

## **Guidelines for the PhD Preliminary Examinations in French Literature and Culture**

The student must form a committee by the end of the second semester in the program. Every committee requires at least three faculty members from the French department, with the option to include members from other departments. By the end of February, at the latest, during the second year of the doctoral program, the student should work with the committee and dissertation director to prepare for the preliminary examinations. These consist of a) a written examination; b) an oral examination; c) a prospectus defense.

It is required that the student pass the preliminary examinations before continuing in ABD (all but dissertation) status to the writing phase of the program.

Before writing the exam, the student will have read, and studied the works listed on the reading list for the PhD in French literature. The student will also have established an initial bibliography relevant to the dissertation project which will be shared in advance of the preliminary examinations with the student's committee. The reading list which relates to the student's dissertation should include: a) primary texts; b) secondary texts (eg. works of criticism); c) texts which reflect the student's analytical approach to the primary material of the dissertation.

The preliminary examinations will be based on both the general reading list, and the reading list specific to the student's research.

### **I. The Written Examination:**

Over the course of three days (not necessarily consecutive) the student will write six essays. A minimum of four of these six essays must be written in French. On each of the three days, the student will have the opportunity to write for a total of eight hours. The student will write two essays on each of the three days.

Examinations will be conducted in a proctored setting, either electronically with monitoring software and/or under direct human supervision, to ensure the integrity of the process. Students are strictly prohibited from using any external help during the exam, including AI tools, notes, internet searches, or collaboration with others. Any suspicion of academic dishonesty will result in immediate reporting to the program administration, followed by a formal investigation and appropriate consequences, which may escalate to dismissal from the program.

#### The essays shall be as follows:

- a) Day 1: two essay questions relating to French literature in general (see PhD reading list: <https://www.cla.purdue.edu/slcs/graduate/ReadingLists.html>).
- b) Day 2: two essay questions relating to French literature in general with emphasis on the student's proposed area of research. For example, if the student's dissertation will focus on twenty-first century literature, the questions in this part of the exam will focus on literature / film of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (see PhD reading list).

c) Day 3: two essay questions: the first relating to the student's proposed area of research (essay questions determined by the student's reading list); the second relating to the student's analytical approach to the primary material of the dissertation.

The student will be evaluated on their ability to:

--Precisely analyze literary or theoretical texts, identifying key themes, stylistic elements, and cultural or historical contexts to critically examine rather than merely describe them.

--Engage critically with the text by problematizing, arguing, and illustrating points within a broader literary or theoretical tradition.

--Organize arguments effectively with a structured introduction, logical transitions between each development sections, and a strong conclusion.

--Demonstrate a high level of written language skills, including accurate syntax, vocabulary richness, and clear expression.

The committee will read the essays written for the preliminary examination within a week, and report back to the dissertation director. The exam is evaluated PASS, FAIL or PARTIAL RETAKE (up to a maximum of two essay questions) by the doctoral committee. The committee director communicates the result of the exam to the student. If one (or more) of the exam areas is considered weak, the student may be asked to repeat it. The exam committee will decide whether the student will retake the failed portion of the exam or whether a new question will be given. The student must retake the exam within one month of the first try. If the written examinations have been completed successfully, then an oral examination will be scheduled within two weeks of the date of the last written examination. If retake exams are unsatisfactory, French department committee members reserve the right to permit the student to attempt them again the following semester.

Please also consult the guidelines of the School of Languages and Cultures: <https://www.cla.purdue.edu/slc/graduate/>.

**II. The Oral Examination:**

The oral exam will be two hours in length, and will proceed as follows:

- 1) The dissertation director will be responsible for overseeing the questioning.
- 2) The first questions will relate to the written examination, if necessary, so that the committee has the opportunity to query and / or clarify any part of the written essays.
- 3) The committee will ask questions relating to the reading lists prepared for the written exams. The goal is to test the student's knowledge of French literature in general, and of the domain specific to the student's planned dissertation research.

The student will be evaluated on their ability to:

- Demonstrate knowledge of texts from the general reading list, to critically analyze rather than merely describe them, identifying themes, ambiguities, contradictions, or innovations.
- Connect texts from the research-specific reading list to your dissertation topic, showing nuanced understanding of their relevance and interpretive challenges.
- Apply theoretical texts to literary analysis, articulating how core concepts illuminate specific works or your research questions.
- Synthesize across lists, drawing links between canonical literature, specialized readings, and theory.
- Respond with clarity, precision, and structure, using appropriate academic French or English terminology and logical progression in oral delivery.

After the oral examination the committee will determine *in situ* whether the student has passed or failed the examination. The student will be asked to leave the room, and then to re-enter after the committee's deliberations to hear the results of the committee's discussion. If the exam proves satisfactory, the student advances to the prospectus defense. If the exam is unsatisfactory, the French department committee members reserve the right to permit the student to attempt it again the following semester.

The Prospectus Defense:

The prospectus defense will be two hours in length, and will proceed as follows:

- 1) The prospectus will take place three to six months after the successful completion of the written and oral examinations outlined above, and no later than the end of the semester following the one in which the preliminary exams took place.
- 2) The student will submit a fifteen-page written prospectus and bibliography to the members of the committee two weeks before the prospectus defense. The prospectus will describe the hypotheses and methodology of the research the student will undertake during the ABD period of the PhD.
- 3) During the prospectus defense the committee, overseen by the director, will question the student on both the prospectus and bibliography, and offer direction to the student.

The student will be evaluated on their ability to:

- Articulate a clear, original research question grounded in Francophone literary and cultural scholarship.
- Demonstrate feasible methodology, engagement with selected texts, and integration of relevant theory.
- Show awareness of scholarly debates, potential field contributions, and a realistic completion timeline.

4) After the prospectus defense the committee will determine *in situ* whether the student has passed or failed, based on a majority of votes; however, if the committee consists of only three faculty members, the vote must be unanimous.

The student will be asked to leave the room, and then to re-enter after the committee's deliberations to hear the results of the committee's discussion. In the event that a student does not pass the prospectus defense, the student will revise and resubmit the prospectus and then repeat the defense in three months. If the prospectus defense revisions are unsatisfactory, the French department committee members reserve the right to dismiss the student from the program.

*Revised December 2025*