

# Department of English, University of Haifa

## The MA Comprehensive Exam

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### *When*

1. The student can take the comprehensive exam only after completing all coursework.
  - a. In general, allow at least 3 months for study after completion of course work - the more the better.

### *Advisor*

2. An advisor can be any full-time regular lecturer or professor in the department.
  - a. An advisor should be someone who specializes in your chosen topic **and** with whom you have a good rapport.
    - i. Approach the advisor as early as possible and ask for their consent to be your advisor in this process.
    - ii. Notify the MA advisor and the department coordinator **in writing** once the lecturer has agreed to be your advisor.
3. Make sure that you set clear goals and expectations and especially deadlines with your advisor.
4. Work together to create the reading list, which needs to be finalized and approved by your advisor.

### *The Reading List*

5. The list will usually focus on one genre in one time period – though some leeway for comparative, cross-period, single author, or genre lists may be approved.
  - a. The student will usually have had at least one course on this subject
  - b. Pick something that you like!
  - c. The list is comprised of 2 lists:
    - i. Primary texts – equivalent of 10-12 book-length works
    - ii. Secondary texts – critical books and articles – equivalent of 15 articles.
  - d. List can include texts previously studied in courses, but should also contain some new ones.

### *The Exam*

6. Total of 4-6 hours (depending on advisor's instructions)
  - a. Spread over 2 days, usually within one week. (Mador Bchinot administers the exam and sets the dates)
7. The advisor can determine what material (books, notes) are allowed in the exam. Make sure you determine this **before you begin studying**
8. Student is entitled to a Moed B only in the case of failure
9. Each part of the exam is usually made up of two to three essay questions

- a. The questions can be either about the primary texts or about the secondary texts/ theory, but at least some (if not all) must show an ability to combine primary / secondary texts.
- b. The advisor will write the exam so that the student will have a reasonable choice of questions to answer.

### *Grading*

- 10. The exam will be graded by the student's advisor and another (anonymous) lecturer in the department (or, in some cases, outside the department), as determined by the MA committee.
- 11. Criteria for exam evaluation
  - a. Comprehensive response to the exam question, in all its parts and components (~20%)
  - b. Thorough knowledge of primary texts (~20%)
  - c. Knowledge of secondary texts and theoretical terminology (~20%)
  - d. Formulating an argument & supporting evidence (~25%)
  - e. English proficiency and style (~15%)

### *Preparing for the exam*

- 12. Once you have a list, begin your first reading of the text.
  - a. Take notes as you read
  - b. **Suggested:** After finishing each text, annotate it:
    - i. For primary texts:
      - 1. Note central themes, characters, plot elements that relate to your topic. Write a sentence or two summarizing these points.
      - 2. Note important formal elements in the text
      - 3. Make notes about the context of the text – its relation to its historical period, to literary history, to larger historical or philosophical concerns.
    - ii. For secondary texts:
      - 1. In one or two paragraphs, summarize the texts' main point(s), or those that are most relevant to your topic. Refer to the "Analysis" part of the "Reading Critically" guidelines for help on what kind of questions you are to ask and answer. Be thorough, but not over-detailed.
      - 2. In a second paragraph, critique the article (again, use the "Critique" part to guide you.) Try to explain how (or how not) the article relates to your topic. Be specific (don't just say something like "this article is about gender and I am also interested in gender"). Elaborate what you agree with and why and what you disagree with, and why.
  - c. Throughout this process, write down questions you may have for your advisor.

13. Meet your advisor after the first reading to address any difficulties or questions you may have and to talk about potential exam focus and questions.
14. Read again.