the “notice of intent form”](#) which language they will use to write Parts 1 & 2 of the exam.

Annual Orientation

Each year, the Comps Committee will organize a meeting for students who intend to write the exam in the following year. The Comps Committee will provide an overview presentation of the description of the LLE Comprehensive Exam and address any questions or concerns students have as they prepare to write the exam.

Accommodations

Students who are registered with Accessibility Services should contact the LLE program administrator and chair of the Comps Committee to discuss which accommodations may be appropriate to complete either part of the exam.

Should students experience an emergency during either part of the Comps process (e.g., serious medical emergency or death in the family) and provide the appropriate documentation, the Comps Committee will accommodate the student on a case-by-case basis.

Academic Integrity

The standard university expectations regarding plagiarism apply to the LLE Comprehensive Exam. Additionally, because Part 1 of the LLE Comprehensive Exam is written before the timed Part 2 begins, it is important to stress that *students must turn in original work for both parts of the exam*. We understand that students will have developed their thinking about their specialist areas and their broad understanding of LLE through coursework, including final course papers and other kinds of academic writing. However, students are not allowed to turn in entire papers written for other courses or other purposes. Self-plagiarism is a reason for failing the exam.

Exam Audience and Evaluation

As they write, students should consider their audience. Two LLE faculty members will evaluate each part of the exam. Likely, only one of the two faculty readers will have expertise about the area addressed in the exam. The Comps Committee will also endeavour to include

the student's advisor in at least one part of the evaluation process. However, because of workload issues, research and other kinds of leave, etc. this cannot always be guaranteed. Thus, students should write each part of the exam to be detailed enough for an expert, while making it accessible enough for any LLE faculty member to review.

The evaluation process is masked in both directions. This means faculty readers will not see the author names of the papers they are evaluating, and students will not see the names of the faculty readers.

Faculty readers will evaluate the exam using a rubric. Because Parts 1 and 2 have different goals, there are different rubrics for each part. The rubrics are included at the end of this document. A third reader will offer an evaluation should the two readers disagree in their assessment.

Exam Results

Students will be notified of their exam results individually via email by the Program Administrator. Students may receive one of three exam results: Pass, Revise and Resubmit, or Fail. If a student receives a pass they must have their advisor complete and submit the [Comprehensive Requirement Completion Form](#) on their behalf.

- To receive a **Pass**, *both* Parts 1 and 2 must be evaluated as Expectations Met.
- To receive a **Revise and Resubmit**
 - *At least one part* has received Expectations Partially Met, and/or Expectations Not Met;
 - The revision would then focus on the part(s) that was(were) not evaluated as Expectations Met.
- To receive a **Fail**, *both* Parts 1 and 2 have been evaluated as Expectations Not Met.

Results will be reported to the student approximately three weeks after the final submission deadline, unless a third evaluation is required.

If the result is **Revise and Resubmit**, then a member of the Comps Committee will offer feedback to the student about revisions. The revision of whichever part(s) were unsuccessful must be completed by full-time PhD students within 30 days, and by flex-time PhD students within 45 days from having received feedback from the Comps Committee member.

If the result is **Fail**, there is no revision process. However, the student will be allowed *one additional opportunity* to write a new exam (meaning, writing both Parts 1 & 2 again). The student should consult with their advisor to determine when it is most appropriate to write the exam again, keeping in mind the general 3- and 4-year deadlines for achieving candidacy for full- and flex-time students, respectively. If the second exam is also given a fail, the student will be recommended for dismissal from the LLE Program. For more detailed information on SGS policy regarding good academic progress, please click [here](#), and for more detailed information on SGS policy on termination of registration in a program for unsatisfactory academic progress, please click [here](#).

RUBRIC FOR PART 1: INDIVIDUAL PAPER

	Expectations Met	Expectations Partially Met	Expectations Not Met
Stance & purpose	The stance of the paper is clear, focused, and relevant. The stance taken in the paper has nuance and sophistication. The purpose of the paper is clearly consistent throughout.	The stance of the paper is clear and/or relevant. The stance taken in the paper has some nuance; it is neither simplistic nor naïve. The purpose of the paper is mostly consistent throughout.	The stance of the paper is not clear and/or relevant. The stance taken in the paper lacks nuance; it is simplistic or naïve. The purpose of the paper is not consistent throughout.
Response to Prompt	The paper addresses every aspect of the prompt. It demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of the issues posed by the prompt.	The paper addresses the major points of the prompt. The paper generally demonstrates understanding of the issues posed by the prompt.	The paper does not respond to the prompt, or does not address all aspects of the prompt. The paper misses the point of the prompt.
Topic Significance & Effectiveness of the Argument	The topic is compelling. It shows understanding of how the topic relates to the field. It provides compelling evidence, reasoning, and support for claims. Citations are drawn from appropriate literature and used effectively. Reasoning is consistently sound throughout. The paper addresses a range of counter-arguments effectively, and/or engages effectively with alternate ways of thinking.	The topic is interesting. It shows some understanding of how the topic relates to the field. It provides some appropriate evidence, reasoning, and/or support for claims. Citations are drawn from appropriate literature and used somewhat effectively. Reasoning is generally sound. The paper anticipates at least one counter-argument and addresses it, and/or shows evidence of some consideration of alternate ways of thinking.	The topic is questionable. It does not provide appropriate evidence, reasoning, or support for claims. Citations are taken out of context or used ineffectively. Reasoning is flawed with overgeneralizations, oversimplifications, and/or fallacies. The argument appeals only to those who already agree (“preaches to the choir”), and/or does not show evidence of consideration of alternate ways of thinking.
Theoretical perspective & framing	The paper shows thorough understanding of the selected theoretical perspective for defining and researching the topic. The theoretical framework chosen to inform the paper’s stance is fully defined and appropriate.	The paper shows some understanding of the selected theoretical perspective for defining and researching the topic. However, the chosen theoretical framework is not the most appropriate for the research envisaged and/or is not fully defined.	The paper shows little to no understanding of the selected theoretical perspective. The theoretical framework chosen is clearly inadequate and/or is poorly defined.
Research methodology	The paper shows proficient knowledge of an approach to research design. It demonstrates deep understanding of relevant research methodology/ies and an articulation of relevance to the selected topic.	The paper shows general knowledge of an approach to research design. It demonstrates acceptable understanding of relevant research methodology/ies and some understanding of its possible relevance to the selected topic.	The paper shows little to no knowledge of an approach to research design. It does not demonstrate understanding of relevant research methodology/ies and/or an understanding of relevance to the selected topic.
Clarity of Writing	The writing communicates clearly and elegantly. The writing not only communicates effectively, but also demonstrates sophisticated literacy with precise vocabulary, literary devices, and organizational structure.	The writing communicates effectively. The writing (grammar, word choice, organization) facilitates communication and comprehensibility. Readers can follow the flow of the paper.	Parts of the paper are incomprehensible. Features of the composition (grammar, word choice, organization) interfere with communicative effectiveness. Readers do not always understand what the paper means.

Additional feedback/comments (required if evaluated as Revise and Resubmit or Fail)

RUBRIC FOR PART 2: PROGRAM PAPER

	Expectations Met	Expectations Partially Met	Expectations Not Met
Stance & Purpose	The stance of the paper is clear, focused, and relevant. The stance taken in the paper has nuance and sophistication. The purpose of the paper is clearly consistent throughout.	The stance of the paper is clear and/or relevant. The stance taken in the paper has some nuance; it is neither simplistic nor naïve. The purpose of the paper is mostly consistent throughout.	The stance of the paper is not clear and/or relevant. The stance taken in the paper lacks nuance; it is simplistic or naïve. The purpose of the paper is not consistent throughout.
Response to Question	The paper addresses every aspect of the question. It demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of the issues posed by the question.	The paper addresses the major points of the question. The paper generally demonstrates understanding of the issues posed by the question.	The paper does not respond to the question, or does not address all aspects of the question. The paper misses the point of the question.
Effectiveness of the Argument	The paper provides compelling evidence, reasoning, and support for claims. Citations are drawn from appropriate literature and used effectively. Reasoning is consistently sound throughout. The paper addresses a range of counter-arguments effectively, and/or engages effectively with alternate ways of thinking.	The paper provides appropriate evidence, reasoning, and/or support for claims. Citations are drawn from appropriate literature and used effectively. Reasoning is generally sound. The paper anticipates at least one counter-argument and addresses it, and/or shows evidence of some consideration of alternate ways of thinking.	The paper does not provide appropriate evidence, reasoning, or support for claims. Citations are taken out of context or used ineffectively. Reasoning is flawed with overgeneralizations, oversimplifications, and/or fallacies. The argument appeals only to those who already agree (“preaches to the choir”), and/or does not show evidence of consideration of alternate ways of thinking.
Clarity of Writing	The writing communicates clearly and elegantly. The writing not only communicates effectively, but also demonstrates sophisticated literacy with precise vocabulary, literary devices, and organizational structure.	The writing communicates effectively. The writing (grammar, word choice, organization) facilitates communication and comprehensibility. Readers can follow the flow of the paper.	Parts of the paper are incomprehensible. Some features of the composition (grammar, word choice, organization) interfere with communicative effectiveness. Some features of the composition (grammar, word choice, organization) interfere with communicative effectiveness. Readers do not always understand what the paper means.

Additional feedback/comments if evaluated as Revise and Resubmit: