

## **Doctoral Candidacy Examination (DCE), Written Component (Developmental Psychology Area) (aka “Prelim 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 developmental area, informally known as the prelim 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 developmental 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*, *Developmental Review*, *Human Development* and similar periodicals devoted to review, analysis and critique of developmental theory and research.

The prelim paper is intended to assess the student’s ability to examine critically a significant developmental question in light of the extant literature. As such the paper is an “ecologically valid” indicator of proficiency as a developmental scientist and member of an academic discipline.

The topic of the prelim paper should be broader than the dissertation topic. Students should approach the task as an opportunity to make a contribution to the literature.

Successful completion of the prelim paper is required for formal advancement to doctoral candidacy. Students are advised to discuss the time frame with their advisors, and to begin the process well in advance of the first week of classes in the fall semester of the 4<sup>th</sup> year in the program, which is the date that is strongly recommended as a deadline for submission of the examination paper topic and prospectus.

**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 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.

### **Time Frame**

April of the 3<sup>rd</sup> year – Defense of the MA Thesis

April – May of the 3<sup>rd</sup> year – Evaluation by faculty for approval of student to take prelims

May of the 3<sup>rd</sup> year – Meeting between student, advisor and program area head to map out specific deadlines. Student forms committee and submits signed **Intent and Schedule Form** to the Graduate Administrative Assistant (GAA). Copies of the form are provided to the student and committee.

August, start of the 4<sup>th</sup> year – On the first Monday of fall classes, student submits prospectus and reading list to the committee. The committee has five academic days to return feedback (i.e., will return feedback on the second Monday of fall classes).

October of the 4<sup>th</sup> year – Student submits prelim paper on the first Monday classes resume after fall break (8 calendar weeks after the prospectus was returned). Faculty will return graded paper in two academic weeks.

December of 4<sup>th</sup> year – Student submits a revised paper by the second Monday in December (4 academic weeks after receiving feedback). Faculty return final grade by the third Monday in December (2 academic weeks).

## DCE Process

**Topic selection and planning.** Meeting between student, advisor and program area head to map out specific deadlines. Student forms committee and submits signed **Intent and Schedule Form** to the Graduate Administrative Assistant (GAA). Copies of the form are provided to the student and committee.

**Topic development.** 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) includes the research advisor and two other faculty members; at least one member of the committee must be a member of the developmental area.

Faculty committee members have 5 academic days\*\* to review and either approve the prospectus and reading list 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 with a new or modified 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, 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 remind 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 two academic weeks to submit their review. The student will be copied on this correspondence.

**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) 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 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 eight *calendar* weeks 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 remind the committee members of the due date for their reviews (viz., within two calendar weeks of receipt of the paper). The student will be copied on this correspondence.

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 his or her 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 2 academic days before the faculty reviews are due, the GAA will send a reminder to any 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. 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 4 *academic* weeks of receiving the last of the three initial reviews. With the final submission of their 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 students 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 2 academic weeks 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 2 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. 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 four critical deadlines associated with the written portion of the exam:

- (1) Submission of the prospectus—which is on the first Monday of the fall semester.
- (2) Submission of the initial draft—which is 8 calendar weeks after approval of the prospectus,
- (3) Submission of the final draft—which is 4 academic weeks after receipt of faculty reviews, and

- (4) Passing the exam, which is by the third Monday in December of the fourth year or the fourth Monday in January of the fourth year. (Note there are variable dates for step 4, depending on whether there are one or two rounds for the prospectus.)

The process is also illustrated in the prelims flowchart for 2017-2018.

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 (or January) final 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,  $\frac{1}{2}$  point; 4-7 DLs, 1 point; 8-14 DLs, 2 points; 15-21 DLs, 3 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 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 exam: (1) Approval of the prospectus, (2) Provision of a written review of the initial submission, and (3) Provision of 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 (or January) final 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 exam, 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 Director of the Developmental Area (DDA): (1) being more than 5 ADLs (Academic Days Late) 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 DDA 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 redo the paper. If the recommendation is negative, the issue shall be considered and voted upon by the entire developmental-area faculty at their next regular meeting. If the initial or final recommendation is to allow the student to redo the paper, 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 committee in consultation with the program area head, 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 paper 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.

**\*\*Academic days** refer to Monday through Friday during the academic semester, excluding University holidays (e.g., Fall and Spring Break, Winter Break, etc.). The summer is treated as a semester, with University holidays (e.g., Fourth of July) during Summer Session also excluded. One academic week = 5 academic days.

Last substantive revision: 1-18-17

(DMG, following edits and consultation by Developmental area faculty and Developmental

Document Approved, 1-18-17, by Developmental Area faculty vote.

Pending approval by GSC.

Minor edits (typos, etc.) 1/23/17 by DMG

Document Approved by GSC, 1/24/17

**Developmental -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 8 calendar weeks 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)

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

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Committee member's name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

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Committee member's name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_