

PhD (Science) Comprehensive Examination Timeline Form and General Instructions

PURPOSE

The comprehensive examination serves as a learning opportunity and is a key milestone in determining whether the Candidate has developed the necessary background, knowledge and academic competencies required to successfully continue their studies.

TIMING

The comprehensive examination process normally begins during the Candidate's third term of study. The written examination will normally take three months (i.e., one month per question). The oral examination is to occur within two weeks of submission of the final question. Candidates normally complete their comprehensive examination within the first 18 months of study towards their PhD degree.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Chair

- Attend all meetings of the Examination Committee
- Submit signed Timeline Form to Graduate Assistant immediately following initial meeting
- Ensure Examiners' questions are submitted on time and that they follow stipulated criteria
- Confer with the Supervisor to ensure that exam questions do not overlap
- Moderate queries while the Candidate is writing the exam
- Chair oral examination, ensuring the exam follows the stipulated process
- Secure required signatures at the end of the oral examination
- Arrange a subsequent meeting of the Examination Committee, in whole or in part, to adjudicate remedial work as required
- Submit completed and signed Report of the Examining Committee and Decision to the SKHS Graduate Assistant following the oral examination

Supervisor

- Attend all meetings of the Examination Committee
- Invite Examiners and a Chair to sit on the Committee
- Arrange the time and location of initial meeting
- Ensure the student has adequate time to write the comprehensive exam
- Confer with the Chair to ensure that exam questions do not overlap
- Adhere to the responsibilities of Examiners laid out below
- Required to read all 3 exam questions and all 3 exam answers

Examiners

- Attend all meetings of the Examination Committee
- Create questions and reading lists in consultation with Supervisor and the Candidate; and submit them in accordance with established deadlines
- Read all 3 questions and all 3 answers but need only to prepare to ask questions about their own question for the oral exam
- Submit a written report on the response to the Examiner's own question only at least five (5) working days prior to the oral examination.
- Participate in the oral examination including: 1) asking the Candidate questions primarily about the written response to the Examiner's own question; and 2) reaching consensus or voting on verdict for each question
- Assess any follow up work as required

Candidates

- Attend all meetings of the Examination Committee
- Consult with Supervisor and Examiners about questions where applicable
- Submit all written responses on time and in accordance with criteria laid out in Section B
- Answer questions in the oral examination
- Complete follow-up work where applicable

Graduate Assistant

- Assist Chair in overseeing examination timeframe
- Send reminder email to Examiners 5 working days before their questions are due
- Distribute questions to Candidate
- Adjudicate written answers to ensure they meet formatting criteria
- Distribute each written answer to all Examiners, and copy Chair, as received, complete with report instructions and due date
- Distribute all 3 questions and 3 answers to all Examiners five working days prior to the oral exam
- Oversee paperwork and signatures
- Submit final results to School of Graduate Studies
- File copies in Candidate's SKHS graduate file

Graduate Coordinator

- Support and advise Chair, Supervisor, Candidate and Graduate Assistant when necessary
- Adjudicate appeals where applicable

PROCESS

A. Prior to the Commencement of Written Answers

1. The comprehensive examination process normally occurs during the PhD Candidate's **third term of study**. The expectation is that the Candidate will complete the comprehensive examination within the first 18 months of their enrollment in the doctoral program.
2. **The Supervisor** must convene a meeting of all members of the Examination Committee, which consists of three Examiners (one of whom must be the Supervisor) and a fourth member who will serve as Chair, **15 working days** prior to the submission of examination questions (see 4). Attendance via skype/zoom is permitted.
3. In instances where Candidates are co-supervised, only one Supervisor will be responsible for establishing the Examination Committee and arranging the initial meeting. For the examination itself, Co-supervisors may either a) create a joint question and reading list for the Candidate and share the question period in the oral examination; or b) decide that only one Supervisor will participate in the Examination Committee. In instances where Option b) is chosen, the non-active Supervisor may attend the oral examination as an observer but may not participate in the proceedings.
4. At the initial organizing meeting, the Examination Committee and the Candidate, must:
 - a) Review the examination process to ensure that the Candidate and Examiners understand the process and their individual responsibilities;
 - b) Identify the three topic areas from the following possible areas. No more than one question from a single area may be included in the three distinct questions identified for that student: i) General

background (mandatory); ii) Current developments; iii) Current controversies; iv) Methodological issues; v) Theoretical issues. The Candidate's examination must be made up of three distinct questions that fall under three separate topic areas.

c) Complete the Timeline Form and return it to the SKHS Graduate Assistant.

5. Each Examiner will submit **one question and an initial reading list** in electronic form to the Chair for approval **no less than 10 working days prior** to the commencement of the written examination. The Chair to confer with the Examiners to ensure that questions do not overlap. The Graduate Assistant to send an email reminder to the Examiners 5 working days prior to the question are due.
6. If revisions to any of the questions and/or reading lists are required, **final approved versions** must be submitted to the Chair **no less than 5 working days** prior to the commencement of the first question.
7. Chair to provide Graduate Assistant with electronic versions of the 3 approved questions and reading lists.
8. Upon receipt of the 3 approved questions and reading lists, Graduate Assistant to obtain Chair's signature of approval to begin the examination and distribute a PDF version of the Timeline document to the Chair, all Examiners, the Candidate, and provide a copy to SGS. The Graduate Assistant will use the original Timeline document and the PhD Comprehensive Examination Steps and Check List to administer the exam.
9. The initial reading list consists of ~10 journal articles, or several book chapters, or a book and is **intended as an excellent starting point** from which the Candidate develops their answer. **Additional reading may be required**, with up to ~20 or so references cited in the answer.
10. The Candidate may consult with members of the Examination Committee **prior** to the commencement of the written examination to establish the scope of the examination questions.

B. The Written Examination and Time Line

1. **The written exam occurs over a 3-month period with a maximum of 15 working days per question.** The Candidate submits the final answer in MS Word format 9:00 am on the 16th working day. There is a minimum of 5 working days between each question. The break period may be shorter or longer to accommodate the Candidate's schedule.
2. Once the written examination has begun the Candidate will direct any queries regarding an examination question to the Chair. The Chair may confer with the Examiner as required.
3. It is expected that the Candidate will work on their Comprehensive Examination answer at least **on a half-time basis during regular working days.**
4. At 9:00 am on the morning of the start date for Question 1 **the Candidate** to email the Graduate Assistant to **request their first question and reading list.** The question and reading list are provided via email in PDF format.
5. The Candidate submits their completed response in MS Word format via email to the SKHS Graduate Assistant **by 9:00 am of the finish date noted for that question.** A one-week break normally occurs between questions. The process is repeated for Questions 2 and 3.

6. Once the written examination has begun, the Candidate will direct queries about the question to the Chair. The Chair may confer with the examiner as required.
7. During the course of the examination the Candidate **may discuss the comprehensive examination with their peers**. However, they are NOT permitted to have anyone read any part of their answer (e.g. proof read or receive feedback on written answer content).
8. The written answer for a question **may not exceed 20 pages** excluding figures, tables and references. Pages in excess of this limit will not be forwarded to the Examiner for marking. All pages exceeding the 20-page limit will be removed from the Candidate's response by the Graduate Assistant before being forwarded to the Examiner for grading. There is no process for resubmitting an answer that exceeds the 20-page limit. Figure captions are intended to match guidelines for a typical journal article in that discipline area. Figures and tables should appear following the reference list, not within the answer text. The document should be formatted with 1.5 line spacing, 12-point font, 1 inch/2.54 cm margins. The Candidate will **submit their written answers electronically to the Graduate Assistant upon completion in MS Word format**.
9. **Within one week of receipt of the written response**, the Graduate Assistant will verify that the response meets formatting criteria and forward the answer, along with the question, in PDF format for marking, to all three Examiners, with a note indicating that only the Examiner for that question is required to perform marking, but all three Examiners are required to read the answer.
10. If the Candidate wishes to attend a conference, experiences a significant illness that prevents them from working, or has some other event scheduled during their examination period that requires them to discontinue work on a question, they may request, in writing, an **extension of time** equivalent to the time lost to complete that question. The Chair will confer with the Supervisor and Examiners to confirm permission for the time extension. The Examination Committee will confer with the Candidate to **reschedule the remaining questions and/or oral examination** as required. New dates will be provided to the Graduate Assistant who will update the Timeline Form accordingly.

C. The Oral Examination

1. **The oral examination** takes place **by no later than the second week following submission of the final written response**. Candidates may request that the oral examination take place in the third week, but no later, following submission of their final question.
2. **No less than one week prior to the oral examination** each Examiner must send a brief e-mail report similar in format to a thesis examination report, to the Chair indicating whether the written response to that Examiner's question is satisfactory or unsatisfactory, and briefly summarize its strengths and weaknesses.
3. Evaluation **will not include judgment of whether a particular reference or references are used** but will be based on the quality and depth of the written response.
4. Candidates will always proceed to the oral examination following evaluation of their three written answers, regardless of the quality of those written responses.
5. The Candidate to bring printed copies of their written responses to the oral examination.
6. The Graduate Assistant will distribute copies, in PDF format (the Chair will also receive the hard copy of each question and answer) of all three Examiners' questions and all three Candidate's written responses

that form the comprehensive examination to all members of the **Examination Committee no less than 5 working days prior to the oral examination.**

7. The Candidate should bring copies of their written answers to the oral examination.
8. Before questioning commences, the Chair will excuse the Candidate and the Committee will discuss any questions or problems related to the answers. This is especially important if one Examiner has rated a question unsatisfactory.
9. The oral examination consists **of two rounds of twenty minutes per Examiner** and will **usually take no more than 2 hours**. If any written answer is considered unsatisfactory the Examiner responsible may take more time to question the Candidate. The Chair will not examine Candidates directly but will moderate the questioning and record the nature of the questions asked by the Examiners.
10. Normally, the order of questioning **will begin with the background question** unless the Candidate chooses to start with a different question.
11. **Examiner's questions must concern the Candidate's written answer.** Any ideas expressed in the written answer, or ideas that could be expected to have been included in the written answer, may be explored during questioning.
12. Following the two rounds of questions, the Chair will excuse the Candidate in order that the Examination Committee may confer on the results.

D. Decision

1. All decisions of the Examination Committee are to be made by consensus where possible. If consensus is not achieved in a reasonable time, a vote may be taken. The Chair does not vote.
2. Following the oral examination, a verdict of "Pass with no revisions required"; "Pass with revisions required"; "Pass with satisfactory completion of remedial work"; or "Redo Question with a mandatory oral defense to be attended by the entire Examination Committee" is provided for each question. All Examiners and the Chair must sign the PhD Comprehensive Examination Report of the Examining Committee. The Examining Committee identifies who will oversee and approve any remedial or revisions required.

If a Candidate obtains a "Pass with no revisions required" verdict for all three questions, they have successfully completed the Comprehensive Examination process. The Chair and the Examiners then sign the PhD Comprehensive Examination Decision Sheet and submit it, and all other comprehensive examination documentation, to the SKHS Graduate Assistant for recording and filing.

2. **For questions where the verdict is "Pass with revisions required"** the Examination Committee will identify revisions required to improve the Candidate to a "Pass with no revisions required" level. These revisions will be listed on pages 1 and 2 of the PhD Comprehensive Examination Report of the Examining Committee. The Committee will identify who will review and provide final authorization on approval of the revisions required and the submission date.
3. **For questions where the verdict is "Pass with satisfactory completion of remedial work"** the Examination Committee will identify supplemental work designed to improve weaknesses of the Candidate to a "Pass with no revisions required" level. These requirements will be listed on pages 1 and 2 of the PhD Comprehensive Examination Report of the Examining Committee. The Committee will identify who will review and provide final authorization on approval of the remedial work and the accompanying submission date. Remedial work may include taking a course; presenting a lecture; or

other tasks or combined tasks as assigned by the Examining Committee. An additional oral examination on a Pass with satisfactory completion of remedial work is at the discretion of the Examining Committee.

The Candidate normally has three months from the time of the oral exam to complete remedial work.

The relevant Examiner provide their verdict for that question after this process. The verdict is either "Pass with no Revisions Required" or "Fail".

Where an Examiner has participated via telephone or other electronic method, they may confer their signing authority to the Chair via email to the Graduate Assistant.

Upon completion of the remedial work, the Chair and the Examiners then sign the PhD Comprehensive Examination Decision Sheet and submit it to the SKHS Graduate Assistant for recording and filing.

4. **For questions where the verdict is "Redo Question with a mandatory oral defense to be attended by the entire Examining Committee"**, the Examination Committee will provide feedback to the Candidate. The Candidate has three months from the time of the oral examination to prepare a new answer to the original question. The work is evaluated by all members of the Examination Committee, and, a mandatory oral defense for that question is held with the entire Examination Committee. After this process, the Examination Committee provides a verdict for that question of either "Pass with no revisions required" or "Fail, required to withdraw from program" on a consensus basis or, failing that, a voting decision of two out of three Examiners is required.

Where an Examiner has participated via telephone or other electronic method, they may confer their signing authority to the Chair via email to the Graduate Assistant.

Upon completion of the "Redo Question with a mandatory oral defense to be attended by the entire Examining Committee", the Chair and the Examiners then sign the PhD Comprehensive Examination Decision Sheet and submit it to the SKHS Graduate Assistant for recording and filing.

5. Where a final decision on a "Redo Question with a mandatory oral defense to be attended by the entire Examination Committee" cannot be agreed upon, an External Expert may be engaged to review the material and assist the Committee in rendering a final decision on that question. To identify an External Expert, the Examination Committee must submit the names of three arms-length researchers to the SKHS Graduate Coordinator who will pick one and arrange for them to join the Examination Committee's deliberations.
6. A Candidate must receive a "Pass with no revisions required" verdict on all three questions in order to continue in the program. If all three questions do not have a "Pass with no revisions required" verdict after Steps 1-5 above, the Candidate will be required to withdraw from the program immediately.
7. The Chair will execute the Decision Sheet after it has been signed by all Examiners (and the External Expert where required).
8. The Graduate Assistant to file a copy of the PhD Comprehensive Examination Decision Sheet in the Candidate's file and forward the original to SGS for recording.

E. Appeals

1. If the Candidate wishes to appeal the outcome of the examination on procedural and/or academic grounds, the appeal must be lodged formally with the SKHS Graduate Coordinator. In instances where the Graduate Coordinator served on the Examination Committee, the SKHS Director shall hear the first

appeal. In instances where both the Director and Graduate Coordinator served on the Examination Committee, a member of the Graduate Subcommittee will hear the first appeal.

2. The Candidate must provide in writing the reasons why they believe the academic decision was undeserved and/or identify where proper procedures were not followed. This should be done as early as possible after the decision is announced and normally not more than 10 working days thereafter.
3. If the matter is not resolved by the Graduate Coordinator or their substitute, and the Candidate continues to believe that the decision was undeserved, a formal request may be lodged for a review of the appeal by the SKHS Graduate Subcommittee (faculty members only), less any faculty members who were among the three examiners on the Examination Committee. Substitutions may be made in this instance in order to ensure that the committee includes three faculty members.
4. After reviewing the appeal, including interviewing the student and the members of the Examination Committee and the External Expert when applicable, the Graduate Subcommittee may find that:
 - (i) The decision is academically and procedurally sound (a procedural review should be conducted even in cases where the appeal is on academic grounds).
 - (ii) An error in procedure or academic judgment has been made. In this case the Graduate Committee will proceed to find a solution.
5. If the Director and Graduate Subcommittee find that the decision of the Examination Committee was academically and procedurally sound and recommend to the appropriate Arts and Science Graduate Council that the Candidate be required to withdraw, the Candidate may appeal the recommendation for withdrawal by following the procedures outlined in Section 8.9(c) of the Graduate School Calendar.
6. The appeal may be based not on academic or procedural matters, but on a Grievance. In this case, the Director will recommend to the student that they directly address the Senate Statement on Grievance, Discipline and Related Matters and the University's Grievance and Appeal Procedures.

This Form to be read in conjunction with the SKHS PhD Comprehensive Examination Report of the Examining Committee and the SKHS PhD Comprehensive Examination Decision Sheet.