

**CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY
DOMINGUEZ HILLS**

**M. A. IN ENGLISH
COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION
PREPARATION GUIDE**

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INTRODUCTION

Beginning in Fall Semester, 2006, the M.A. in English program at CSUDH will require, as a culminating experience, a Comprehensive Examination. The thesis will remain a possibility for qualifying students. (See “The Basics,” below, as well as the link to the Graduate Student’s Handbook on the English Department webpage, and Catalogue for details).

We have designed our examination to reflect the concerns of our program, and to allow students to demonstrate in a variety of ways the abilities specified in the California Education Code (Title 5), which governs CSU M.A. programs. Title 5 specifies the following about a comprehensive examination:

A comprehensive examination is an assessment of the student’s ability to integrate the knowledge of the area, show critical and independent thinking, and demonstrate mastery of the subject matter. The results of the examination provide evidence of independent thinking, appropriate organization, critical analysis, and accuracy of documentation.

This booklet provides information about the examination, including reading lists and sample questions for each of the three parts. The Graduate Coordinator can answer questions you may have after you have reviewed the material in this booklet. See below for contact information for the Graduate Coordinator.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Office of the Graduate Coordinator:
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THE BASICS

When You Take the Examination	No earlier than last semester of program coursework; you must declare your intention to take the examination – by signing up in the English Department Office - at least one semester before taking it.
Continuous Enrollment	You must be enrolled in, at a minimum, English 600 during the semester you take the examination.
Structure of the Examination	The examination consists of three parts: Part I: In Depth analysis of Set Texts Part II: Comprehensive historical knowledge Part III: Literary Theory or Composition & Rhetoric Theory
Exam Schedule	Part I will be written on a Tuesday of the 12 or 13 week of the Fall semester and of the Spring semester. It will last 2 ½ hours. Parts II & III will be written on the Thursday of the same Week. 2 hours will be given to each of these two parts . The exam schedule for Fall semester, along with that exam’s set texts, will be emailed to all who have signed up for the exam by July 15 for the Fall exam, and to those who have signed up for the Spring semester exam by December 15.
What to Bring	You may bring your copy of the specified edition of your selected Set Text for Part I. You may also bring a non-electronic dictionary. Nothing else will be permitted besides your Blue Books. Blue Books and a dictionary are all that you may bring to Parts II & III. They are not open book exams. The Reading Lists will be supplied.
Reading the Examination	Members of the English Department will read the exam.
Grading Scale	Pass/Fail; See rubric on page 9. Results will be announced approximately 3 weeks after the completion of the examination.
Repeat of Examination	The examination cannot be taken more than twice, and re-takes must be done within one academic year. If you fail one part of the examination and pass the others, you need only re-take the part(s) you failed.
Reading Lists	A slightly different list will be released every three years. The Reading List you receive when you enter the Program, in Fall 2006, for example, will remain the same in most respects until Fall 2009 when a somewhat amended list will be handed out. However,

you should re-check the list for the semester in which you plan to take the exam for any changes. Set Texts (Part I) change each semester.

- Accommodation: If you require an accommodation, be sure to visit the Disabled Student Services (DSS) office in Welch Hall for a qualifying interview, well in advance of the exam.
- Thesis Option Requires 3.75 GPA, available faculty and the permission of the Graduate Coordinator for students admitted to the program beginning in Fall 2006.
- Changing from One Option To another You may change from the Thesis Option to the Examination Option up to one semester prior to taking the exam. Once you have attempted the examination, you may not change to the Thesis Option. If you take the exam and fail, you cannot revert to the Thesis; if you fail the exam a second time, you will not receive your degree.

PREPARING FOR THE COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION

Reading this booklet is the first step in preparing for the Comprehensive Examination. Make sure you understand the nature of each of these parts, and if you have questions contact the Graduate Coordinator.

The exam questions posed on the entire exam - on Parts I and II and III - will ask you to make connections among the ideas presented in all your coursework. As you work through your M.A. program – from the first semester onwards - think about the ways in which the concepts of one course relate to those of another, and of how the texts on the reading list help amplify in some way those concepts. In the words of E.M. Forster, “only connect.” Pursuing your studies in this manner throughout your program – and not just in a final rush of intensive studying in the last semester – will prepare you to do well on the exam.

An excellent way to prepare, in addition to your own private study, is through collaborative study groups. Talking with others about the ideas of the various areas covered in our program (see catalogue areas B, C, D, and E), about the set texts and the texts on the reading list, is an excellent way to heighten understanding and to gain facility with the discourses and concepts of the discipline generally. Your responses on the exams must, however, be completed independently.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS AND READING LISTS

PART I: (In Depth Analysis of Set Texts). In this part of the examination, students will choose to write about ONE among the three given set texts, two of which will be literary texts and one of which will be a Composition/Rhetoric text. Because this part of the exam assesses the student's own skills to analyze a text in terms of both formal concerns and outside critical sources, texts used in graduate seminars in the three years preceding the exam will be excluded as set texts.

You will be asked to employ critical perspectives, and the critical information from specified casebook editions or the sources included along with the Set Text for Rhetoric/Composition needs to be appropriately documented. (MLA) For the purposes of this exam, we are identifying the Norton Critical Edition as the specified editions for both literary texts. You may bring your copy of the set text into the exam with you. (MLA).

Sample Set Texts for Examination:

1. William Shakespeare, *I Henry IV*
2. Gertrude Stein, *Three Lives*
3. James Berlin, *Rhetoric and Reality: Writing Instruction in American Colleges, 1900 - 1985*

Specified Editions:

Shakespeare (3rd Edition) and Stein (1st Edition), Norton Critical Editions.

Begin by selecting one of these set texts and the accompanying critical materials in the Norton Critical Editions listed above or, in the case of Rhet/Comp, the assigned critical materials..

Depending upon the set text and the questions posed, the examination may require that you demonstrate some or all of the following:

- an ability to interpret the text and perform a close textual analysis
- an ability to situate the work in the author's canon or career
- an awareness of the social and historical context of the work
- familiarity with the text's critical history (for example, critical controversies or debates that have arisen in connection with the work)

For you to achieve this level of preparation, we recommend reading a range of critical works about the set texts, including some criticism focused on close textual analysis, drawing upon the research skills you have developed through your coursework. Do not limit your reading only to recent criticism; develop a sense of the critical response to the

work over time. The ancillary critical material provided for the Rhet/Comp set text and the specified casebook editions of the literary set texts should be sufficient.

Sample Question: William Shakespeare, *I Henry IV*

I Henry IV is in many ways a play about performance. Many of its characters find themselves – or choose to find themselves – playing roles in the course of this historical drama. Identify what seem to you the most significant instances of characters enacting “performances” in the play. Then discuss the ways in which these enactments contribute to the acquisition of power, the shaping of identity and relationships, and the construction of a social or political order. Draw on those materials in the Norton edition that seem most relevant to your discussion.

Select One: 2 ½ Hours

Sample Question: Gertrude Stein, *Three Lives*

Making use of at least three sources in the Norton Edition, write an essay that compares differing critical responses to the Melanctha section’s treatment of race, ethnicity, and class; include some remarks on the same issues in the two other Lives.

Sample Question: James Berlin, *Rhetoric and Reality: Writing Instruction in American Colleges, 1900 – 1985*

In this work, James Berlin identifies three trends in composition between 1960 and 1975: objective rhetoric, subjective rhetoric, and transactional rhetoric. What are the major characteristics of each of these three approaches? Does Berlin seem to favor any one of the three? Why or why not? Be specific. In your opinion, how could any one of these three trends be used in a composition class today? What would its characteristics be?

PART II: (Comprehensive historical knowledge). In this part of the exam, you should demonstrate your ability to make connections between texts across periods and to explain those connections in terms of genre and/or historical and cultural factors. Two questions will be given, and you will answer ONE. Your answer should draw upon three writers from the reading list, at least one from before 1800, and at least one from after 1800.

Select ONE – 2 Hours

Sample Questions:

- 1. From its earliest beginnings narrative fiction has reflected an inherent tension between its non-realistic manipulations of reality and the desire to capture the actual world in fiction. Select THREE writers from the list – at least one from before 1800 and at least one from after 1800 –and discuss the attitude toward “realism” demonstrated in their writing. You may choose to**

- focus on treatment of character, place, or structure, voice, narrative strategies, or on a more general discussion of the works.**
- 2. The desire for power appears in a number of works on the reading list. Analyze how characters seek mastery and control, or perhaps fail to achieve mastery and control, in any THREE of the texts. Select at least one from the list that is pre 1800 and at least one that is post-1800. Explain the different treatment of this theme in terms of genre and/or historical social factors.**

PART III: (Literary Theory or Composition & Rhetoric Theory). This part of the exam tests students' familiarity with and understanding of critical theories of and about literature or rhetoric/composition and their ability to analyze those theories' assumptions and apply them to literary texts.

Select ONE. Two hours

Sample Questions

- 1. Using three essays by three different authors from the Theory reading list , trace how each critic constructs a theoretical framework in which gender, race, class, sexuality, or national identity serves as a key principle and discuss how each of these frameworks can be used as a critical lens for reading literary texts.**
- 2. Throughout Western history, rhetoric and philosophy have intersected and clashed at many points. Nowhere is this more apparent than in epistemology, the study of the nature of knowledge or how we know what we know. Because language names the world, words, their origins, and their functions are crucial elements in this discussion. Compare and contrast the views on the nature of language of three rhetorical theorists from the list, at least one of whom must be a classical writer. How do these theorists depict language, specifically speech and writing. Do their views clash? How do these beliefs pertain to rhetoric? Besides defining what each thinker means by his/her terms, you will need to discuss the theorists' world views: What does each writer believe about mind-world-language relationships?**

HOLISTIC GRADING SCALE FOR ESSAYS
MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH COMPREHENSIVE EXAM

6 Superior

This essay synthesizes material learned and skills developed during the Master's program. It demonstrates an accurate understanding of themes and principles covered in the readings and lectures and shows an honest grappling with issues, exploring them thoughtfully and in depth throughout. Responses are well developed and well organized, and they are thoroughly and persuasively argued. The essay displays a superior control of language and is written with no errors in English. Many references to relevant sources are included, and standard essay format is used.

5 Strong

This essay synthesizes material learned during the Master's program; however, in some cases this may not be even throughout the essay. It demonstrates an accurate understanding of themes and principles covered in the readings and lectures, and it conducts some in-depth exploration of significant issues. It is generally well organized and well developed with quite a few references to relevant sources included, and displays considerable syntactic variety and facility and displays few errors.

4 Adequate

This essay minimally synthesizes materials learned during the Master's program. It generally demonstrates an accurate understanding of themes and issues covered in the readings and lectures, it provides an adequate analysis of the problem(s) posed, and there is a minimal attempt to grapple with significant issues. Responses are complete with all questions answered with adequate support, using several references to relevant sources. The wording is precise and accurate, and it displays competence in mechanics, usage and sentence structure.

3 (No Pass) Marginal

This essay reflects a barely complete understanding of themes and issues covered in the readings and lectures. Discussion often appears simplistic because there is little or no attempt to grapple with significant issues or to provide adequate support for ideas. It demonstrates some understanding of the problem, but is flawed in some significant way. Its analysis is weak, it displays some confusions about the meaning and/or technique of the text(s) in question, it is poorly organized or developed, it fails to provide adequate or appropriate details to support the argument, it avoids syntactic variety and displays errors

in mechanics, usage and sentence structure. Any of all of these weaknesses will flaw this essay.

2 (No Pass) Inadequate

This essay reflects an inadequate understanding of themes and principles covered in the readings and lectures. One or more serious gaps in knowledge are apparent. Discussion is inadequate and superficial because of avoidance of certain questions or lack of adequate support or elaboration. It is seriously flawed and reveals one or more of the following weaknesses: it displays significant confusion about the issues involved, it neglects important elements in the argument, it is poorly organized and developed, and it displays numerous errors.

1 (No Pass) Incompetent

This essay reflects a weak understanding of themes and principles covered in the readings and lectures. Many serious gaps in knowledge are apparent. Discussion is weak because of deviations from the stated topic or lack of support or elaboration. It reveals one or more of the following weaknesses: it suggests an inability to comprehend the text(s) in question or to respond meaningfully to the required tasks, it is unfocused, illogical, incoherent, or disorganized, it is undeveloped and has serious and persistent errors in writing.

M.A. PROGRAM IN ENGLISH
 COMPREHENSIVE EXAM READING LIST
 2006

PRE 1800 - BRITISH

Medieval:

Beowulf
 Chaucer, from *The Canterbury Tales*: (General Prologue, Knight's Tale, Miller's Tale,
 Clerk's Tale, Pardoner's Tale, Man of Law's Tale, and Tale of Sir Thopas
Sir Gawain and the Green Knight
 Marie de France (Lanval, Bisclavet)
Everyman

Early Modern:

Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, *King Lear*
 Milton, *Paradise Lost*
 Donne, "Holy Sonnets 10, 13, 18"; "Goodfriday 1613.Riding Westward"; "The
 Flea"; "The Sun Rising"; "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning"
 Marlowe, *Dr. Faustus*

Late 17th – 18th

Behn, *Oroonoko*
 Wycherly, *The Country Wife*
 Pope, *Rape of the Lock*
 Goldsmith, *The Vicar of Wakefield*
 Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*; Introduction, Chapters 1
 & 2.
 Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*

POST 1800 - BRITISH

Early 19th - Romantic:

Austen, *Emma*
 Wordsworth, "Simon Lee, "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey,"
 and Books 1, 10, 13, 14 of *The Prelude* (1850 ed.)
 Keats, "Ode to a Nightingale," "Ode on Melancholy," and "Ode on a Grecian
 Urn," "La Belle Dame sans Merci," "When I have fears that I may cease
 to be," "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer"
 Byron, the Dedication and Cantos 1, 2, and 11 from *Don Juan*
 Mary Robinson, "January, 1795" and "London's Summer Morning"

Victorian:

Tennyson, "Ulysses," "Break, Break, Break," and "Locksley Hall"
 Bronte, *Wuthering Heights*
 Eliot, *Middlemarch*
 Robert Browning, "My Last Duchess"; "Fra Lippo Lippi"; "Porphyria's Lover"
 Mill, "Subjection of Women," Chapter 1

Modern:

Joyce, either *Ulysses* or *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*; "Araby" and
 "The Dead" from *Dubliners*
 Conrad, either *Lord Jim* or *Heart of Darkness*
 Mansfield, "The Garden Party," "Daughters of the Late Colonel," "Bliss"
 Woolf, either *Mrs. Dalloway* or *To the Lighthouse*
 Yeats, "Easter, 1916," "The Second Coming," "Sailing to Byzantium,"
 "Byzantium"
 Hardy, "Hap," "Neutral Tones," "The Darkling Thrush"

PRE – 1800 AMERICAN

Franklin, *Autobiography*
 Paul Radin, Either *The Trickster* or Mary Rowlandson's *Captivity and
 Restoration*
 Equiano, *Interesting Narrative of the Life of Gustavas Vassa, The African*

POST 1800 AMERICAN

19th Century

Melville, "Bartleby the Scrivener" and either "Benito Cereno" or *Moby Dick*
 Whitman, "Song of Myself," "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed"
 Dickinson, #s 49, 67, 199, 216, 241, 303, 754
 Hawthorne, "Young Goodman Brown," "My Kinsman, Major Molineux"
 Douglas, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*

20th Century

Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*
 Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*; "Barn Burning"
 Morrison, *Beloved*
 Paredes, *With His Pistol in His Hand*
 Cervantes, from *Emplumada*: "Emplumada," "Freeway 280," "Poem for the
 Young White Man Who Asked Me How I, an Intelligent, Well-Read
 Person Could Believe in the War Between Races," "Poema para los
 Californios Muertos," "Cannery Town in August"

James, either *Washington Square* or *Turn of the Screw*
 Eliot, *The Waste Land*

RHETORIC & COMPOSITION

Readings in *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present*, 2nd edition, ed. Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg (Boston and New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2001)

Gorgias, "Encomium of Helen"
 Plato, *Gorgias* and *Phaedrus*
 Aristotle, *Rhetoric*
 Erasmus, *Copia*
 Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense"
 Burke, Kenneth. From *A Grammar of Motives* and from *A Rhetoric of Motives*
 Foucault, from *The Order of Discourse*
 Gates, from *The Signifying Monkey*
 Fish, "Rhetoric"

THEORY

Selections from *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* or Richter's *The Critical Tradition* (2nd or 3rd editions) or *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, Rivkin and Ryan eds.

Aristotle, *Poetics*
 Augustine
 Sidney, "The Defense of Poetry"
 Johnson, "The Rambler #4"
 Wordsworth, Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, 2nd ed.
 Cleanth Brooks, "The Formalist Critics"
 Freud, from *The Interpretation of Dreams*
 Said, "Austen and Empire"
 Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination"
 Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I," "The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious"
 Foucault, "The Subject and Power," from *The Order of Things*
 Anzaldúa, "How to Tame a Wild Tongue"
 Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play"
 Marx, from *The German Ideology* and "Commodity Fetishism"