

## **Doctoral Candidacy Examination (DCE), Written Component (Clinical Psychology Area)** (aka “Prelim Paper” or “Comps Paper”)

The examination for admission to doctoral candidacy at Notre Dame has both a written and an oral component. In the Psychology Department, the written component of the candidacy examination in the clinical area, informally known as the prelim paper or comps paper, is a comprehensive research-review manuscript, and the oral component is the defense of the dissertation proposal. The primary goals of the written portion of the DCE in the clinical area are to demonstrate students’ in-depth knowledge of a significant portion of the psychological literature and to produce a manuscript worthy of submission to a major psychology review journal (e.g., *Psychological Bulletin*, *Psychological Review*, *Clinical Psychology Review*).

Successful completion of both the written and oral components of the DCE is required for formal advancement to doctoral candidacy, which must occur prior to students applying for internship (see “Major Mileposts & Deadlines”). These processes involve a sequence of events, so the time required to complete these requirements varies, depending, for example, on how quickly the review paper and dissertation proposal are approved. Thus, students are advised to discuss the time frame with their advisors, and to begin the process well in advance of May 1 of the third-year, which is the date that is *strongly recommended as a deadline* for approval of the examination paper topic.

**NOTE: When students ask faculty members to be on their committee, they should inform them of the likely timeline for the process—most importantly, approximately when the faculty members’ initial written review and final score will be due. Before agreeing to serve on a DCE committee, faculty members should be sure that they will be able to complete their written review and submit their final score according to the specified timeline. If not, (e.g., the faculty member will be unavailable during the specific period of time in which the review would likely be due), then the faculty member should not agree to serve on the committee.**

### **DCE Process**

**Topic selection.** Students initially should consult with their advisor regarding the paper topic. After selecting a topic, students submit a prospectus (approximately 3-5 APA-Style pages, plus references), proposing the topic and how they plan to approach the review, to a committee of three faculty members. The DCE committee (aka prelim committee or comps committee) includes the research advisor and two other faculty members; at least one member of the committee must be a member of the clinical area.

Faculty committee members have 5 academic days\*\* to review and either approve the prospectus or request revision(s), clearly specifying the rationale for the request and the expected scope of the revision(s). Faculty evaluations are sent to the student and all committee members. When the third faculty evaluation has been submitted, if *any* revisions are requested, students have 5 academic days to submit a revised prospectus. Faculty who requested revision(s) have 5 academic days to review and either approve or disapprove the prospectus. Faculty who approved the prospectus initially may choose to review or not to

review the revision and, if they review it, may either confirm their approval or disapprove of the revision. If the second submission is not approved by at least two faculty members, then students must begin the process from the beginning and propose a new topic. The research advisor is charged with keeping track of the prospectus revision process, including reminding faculty of their obligation to review the prospectus within 5 academic days and following up with them if their decision is not submitted in a timely fashion. Students will want to confirm with their research advisor their expectations about the specific deadlines this process entails, to assure their advisor is overseeing the revision process with the same deadlines in mind.

Acceptance of the prospectus is established when either (a) all three committee members have approved the first submission or (b) two committee members have approved a revised submission, either by e-mail or by signing and dating the [Prospectus Approval Form](#) (see the last page of this document), whichever is earlier. Students are responsible for obtaining faculty signatures and submitting the form, along with FORM DW-A from the department's [Graduate Students Form Packet](#), to the Graduate Administrative Assistant (GAA), who will record the date.

When the prospectus has been approved and the form submitted, the GAA will determine the due date for the initial paper and notify the committee members of that date so they may know the latest that they should expect to receive the paper to review. The GAA also will remind the faculty members that when they receive the initial submission they will have 15 academic days to submit their review.

**Writing the review paper.** To permit breadth of evaluation that is sufficient to determine doctoral candidacy, students need to: a) delineate the topic with respect to other related areas of inquiry; b) to review relevant theories; c) summarize both contemporary and classic studies in the area; d) evaluate critically important methodological issues, such as research designs, quantitative techniques, and sampling procedures; and e) provide an integrative discussion section. Although comprehensiveness of the review is one evaluation criterion, students may meet the spirit of this criterion with a somewhat more narrow presentation provided it is appropriate to their topic and they explicitly justify doing so in the paper. The paper must conform to current APA publication style throughout (including title page, abstract, formatting, etc.). Although there is no official minimum length for the review, students are invited to discuss the paper's length with their committee before they begin writing if they prefer some degree of certainty on this point.

The DCE paper is a competency-based project, and is evaluated in keeping with disciplinary practices for evaluating scientific manuscripts submitted for publication. Once the paper topic is approved, students research and write the paper on their own (i.e., without written input from committee members, although discussion is permitted). The first draft of the review paper is due 90 *calendar* days after the prospectus has been approved.

**Faculty review of the review paper's first draft.** When students have completed a first draft of their comprehensive review paper, they submit the draft to their committee members, and inform the GAA that they have done so. The GAA will notify the committee members of the

due date for their reviews (viz., within 15 academic days of receipt of the paper).

Faculty committee members each review and evaluate the paper independently. Each writes a formal review of the work, as if evaluating it as a manuscript submitted to a major psychology journal, and each provides the student, other committee members, and the GAA with a copy of their review. (*Note*: If students or other faculty committee members notice that a faculty member failed to inform the GAA, they should ensure that the GAA is informed.)

Approximately 3 academic days before the faculty reviews are due, the GAA will send a reminder to all faculty committee members who have not yet submitted their review, cc'ing the research advisor. If a faculty member has not submitted a review by the second day after the due date, the GAA will send another reminder, again cc'ing the research advisor, and the GAA will continue at least weekly to remind the faculty member that the review is due. However, faculty members should make every attempt to submit their reviews by the due date and should notify the research advisor, the student, and the GAA as soon as possible if there are extenuating circumstances that prevent them from doing so.

*Note*: Committee members do *not* provide a formal recommendation regarding acceptability of the manuscript, as normally would be done at this stage in the editorial review process for a journal.

**Students' revision.** Students then revise the manuscript in response to the committee members' feedback, and submit the revised product for final review by each committee member within 30 *academic* days of receiving the last of the three initial reviews. With the final submission of their DCE paper, students shall include a cover letter, with a point-by-point discussion of how each reviewer comment was, or was not, addressed. For comments that did not result in revision, students should provide a rationale for not doing so. Again, students may consult with committee members during the revision stage, but further written feedback is not permitted, to ensure that the revision reflects students' independent scholarship.

**Final scoring by committee members.** In the final stage of the process, each committee member provides a rating, and the average of the members' ratings determines the final grade. When they distribute their revised paper, they shall inform the GAA that they have done so, and the GAA will remind the committee members, of the due date and distribute to the committee members the following 6-point grading scale:

6 - Excellent performance:	highest pass
5 - Good performance:	high pass
4 - Average performance:	pass
3.5 - Cut off point:	minimal pass
3 - Below average performance:	high fail
2 - Poor performance:	fail
1 - Very poor performance:	low fail

Committee members each send their scores within 15 academic days to the GAA but NOT to

the other committee members, to maintain the independence of the scores. When all scores have been received, the GAA averages them and sends the results to the research advisor, who informs the student and committee members whether the student has passed the exam.

As with the initial reviews, approximately 3 academic days before the faculty scores are due, the GAA will send a reminder to all faculty committee members who have not yet submitted their score, cc'ing the research advisor. If a faculty member has not submitted a score by the second day after the due date, the GAA will send another reminder, again cc'ing the research advisor, and will continue to remind the faculty member at least weekly that the score is due. However, faculty members should make every attempt to submit their scores by the due date and should notify the research advisor, the student, and the GAA as soon as possible if there are extenuating circumstances that prevent them from doing so.

**Process in the event of *students'* failure to meet deadlines.** There are three critical deadlines associated with the written portion of the DCE exam:

- (1) submission of the initial draft—which is 90 calendar days after approval of the prospectus,
- (2) submission of the final draft—which is 30 academic days after receipt of faculty reviews, and
- (3) passing the exam, which is December 1 of the fourth year.

The number of days late (#DLs) for the final deadline represents the accumulation of DLs over the entire process. Rather than tracking each individual deadline, the #DLs after the December 1 deadline (minus the #DLs of faculty; see below) will be used to calculate a score that will be deducted from the final, averaged exam score on the following schedule: 1-3 DLs, no penalty; 4-7 DLs, ½ point; 8-14 DLs, 1 point; 15-21 DLs, 2 points. ***More than 21 DLs constitutes failure of the exam, regardless of the reviewers' scores on the exam.***

The reason for applying a formula—rather than the usual practice of simply considering students who miss a major milestone deadline to be on probation until they complete the requirement—is that the written portion of the DCE is a timed exam, so that the usual practice would unfairly advantage students who took longer to write and/or revise the paper over those who met the deadlines.

**Process in the event of *faculty* failure to meet deadlines.** There are three critical faculty deadlines associated with the written-portion of the DCE exam: (1) Approval of the prospectus, (2) providing a written review of the initial submission, and (3) providing a score on the final submission. The total number of faculty DLs, considered simultaneously across the three-faculty committee, shall be totaled and subtracted from the total #DLs past the December 1 deadline for the purpose of calculating the net #DLs to use in applying a late penalty to students' scores.

In order not to interfere unduly with students' timely completion of the written portion of the DCE, any of the following shall cause removal of a faculty member from a DCE committee, with

a replacement to be selected (with the selected faculty member's agreement) by the research advisor, in consultation with the third committee member and the DCT: (1) being more than 5 ADLs for responding to the submission of the prospectus or its revision; (2) being more than 10 ADLs for submitting a written review of the initial paper submission; or (3) being more than 10 ADLs for submitting a score for the final paper submission. The DCT shall notify the Department Chair of the removal of a faculty member from a DCE committee with an explanation of the reason for removal.

**Process in the event of exam failure.** If a passing score is not achieved, the committee shall recommend whether the student should be allowed to retake the exam. If the recommendation is negative, the issue shall be considered and voted upon by the entire clinical-area faculty at their next regular meeting. If the initial or final recommendation is to allow the student to retake the exam, the student must start the process over with the same or a different topic. A new set of deadlines shall be determined by the student's DCE committee in consultation with the DCT, but the periods allotted for each stage of the process shall be no longer than the standard set. Students retaking the written portion of the DCE will be on probation until the exam has been passed. University regulations require that students have a maximum of two opportunities to pass the candidacy examination. Not passing the review-paper requirement the first time constitutes one of those opportunities.

### **Summary of Tasks and Timelines for the Written Portion of the DCE**

1. Students consult with research advisor(s) on topic, scope, focus, and so on, as well as committee composition.
2. Students submit a 3-5 page prospectus (topic proposal) to the committee.
3. Committee members review the prospectus and either approve the topic or request revisions. If revisions are requested by any committee member, the student revises the prospectus and re-submits the prospectus to all committee members. The committee members then e-mail students of their approval or disapproval of the topic and thereafter sign the Prospectus Approval Form, which students submit to the GAA. At least two committee members must approve the prospectus for students to begin writing the first draft. The 90-day period for writing the review starts when the student receives a second approval from the committee members.
4. When the student submits the Prospectus Approval Form, the GAA informs the committee members of the student's deadline for submission of the DCE paper.
5. Students independently research and write the DCE paper, which they distribute within 90 calendar days after the prospectus is approved. When students distribute the paper, they also inform the GAA, who notifies the committee members of the due date for their review.
6. Upon receipt of the DCE paper, committee members independently review the manuscript within 15 academic days of receipt, and each writes a review, as they would for a major

psychology journal, and submit their review to the student, other committee members, and GAA, who reminds faculty of the review deadline, as described earlier.

6. Within 30 academic days after receiving the last set of reviewer comments, students resubmit the paper to the committee, with a cover letter that discusses how reviewer comments were addressed. When students distribute their revised paper, they inform the GAA, who notifies the faculty of the deadline for submitting their scores and provides them with the 6-point grading scale.

7. Committee members provide their final scores within 15 academic days to the GAA, who reminds faculty of the review deadline, as described earlier.

8. When all scores have been received, the GAA forwards the average scores and the total days late to the research advisor, who informs the student and the other committee members of the outcome.

**\*\*Academic days** refer to Monday through Friday during the academic semester, excluding University holidays (e.g., Fall and Spring Break, Christmas Break, etc.). The summer is treated as a semester, with University holidays (e.g., Fourth of July) during Summer Session also excluded.

*Substantive modifications approved by the clinical-area faculty: May 5, 2014.*

*Stylistic modifications made: July 28, 2015.*

*Clarifying modifications approved by the clinical-area faculty: November 3, 2015.*

*One substantive modification tentative approved by the clinical-area faculty: April 27, 2016.*

*Current document officially approved by the clinical-area faculty: April XX, 2016.*

**Clinical-area Doctoral Candidacy Examination**  
**(DCE: written portion, aka Comps / Prelim)**  
**Prospectus Approval Form**

Note: Submit this form to the Graduate Administrative Assistant to indicate your DCE Committee's approval of your DCE Prospectus (i.e., your review paper proposal). The first draft of your review is due 90 calendar days after the last faculty member on your committee has indicated his/her approval either by e-mail or by signing this form, whichever is earlier.

I approve the prospectus submitted by \_\_\_\_\_  
(Student's name)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Advisor's name Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Advisor's name Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Advisor's name Date