

ENGLISH MA WRITTEN COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION

EVALUATION RUBRIC

The English MA comprehensive examination is offered three times annually, on the third Saturdays of February, June, and October, respectively. Students choose three comprehensive areas in literature, language, and writing disciplines and prepare from reading lists, posted on line.

On the day of the examination, the student is given three questions for each area. He or she selects one question for response and has two hours to address the question.

The examination uses a double-blind grading system, in which both the candidates who sit for the exam and the faculty readers are anonymous: Two graduate faculty members read each exam and award it a Pass, Fail, or High Pass, according to its merits or deficiencies. In the case of a dispute between the two primary readers, the essay goes to a third graduate faculty member who has no knowledge of the previous results; his or her evaluation of the essay breaks the tie.

Readers judge the essay according to the following rubric:

(A) PASS

A grade of Pass is awarded to an essay that

- (1) demonstrates competent graduate-level knowledge of the works, facts, and broad cultural and aesthetic developments and theory defining the area;
- (2) directly answers the question addressed;
- (3) adequately defends a carefully considered argument;
- (4) is able to synthesize materials competently within broad theoretical contexts;
- (5) strikes a good balance between levels of generalization and specificity; and
- (6) is purposefully organized and written clearly and correctly in an idiom befitting graduate-level expression in English.

(B) FAIL

A grade of Fail is given to an essay that

- (1) fails to address the question;
- (2) fails to demonstrate competent graduate-level knowledge of the works, facts, and broad cultural and aesthetic developments and theory defining or informing the area;
- (3) fails to develop an argument in response to the question;
- (4) is incoherent or ill-organized; and

(5) is fraught with construction, grammar, and usage problems. A student who fails an area or areas is allowed one opportunity to retake the examination in the failed section(s).

(C) HIGH PASS

A grade of High Pass is awarded to an essay that

- (1) demonstrates exceptional knowledge of the works, facts, and broad cultural and aesthetic developments and theory defining or informing the area;
- (2) demonstrates an understanding of the subject beyond narrow disciplinary boundaries;
- (3) is able to make a significant and sophisticated argument about the subject within carefully defined theoretical contexts; and
- (4) is organized purposefully and uses a critical idiom that is sophisticated, crystal clear, and nearly flawless.

For samples of examination essays awarded Pass, Fail, and High Pass, please see other attachments to this indicator.