

The PhD written qualifying exam is intended to test the student's knowledge and synthesis of the seminal and influential literature related to his/her broad program of study and tailored to the student's research interests. Mastery will be assessed via written responses to three questions developed by members of the student's examining committee.

Year 1	Fall semester	The student must form an examining committee in consultation with his/her advisor. The examining committee will be composed of three Biology faculty members (other than the student's research mentor). These may or may not be the same faculty selected to serve on the student's dissertation committee. NOTE: if a student – in consultation with his/her advisor – feels unprepared to sit for the written exam according to this timetable, s/he may submit a petition in the form of a letter to the Graduate Affairs Committee requesting a one-year extension. The letter must justify the reason for the request and must be signed by the student and his/her advisor. If approved, the student must complete the written exam no later than the end of the fourth semester in residence.
		The examining committee will prepare three reading lists appropriate to the broad topic areas of the student's research interests. Generally, topic areas will be defined by the sections (CMR or EES), although other topics are possible as appropriate. Reading lists may be focused on coursework, seminal texts or primary literature, but should provide the necessary level of breadth and depth to prepare the student for the written exam.
	Spring semester	The student will receive a reading list from each member of the examining committee no later than February 1 of the second semester in residence.
		Written exams will be scheduled for the last week of the semester, after finals and before graduation. The exam will take place over the course of three consecutive days, with the order of topics determined by the committee. For each topic, the student will receive two questions from a member of the examining committee each day, and may choose which question to answer. For each question the student answers, s/he may use notes to prepare a written response which must be completed within a maximum six-hour period. The student will use a computer to prepare his/her responses, but internet access will not be permitted during the exam.
		The response to each question will be assessed by two committee members, one of whom assigned the original topic. The examiners will evaluate the student's work and assign a pass or fail grade. If there is no consensus between the two evaluators, the third examining committee member will review the student's response. After all examiners have evaluated their parts of the exam, the committee will meet to discuss the outcome. A student who successfully passes all three portions of the written exam may begin working on his/her dissertation proposal in preparation for the oral exam.
		A student who fails any portion of the exam will be allowed to retake that portion once. All retakes must be completed within a one-month time period. The specific question, while in the same general area, may not be the same as the original question. In the case of a second failure, the student will not be permitted to continue in the PhD program, but may petition to amend the program to a master's. The Graduate Affairs Committee will solicit the examining committee's recommendation to approve or reject such petition.