Doctoral Comprehensive Exams

All students in the Doctoral Program in Developmental Education are required to pass a comprehensive examination (comp, for short) towards the conclusion of coursework, prior to moving into the dissertation phase of the program. Comprehensive examinations are an opportunity for faculty to assess students’ areas of expertise and knowledge from their coursework. Preparation for the comprehensive exam should help you integrate and utilize the knowledge and skills you have gained in your doctoral study. The specific purposes of this exam are for the student to demonstrate control of the literature and control of research through mastery of their coursework content and to demonstrate preparation for moving on to the dissertation.

Note: this document reflects the current comprehensive examination process. Students may elect to adopt this exam protocol starting in spring 2023. Students admitted to the program during the 2022–2023 academic year or earlier may elect to adopt the previous exam protocol and should consult with their advisor for direction. Students entering the program in the 2023–2024 academic year and later will be expected to follow the current exam process.

For the doctoral comprehensive examination, you are required to (a) generate written responses to the following three items and (b) answer questions from faculty in an oral defense that includes a presentation from you. In the first part of your written response, begin with a narrative account that briefly traces your learning in the program relevant to the perspective(s) taken in your answer. For example, you may refer to course-based and non-course-based learning experiences through the program that helped to inform your perspectives. The second part of your response should draw from scholarly literature and your coursework.

* **Item 1**: Discuss an overarching theoretical framework, grounded in the literature, that guides your understanding of an issue/problem related to developmental education. Your discussion of this framework should (a) reflect your learning in the doctoral program relevant to the theoretical framework, (b) demonstrate your knowledge of conceptual models, theories, and/or key constructs that comprise the theoretical framework, (c) apply the theoretical framework to an issue in developmental education taking care to state the issue/problem you will be addressing, and (d) incorporate scholarly literature (not to exceed 6–8 double-spaced pages, excluding references).
* **Item 2**: Discuss a research methodology that (a) reflects your learning in the doctoral program, (b) incorporates literature that helps to describe the methodology and its strengths and limitations, and (c) explains why and how you would apply this methodology to explore an issue/problem related to developmental education (not to exceed 4–6 double-spaced pages, excluding references).
* **Item 3**:  Produce a brief synthesis of the literature that (a) reflects and extends your learning in the doctoral program, (b) examines a scholarly issue you would like to explore based on what you learned in your coursework, (c) evaluates research methods and evidence from key studies, and (d) identifies specific gaps in research and practice that could be address in future research (not to exceed 8-10 double-spaced pages, excluding references).

Your online submission should only include the following items:

* Your written responses to the three items, each as a separate document with a reference list specific to the item being addressed in that document and using the current version of APA style.
* Comprehensive exam form with as much filled out as known at the time.

Please note, your responses to the three comprehensive exam items do not need to connect with each other. For example, the research methodology you discuss in Item 2 does not have to be one you might use if you were to research a scholarly issue addressed in your brief research synthesis (Item 3). Use the information from your coursework to demonstrate your knowledge in your responses. Similarly, incorporate scholarly literature to support your ideas and demonstrate mastery of coursework. However, you may not submit work that has already been submitted in your coursework. You may explore similar topics, but take care to avoid self-plagiarism.

Oral defenses are scheduled for 50 minutes. Oral defenses can be scheduled virtually or face-to-face. For your oral defense, you will

1. give a 20-minute presentation on your exam responses and
2. answer questions from faculty that will be about your written exam and about concepts from your coursework (for example: How do you define developmental education? How do you define correlation research methods? What research evidence supports the claim you made? What research gaps are you most interested in exploring in future research and why? What is the difference between emic and etic viewpoints? What is the difference between study skills and learning strategies? In what ways might your theoretical framework be useful for exploring postsecondary learning?).

# Timeline

In the semester before stating your intention to complete the comp exam, it is recommended that you at least (a) formalize your comp exam committee and (b) organize your ideas for writing each of the three comp exam questions and discuss those ideas with your comp exam chair and committee members (as needed). Comp exams are typically completed in the fall or spring long semesters; for summer semesters, please discuss with your advisor.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Action | Fall Semesters | Spring Semesters | Instructions and Links to Forms |
| *Form comp exam committee AND apply to take the comp exam by* | September 1 | February 1 | [Committee request form](https://www.education.txst.edu/ci/dev-ed-doc/Important-Links/program-forms/Comprehensive-Exam-Committee-Request-Form.html)  [Application form](http://www.education.txst.edu/ci/dev-ed-doc/Important-Links/comp-exams/comprehensive-exam-application-form) |
| *Begin comp exam by* | September 15 | February 15 | N/A |
| *Submit completed comp exam documents by* | October 15  (1 month after exam start) | March 15  (1 month after exam start) | Submitted in Canvas. Email committee after submitting so they know it is ready for review. |
| *Schedule date/time for oral defense by (dates may range from two weeks after actual exam submission to two weeks before the end of classes)* | November 1 | April 1 | Student (1) emails the committee to arrange date/time and (2) emails Dena, and CC's Comp Chair, to request a calendar invitation be sent. |
| *Complete oral defense by* | Two weeks before the end of classes | Two weeks before the end of classes | N/A |
| *Revisions (when necessary) due* | Two weeks after the oral defense | Two weeks after the oral defense | Submitted in Canvas. Email committee after submitting so they know it is ready for review. |

# Comprehensive Exam Committee

Students will form a comprehensive exam committee that is composed of a comp committee chair and two other faculty members from the Developmental Education program. Students will first discuss their ideas for the three items with their chair for initial approval. The comprehensive exam committee will be disbanded upon successful completion of the exam. At that point, a new committee will be created for the dissertation.

# Application and Clearance to Take the Comprehensive Exam

* The comprehensive exam should be taken during the final semester of coursework.
* Students must be enrolled in at least one graduate-level course during the semester in which they take the comprehensive exam.
* Students must have formed their comp exam committee, have an approved Comprehensive Exam Committee Request Form on file, and must apply to take the comprehensive exam.

# Oral Defense Scheduling

Once your eligibility to take the comprehensive exam is confirmed via the application process, you will be responsible for scheduling your oral defense in consultation with your chair and committee members. Students should (1) email the committee to arrange a date/time and (2) email Dena, and CC comp chair, to request a calendar invitation be sent.

# Online Submission

A Canvas site titled "DE Doc Comprehensive Examination" will be set up for you after applying for and being cleared to take the comprehensive examinations. Upload your documents into the "Assignments" tab. When you finish uploading your documents, email your committee to notify them that your documents have been uploaded and are ready for review.

# Evaluation of Comprehensive Exams

The comprehensive exam includes responses to the three items, which are submitted as individual papers and defended orally. All three items must earn a pass in order to pass the exam. Possible outcomes at the conclusion are:

* Pass
* Needs revisions
* Does not pass

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Possible Outcomes | Description |
| *Pass* | “Pass” indicates passing the exam with no further revision needed. It is possible to pass one item and need revision on others. In that case the student will only revise the items needing revisions. |
| *Needs Revisions* | “Needs revisions” indicates that students will need additional work on one or more items, based on the rubric and other feedback from their exam committee. Students will have two weeks from their defense date to make recommended changes and resubmit them for their committee’s approval. Failure to meet the revision deadlines will result in their evaluation being changed to “does not pass.” Only one resubmission will be reviewed by the committee, with possible outcomes at the conclusion as follows: “Pass” or “Does not pass.” For any item not passed after revision, the student will need to retake that portion of the exam in a subsequent semester. |
| *Does Not Pass (First Attempt)* | Students earning an overall evaluation of “does not pass” must wait until the next semester to retake the examination. They will have two additional opportunities to retake the examination, and they may modify their committee members and/or chair. |
| *Does Not Pass (Second Attempt)* | The procedures for the comprehensive exam will be the same as on their first attempt. However, students who earn “does not pass” after revisions on their second attempt will be referred to a committee of faculty, consisting of their comprehensive exam committee and two additional faculty, chosen by the program, to discuss their continuation in the program. |
| *Does Not Pass (Third Attempt)* | The procedures for the comprehensive exam will be the same as on their first and second attempts. Students who do not pass will be discontinued from the program. |

# Follow the procedures below to revise and resubmit your work:

1. Submit your revised documents in the "Assignments" tab in the Canvas site titled "DE Doctoral Comprehensive Examination Revisions."
   1. When revising your comprehensive exam documents, be sure to turn on "tracked changes" in Microsoft Word, so that every revision you make is tracked. Make sure to upload two versions of this document: one version with tracked changes (add the word "tracked" at the end of the file name) and one version with all changes accepted (add the word "clean" at the end of the filename).
   2. If requested, create a new document titled "Overview of Revisions." In this document, outline all changes you made to your work and explain how you have addressed each of your committee members' suggested revisions.
2. After your revisions are submitted, email your committee so they know it is ready for review.

# Outside Assistance and Academic Integrity

Prior to stating their intentions to complete the exam, students should discuss their ideas for answering Questions 1-3 with their chair, and their committee members (as needed). However, those conversations should end after formally stating their intentions to take the exam. At any time, it is permissible to ask general questions about the process. Texas State University expects both faculty and students to respect and follow the Honor Code. For students, this means that all academic work will be done by the individual to whom it is assigned, without unauthorized aid of any kind. Read the full Honor Code.

Resources to help guide your understanding of plagiarism can be found here:

* <https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/citations/plagiarism>
* <https://www.txstate.edu/honorcodecouncil/Student-Resources/Avoiding-Plagiarism.html>

Please note that accommodations can be requested with approval from the Office of Disability Services at Texas State University

# Doctoral Comprehensive Exam Rubric

*This rubric should help guide your thinking as you prepare each item as it will be used by faculty to assess your work. You will receive a holistic summary of the evaluation at the conclusion of your exam.*

## Assessment Rubric for Item 1

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1 Unsatisfactory | 2 Emerging | 3 Proficient | Score |
| Does not describe theoretical framework(s) and makes incomplete connection(s) to an issue in DE. | Inadequately describes theoretical framework(s) and/or makes incomplete connection(s) to an issue in DE. | Describes relevant theoretical framework(s) and makes solid connections, grounded in the literature, to an issue in DE. |  |

**Item 1:** Discuss an overarching theoretical framework, grounded in the literature, that guides your understanding of an issue/problem related to developmental education. Your discussion of this framework should (a) reflect your learning in the doctoral program relevant to the theoretical framework, (b) demonstrate your knowledge of conceptual models, theories, and/or key constructs that comprise the theoretical framework, (c) apply the theoretical framework to an issue in developmental education taking care to state the issue/problem you will be addressing, and (d) incorporate scholarly literature (not to exceed 6–8 double-spaced pages, excluding references).

## Assessment Rubric for Item 2

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1 Unsatisfactory | 2 Emerging | 3 Proficient | Score |
| Does not describe and does not apply research methodology as reflected in the literature to examine an issue in a comprehensive and clear way. | Describes or applies research methodology relevant to an issue in DE. However, the description or application of method in general, or for an issue in DE specifically, is not clearly and/or comprehensively addressed. | Describes and applies research methodology for an issue in DE in a comprehensive and clear way. Provides a compelling rationale for why the method would be useful, and how it could be used, to explore an issue in DE. |  |

**Item 2:** Discuss a research methodology that (a) reflects your learning in the doctoral program, (b) incorporates literature that helps to describe the methodology and its strengths and limitations, and (c) explains why and how you would apply this methodology to explore an issue/problem related to developmental education (not to exceed 4–6 double-spaced pages, excluding references).

## Assessment Rubric for Item 3

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1 Unsatisfactory | 2 Emerging | 3 Proficient | Score |
| Does not situate a scholarly issue in DE in foundational and current relevant literature. | Provides research evidence with limited analysis of foundational and current relevant literature; lacks critical synthesis in analysis of the literature. | Analyzes foundational and current relevant literature; logically presents important evidence related to a scholarly issue in DE; critically synthesizes the literature. |  |

**Item 3:** Produce a brief synthesis of the literature that (a) reflects and extends your learning in the doctoral program, (b) examines a scholarly issue you would like to explore based on what you learned in your coursework, (c) evaluates research methods and evidence from key studies, and (d) identifies specific gaps in research and practice that could be address in future research (not to exceed 8-10 double-spaced pages, excluding references).

## Overall Assessment Rubric for All Items in Three Areas

### Area 1: Reflects on learning in the doctoral program

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1 Unsatisfactory | 2 Emerging | 3 Proficient | Score |
| Does not reflect learning from the doctoral program. | Partially reflects learning from the doctoral program and/or needs additional specificity. | Reflects learning from the doctoral program by referencing specific experiences and/or assignments. | Item 1: \_\_  Item 2: \_\_  Item 3: \_\_ |

### Area 2: Quality of writing

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1 Unsatisfactory | 2 Emerging | 3 Proficient | Score |
| Makes frequent errors in sentence structure and/or grammar that affects understanding; citation style has errors. | Makes some errors in sentence structure and/or grammar that affects understanding; citation style may have errors. | Makes minor or no errors in sentence structure and/or grammar that do not impede understanding; generally, uses correct APA style in text and references. The response is well organized. | Item 1: \_\_  Item 2: \_\_  Item 3: \_\_ |

### Area 3: Substantiates claims by citing specific research and relevant literature

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1 Unsatisfactory | 2 Emerging | 3 Proficient | Score |
| Research cited is not relevant or present. | Discusses but does not adequately review previous research findings on the topic; important research from the field is missing from the review. | Identifies and discusses previous research findings to support the scientific merit of the topic, resulting in a scholarly, thoughtful voice throughout the response. | Item 1: \_\_  Item 2: \_\_  Item 3: \_\_ |

## Final Assessment for Submission

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Possible Outcomes | Committee Decision | Committee Comments |
| Pass  Needs Revisions  Does not pass |  |  |