

Oral Exams

You will have two one-hour oral exams, one at midterm and one during finals week. The exact dates will be scheduled at a mutually agreed upon time. The oral exams can be taken individually or in a group. If you take the oral exam in a group, you will receive a grade based on your individual contributions to the exam answers. This is not a group project or exam. The oral exams will consist of the kinds of questions typical on essay exams as well as questions addressing specific details of the works we have studied. For example, some questions may include

- What is Algernon's alter ego in *The Importance of Being Earnest*?
- Modernist literature came to see WWI as the defining event of the movement, not least of all because the war seemed to represent the death-knell of the Victorian period and its notions of the progress of modernity. Discuss the meaning of the war in three Modernist works.
- Compare and contrast the use of nature in two Romantic texts with its use in two Victorian texts. What does the representation of nature in these texts say about the two periods?

The oral exams will

- Provide you with the opportunity to develop and demonstrate oral communication ability,
- Give you experience with the communications identified as most challenging in the workplace, i.e., interaction with a superior, and
- Help you develop explanatory skills, powers of persuasion, oral poise and self-confidence.

Grading Rubric for Oral Exams

There are three levels of performance on the oral exams: passed with distinction, passed, and failed.

Category: Failure. The student may fail the oral exam for any one or more of the following deficiencies:

1. **Information deficiency:** students know somewhat less than 70 percent of the primary material in specifics of content. Examiner's concerns: does the student not know or now know how to demonstrate specific knowledge?
2. **Comprehension deficiency:** students seem not to be able to demonstrate experience in processing thematic approaches and in explicating themes and in tracing historical, social, and intellectual patterns in specific works and fields of works. Students may seem not to understand the theme or not to be able to recognize its possibilities within a specific work or period. Students may hesitate, may have false starts, and may ignore obvious and essential relevancy and implications. To the examiner, however, the problem will appear to be a lack of

thoughtful reading of the literature, or worse, a deficiency in discipline acculturation.

3. **Test-taking deficiency:** students seem not to be able to use the occasion to demonstrate their knowledge and preparation, a personality inhibition that can be severely limiting if not totally debilitating. Students may freeze up or muddle through the exam.

Category: Pass. The student should perform in the 70 and above percentile in all of the following areas of competencies:

1. **Information:** students should apparently have read all the texts in all the areas in which they are being examined and should have ready retention of each work. Students should know the historical, cultural, and intellectual contexts of each work as representative of a time, a genre, and a worldview. Students should be able to provide on command some specifics from all the works and no less than 70 percent from works on which they focus their discussions and summaries.
2. **Comprehension:** students should be able to use the language of critical approaches to demonstrate analytical aptitudes and intellectual perspicuity in the discussion of literature. Students should show a clear grasp of theme; of patterns of implications (meaning) in forms, in figurative language, in narrative, descriptive, and expository structures; of contextual allusions and references; of poetic and fictional strategies. Students should be able to trace threads of content and technique through multiple texts and to apply philosophical, political, and social education to the illumination of literary texts. Students should perform at a competent level, demonstrating that, despite gaps and spots of indecisiveness, they understand what is required of them. They should be able to recognize their strengths and weaknesses.
3. **Test-Taking Aptitudes:** students should be able to present themselves with confidence and composure. They should demonstrate the virtues of oral communication. When pressed, they should be able to confess uncertainty and to offer alternative responses, directing their discussions always toward their strengths. This approach should not become an escape strategy and should be used sparingly. They should, however, appear comfortable with the exposure of their weaknesses as long as they apparently recognize high standards for themselves.

Category: Passed with Distinction. Students demonstrate the same competencies as the Passed category but at the 90 and above percentile.