Example: Feedback Comprehensive Examination Failure –Theory and Methods

This exam shows minimal mastery of sociology expected at the master’s level. The response to the first question on theory is inadequate for an advanced level Masters student and does not meet the most minimal expectations. The comments are general underdeveloped and overly simplistic. The same is true for the second question over macro and micro approaches. Ms. Student would be wise to avoid citing [Dictionary.com](https://mail.shsu.edu/owa/redir.aspx?C=XhG1BaJDBUqdjcc5qb7-6NHd7qaOIdEIYKpPYTxPH4gKffGNQOecTa-Wpb1RGgOajLaEszat6I8.&URL=http%3a%2f%2fDictionary.com) in her future academic writing.

As for the methods questions, large portions are unclear and not well developed. Unfortunately, I recommend a failing grade with the opportunity to try again another semester.

Essay 1: Student offers a **very** limited discussion of the theories of Marx, Durkheim, and Weber. This is a comprehensive exam and responses should reflect the depth of understanding that an advanced Master’s student should possess. At the very minimum, the essay should be grounded in the original texts of the theorists and essential secondary texts of sociologists who have evaluated their work. Student proposes and individualistic interpretation of Durkheim. This interpretation is not in line with Durkheim’s reasoning (e.g. the concept of social facts). Marx and Weber are central in early theorizing of social stratification. The student does not demonstrate that she understands this. Specifically, Marx’s theory of class and class formation is only briefly discussed and at times inaccurate. Further, Weber’s status hierarchy class theory is fundamental to contemporary analyses of stratification. Again, his ideas regarding stratification are only briefly discussed. The student should recognize that since this is a comprehensive, take-home, “open-book” exam, the breadth of her responses should far exceed one page of written work for one question. This response would not earn a passing grade in an undergraduate social theory course.

Essay 2:

 [Dictionary.com](https://mail.shsu.edu/owa/redir.aspx?C=8vPKnnWTBkmpt_kcUipiUdAjrbNsINEIs836Tr4O7sPSRiCLbMahY3PjLUko2l6BkoP-Cx2q3rg.&URL=http%3a%2f%2fDictionary.com) is not an appropriate academic source for advanced Masters students. This essay does not demonstrate that the student has an understanding of the epistemological issues regarding the macro/micro division in social theory and the discipline as a whole. The provided response only offers a pedestrian understanding of the discourse and theoretical debate between these two camps. At the very minimum, the student should extensively ground their answer to the question in theoretical sociological literature. Like the response to the first essay, this response lacks breadth and the student should recognize that this is a comprehensive, take-home, “open-book,” exam. Any response should reflect a student’s intensive engagement with the academic literature germane to the topic.

Her theory question #1

* Marx, Weber, and Durkheim are not contemporary theorists but classical.
* Your understanding of Marx, Weber, and Durkheim is not sufficient.
* You cannot use a quote to make your point.  For example, on the page 1, you cut and pasted a long quote by Breen & Rottman 1995: 27). If you want to use a quote, first of all you need to make your own argument.  Then, use a quote to back up your argument.  You cannot just plug in somebody's work in a form of quote and present it as your own argument in an academic work.
* Your answer needs to be much more developed and elaborated.  As of now, it reads as a statement, and not analysis.
* In an academic work, you cannot use "I believe…" or "I don't believe."  What you need to write is not your own opinion on theories/social phenomena.  It is irrelevant.

Her theory question #2

* Again, her answer is not fully developed and insufficient. For example, you cannot simply cut and paste the definition of macro- or micro-sociology from [dictionary.com](https://mail.shsu.edu/owa/redir.aspx?C=XhG1BaJDBUqdjcc5qb7-6NHd7qaOIdEIYKpPYTxPH4gKffGNQOecTa-Wpb1RGgOajLaEszat6I8.&URL=http%3a%2f%2fdictionary.com) in the comprehensive exams.

Essay 3:

 [Dictionary.com](https://mail.shsu.edu/owa/redir.aspx?C=8vPKnnWTBkmpt_kcUipiUdAjrbNsINEIs836Tr4O7sPSRiCLbMahY3PjLUko2l6BkoP-Cx2q3rg.&URL=http%3a%2f%2fDictionary.com) is not an appropriate academic source for advanced Masters students. There are multiple problems with this response. Below are a number of noted mistakes and deficiencies in this response:

-Student wants to find out if there are “any correlations.” This statement does not indicate that the student understands what a correlation is. Any correlations between what?

-Student attempts to equate quality of life with amount of time socially interacting. This is a fatal problem with this response. The multiple problems include the following: First, has anyone else used this as a measure? If so, who, and with what results? Second, there are **many** logical problems with using this as a measure. What about students who think that have a high quality of life but do not interact with others? Third, the student builds this measure based on many flawed assumptions such as “socially interacting with others is known to be a pleasant experience,” and “social organizations, extra-curricular activities, and time spent with friends. These are behaviors most likely to occur during college…”. Show me research that supports these tenable assertions.

-Student does not differentiate between race and ethnicity as measures.

-No analysis plan is provided. E.g. regression.

-Student is unclear about the differences between student’s SES, student’s income, and parent’s SES. When operationalizing the concepts. Indeed, the student is never clear which variable is being used.

-Student proposes “stratified random sampling” but doesn’t justify it in a clear manner. The student simply states “Gender, SES, and classification are exclusive categories, which it the primary reason that the sample has to be stratified.” This just doesn’t make sense and indicates to me that the student does not understand what stratified random sampling is, and when it should be used. Further, what is the sampling frame? Are students going to be sampled every year, once in year 1, then tracked? There is no clear sampling plan in place here. How have other researchers sampled this target population of college students?

-This student needs to take the short time required and search Google scholar with the words “measuring quality of life.”

-Ground your proposal in the existing literature on the topic.