

Department of Anthropology | Stanford University**Department of Anthropology Best Practice Reference, Doctoral Qualifying Examination in the Third-year**

Graduate Handbook Reference <https://web.stanford.edu/dept/anthropology/cgi-bin/web/?q=system/files/GraduateHandbook.pdf>

The purpose of the qualifying exam is to test and ascertain that the student has full command of the relevant literature pertaining to his/her chosen field of study. The field of study covered in the bibliographies is always more broadly defined than the field of study that has need outlined in a dissertation proposal.

All the components of the qualifying exam process are the joint responsibility of the student and the faculty members confirmed on the Qualifying Examination committee.

A systematic preparation involving all members of the Qualifying Examination committees as early as possible holds the key to a successful and intellectually enriching examination process.

The Qualifying Examination process includes the following five components:

1. Bibliographies

Each student should prepare two bibliographies – one on AREA and one on TOPIC. Each of the bibliographies should include approximately 100 titles – book and/or articles. The exact number of titles on the list should depend on whether these are whole books or shorter articles. Each of the bibliographies should have subheadings organizing the content – three to five subheadings is advisable.

The preparation of the bibliographies, including discussion of exact area and topic content, begins early in the second year of the degree program (or before) *in close collaboration with the advisors and members of the area and topic Qualifying Examination committees*. Students identify the Qualifying Examination advisors in the Winter quarter of the second year (Area and Topic Advisors); and, Qualifying Examination members in the Autumn quarter of the third year (Area and Topic Members).

2. Literature review – how to prepare for the exam

The safest way to pass the qualifying exam is to prepare early and well by discussing the selected texts with members of the committee. After a year of gradual preparation of the kind detailed below, each student will have an archive of notes and précis that will be immensely helpful in writing the Qualifying Examinations.

The most successful and proven method to review and understand the selected literature is the following:

- Schedule regular (bi-weekly) meetings with members of your Area and Topic committees. This should begin in the second year of the degree program. Enroll in ANTHRO 451. Directed Individual Study under the section of the Committee advisor for Area with 9 units and S/NC grading option; and, in ANTHRO 451. Directed Individual Study under the section of the Committee advisor for Topic with 9 units and S/NC grading option. In preparation for each meeting, the student should select a cluster of related texts (four to six) from the bibliography and write a two-three pages succinct summary and discussion of the texts (i.e. write on what has been discussed, how the texts are situated in relations to one another, etc.). This sort of preparation enables the student to read and digest the texts early, and to become familiar with the brief and précis-style of writing that is expected for the Qualifying Examinations.

3. Setting the Qualifying Examination questions

As students prepare and read for the Qualifying Examinations, it is suggested that the student take an active role in identifying areas and themes from which to base the development of examination questions. It is important to identify these areas and themes for discussion with Qualifying Examination Committee members well ahead of Winter quarter of the third year of the degree program.

The actual Qualifying Examination questions should NOT be framed by the student *but always by the Qualifying Examination Advisors for Area and Topic*. *It is ultimately the responsibility of the Qualifying Examination Committee advisor to make ensure that appropriate questions have been approved by the committee and submitted for the student's scheduled before the date and time of the written part of the Qualifying Examination.*

Each of the Qualifying Examination questions should be broad enough to allow the student to demonstrate mastery of a wider literature, and precise enough to be answered meaningfully in an essay of approximately 8-9 pages (i.e. approximately 400 words per page).

There should be a minimum of five questions confirmed for Area and five for Topic. The student must answer at least three questions in each category.

4. The Written Component of the Qualifying Examination

A written Qualifying Examination is an essay that either addresses a contradiction, tension, and/or paradox within a body of literature *and/or* traces the permutations and continuities of certain frames and themes in a given body of literature.

The style and economy of presentation for a Qualifying Examination should be akin to that of a (good) Annual Review article that present and discuss various positions while developing an argument of its own. In addition, the style should be precise and should demonstrate an ability to summarize large and complex arguments succinctly; an ability to situate various works in relation to one another; an ability to develop a clear and reasoned argument, and an ability to situate theoretical and conceptual positions within a larger field of debate as it has developed over time and in different geographical and historical contexts.

5. The Oral Component of the Qualifying Examination

The written Area and Topic essays, inclusive of the questions, answers and bibliographies should be sent to the Qualifying Examination Committee member(s) one day ahead of the scheduled Qualifying Examination.

In the quarter in which the student has scheduled the Oral component of the Qualifying Examination (usually the Spring quarter of the third year), the student should enroll in ANTHRO 401. Qualifying Examination under the section of the Dissertation Reading Committee advisor for 10 units and S/NC grading option.

- The Oral component of the Qualifying Examinations should be scheduled over a minimum of 90 minute period of time.
- The exam should begin with a 10-15 minute presentation by the student on central themes arising from the exam answers.
- Following the presentation, the committee discusses the examinations and the associated bibliographies with the student: suggested 30 minute discussion for Area and 30 minute discussion for Topic. Students may be asked to clarify and expand on arguments made in the written examinations and/or explain the specific arguments of various authors. There are three golden rules for a successful process: (a) Make sure to answer the questions that are posed; (b) be prepared to discuss authors and perspectives from the bibliographies that may not be included in the written component of the Qualifying Examinations; and, (c) be as precise and brief as possible to make the most of the discussion.
- Following the discussion, the student is excused and the committee discusses the Qualifying Examination as a whole and decides to approve, or not approve, the student's written and oral performance.
- Following the committee's discussion, the committee members invite the student back in and communicates the result(s) to the student. If the Qualifying Examination is not approved, the committee members will present recommendations for improvement and a suggested time frame for revision and resubmission of the written Qualifying Examinations directly to the student. Alternatively, the comments and required revisions can be relayed to the student by the Advisor.
- A student can revise the written Qualifying Examinations and reschedule the oral Qualifying Examinations a maximum of three times. However, the third instance must be complete (i.e. written Qualifying Examinations submitted and meeting successfully completed) by the end of Autumn quarter of the fourth year.