

The PhD Comprehensive Examination – Guidelines & Checklist

Students in the College of Nursing's PhD program will complete both a written and oral comprehensive examination. The examinations will be scheduled after successful completion of NURS 796A, and before the student begins work on the dissertation.

Written Comprehensive Examination

The written comprehensive exam covers both the major (substantive) and minor areas of study. The comprehensive examination, including both the written and oral examinations, must be completed before the final dissertation defense.

Written Comprehensive Examination Checklist

Done!	Task
	Successful completion of NURS 796A
	Attend RISE III (August)
	Comprehensive Exam Committee Meeting (scheduled by September 15 th) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review Plan of Study (major/minor content areas)• Ensure GradPath forms up to and including the Comprehensive Exam Committee Appointment Form are approved• Determine start date for the written examination
	Provide OSSCE (advanced@nursing.arizona.edu) with the start date of the written examination
	I have: a quiet space to work, dedicated time to complete the exam, and the resources I need!
	At the deadline: upload responses to PhD Portfolio & send to OSSCE (advanced@nursing.arizona.edu)

Written Examination Details

The written comprehensive exam page limit is **not to exceed 45 double-spaced pages, excluding references and title pages**, and other specific components to be negotiated with the chair.

PhD students who minor in Nursing will not have a separate written minor comprehensive examination. For the written examination, the Advisory Committee may select to either:

- Integrate minor content into one or more major areas (conventional substantive, theoretical and/or methodological questions), depending on the decision by the committee; or
- Construct a fourth question on the minor content. If there are 4 questions, then the 4 questions should be constructed to be an equivalent amount of work to be completed within 7 days.

PhD students with a minor outside of Nursing will continue to follow the requirements of the department responsible for the particular minor.

Preparation for the Written Examination

The student's comprehensive exam committee members confer with the student to review the student's plan of study. This meeting enables the committee to get a sense of the student's research interests, which will be used as a context for the examination. However, the examination is to be based on completed coursework, not the student's planned dissertation research. The committee members determine who will write the three questions (theory, substantive, method). Questions should require that students demonstrate the ability to synthesize relevant content and apply it within their own research context. Students may not use previously written manuscripts or papers in place of one or more of the written exam questions. The exam is coordinated by the chairperson of the comprehensive examination committee. The committee chairperson forwards the examination questions to OSSCE (advanced@nursing.arizona.edu) no less than 2 weeks prior to the exam start date in PDF format.

Scheduling the Written Examination

Prior to scheduling the written exam, the student must complete all forms in GradPath up to, and including, the Comp Exam Committee Appointment Form. Approval of this form is required to proceed with the comprehensive exam.

Students should schedule each part of the comprehensive examination only after conferring with their comprehensive exam committee. The student is responsible for contacting OSSCE (advanced@nursing.arizona.edu) at least 3 weeks prior to the exam start date to schedule.

Procedure for the Written Examination

The written comprehensive examination will take the form of a take-home examination. The student may elect to combine the major and minor into one written exam with the approval of their advisory committee (see above). The minimum length for each component of the major exam is 10 double-spaced pages. The student should negotiate the exam procedures/format with the minor department if outside of nursing and follow the procedures of the college providing the minor.

Taking the Written Examination

Students will have one period of 7 consecutive calendar days to complete all portions of the nursing written examination (nursing major and minor). OSSCE will email the PDF examination to the student on the morning they are expected to begin the exam. The student may contact the committee chairperson or designee with any questions regarding the examination. The student's written examination will take the form of a scholarly paper. The student should demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the extant literature; and both depth and breadth of knowledge will be evaluated. APA format is required with a complete reference list.

At the end of the 7-day written examination period, the student will submit their completed examination to the assignment dropbox in their PhD Portfolio in D2L. The student will combine each portion of the exam as one document (3 documents for students with an incorporated minor question, 4 documents for students with an independent minor) for submission to the PhD Portfolio. At the same time, the student should notify OSSCE (advanced@nursing.arizona.edu) and the committee chair that their exam has been submitted to D2L. The student should attach each individual document (3 documents for students with an incorporated minor, 4 documents for students with an independent minor) to the email to OSSCE. The Turnitin® feature is enabled for the PhD Portfolio dropbox, and all documents will be reviewed for an originality report upon submission.

Grading of the Written Examination

During the same business day in which the student submits their written examination to OSSCE & the PhD Portfolio, the committee chair will receive the following documents from OSSCE:

- The student's examination responses,
- The original examination questions,
- The individual committee member scoring sheet
- The summary results form.

The committee chair will verify that the student's exam papers are available in the PhD Portfolio in D2L and review the Turnitin® originality report. The committee chair also notifies the committee members that the examination is ready for grading. The committee chair forwards the following documents to the committee: student's examination responses, original examination questions, the individual committee member scoring sheet and the date & time the scores are due back to the chair. The committee has 10 business days to review and score the student responses. After the chair receives each committee member's score, the chair will have four business days to report the results to the student.

Each committee member has 10 business days to review and score the student's responses. The committee member sends one file containing each completed score sheet to the committee chair at the end of the 10-business day scoring period. The committee chair will calculate the average score. To successfully "pass" the major comprehensive examination, the total acceptable scores from each reader for each question are averaged. Passing is 80% or greater.

If the minor content is woven into one question, then the minor chair will also evaluate that question. If the minor content is a separate question, then the minor chair evaluates only that question.

Results of the Written Examination

The results are based on an average of the committee members' scores and will be reported in aggregate without specifying each member's individual score using the Summary Results Form. The chair will send the Summary Results Form to all committee members once prepared prior to notifying the student of the results. The chair must report the results in writing by email to the student no more than 14 business days after the exam due date. The chair will copy the committee and OSSCE (advanced@nursing.arizona.edu) on this email. This email must include: "pass" or "fail" results in the text of the email using the templates provided.

Once the student has been notified, OSSCE will send the committee chair the Official Results of the PhD Written Comprehensive Exam Form. The chair will reply to this email with individual committee member scoring sheets to be added to the student's electronic file. Concurrently, the committee chair will initiate circulation of the Official Results of the PhD Written Comprehensive Exam form by recording the results, any applicable comments and affixing their signature. The chair will circulate the form for all committee signatures. The committee chair will then send the completed Official Results of the PhD Written Comprehensive Exam form to OSSCE (advanced@nursing.arizona.edu) where the form is saved to the student's permanent file and entered into the PhD database.

Retaking the Written Examination

Students who do not pass the written examination may take an alternate version of the examination for the portions that were failed. The alternate examination must be taken no later than 3 months after the date of the first attempt. Failure to pass either the major or minor examination on the second try will result in the student's disqualification from the program.

Oral Comprehensive Examination

The oral comprehensive examination will be based on the student's plan of study, as well as addressing relevant questions related to course work foundational to the student's ability to conduct the dissertation.

Oral Comprehensive Examination Checklist

Done!	Task
	After passing the written exam, confer with committee chair to identify preliminary dates for oral exam
	Confirm date with comprehensive exam committee (Doodle poll)
	Provide OSSCE with the date of the exam (advanced@nursing.arizona.edu) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• In the email, note whether you (the student) will be on campus or attending via Zoom• Note whether a room reservation is requested by either student or committee. If requested, OSSCE will facilitate the reservation
	File the "Announcement of Doctoral Comprehensive Exam" form in GradPath – must be completed at least 10 days prior to the exam

Scheduling the Oral Examination

The oral examination must be taken within 3 months of successfully passing the written examinations. The student should consult with all members of their advisory committee to determine a date and time for the oral examination. At this time, the student and committee should establish whether the student will be physically on-campus to complete this milestone.

As soon as a date and time are agreed upon, the student must notify OSSCE via email (advanced@nursing.arizona.edu) so that a room may be reserved for the exam. The student should reserve the room at least 3 weeks in advance of the scheduled exam. Students who will complete the exam via Zoom must still reserve a room in the College of Nursing as required by the Announcement of Doctoral Comprehensive Exam form in GradPath. The committee chair (or one other member of the student's committee), at minimum, must be in attendance if the student is present in the College of Nursing for this milestone. If at least one member of the committee cannot be present, the exam should be rescheduled. In all cases, the Announcement form must be approved prior to the oral examination.

Taking the Examination

The oral examination will be conducted, either onsite or via Zoom, as arranged by the student and the advisory committee, following procedures put forward by the Graduate College. The oral examination will cover both major and minor emphasis areas and will require the student to demonstrate breadth of knowledge in the field, as well as depth of knowledge in the student's specialty area. Students may not use notes or other sources during the oral examination. The oral examination must be at least one hour in length. All committee members must be present for the entire examination.

The [Graduate College policy](#) is available for reference and download by both faculty and student at any time. The file includes faculty instructions on recording the results of the exam.

The examination is conducted in closed session. It is not open to the public. All members must be in attendance for the entire exam which should be at least one hour in length, but not exceed three hours. At the conclusion of the Oral Comprehensive Examination (and after the student has left the room), the committee initiates discussion of the student's performance. Each member of the examination committee is expected to evaluate the student's performance based on the examination, not just on a particular area of questioning or specialty area.

Results of the Oral Examination

A student passes or fails the Oral Comprehensive Examination. Regardless of outcome, the Chair must record the results of the exam (including results of the written exam) on the Results of Comprehensive Exam form in GradPath. The Chair will receive an email with a link to this form when the student's Announcement form is approved prior to the exam.

If the student fails, the Committee has two options which need to be noted in GradPath. The option to be followed is determined by a majority vote of the Committee.

- Option 1: Repeat the Oral Comprehensive Examination
- Option 2: The Committee votes not to recommend a repeat examination

Retaking the Oral Examination

The oral examination may be repeated once if not passed initially. Failure to pass the second attempt will result in the student's disqualification from the program. The re-examination, if approved, will take place upon recommendation of the committee. Oral comprehensive re-examination must occur within three months of the initial oral comprehensive exam. The committee may request a representative, designated by the Graduate College, to attend the oral comprehensive re-examination.

No further coursework is required from the student before a re-examination. If a re-examination is recommended, the committee members must be the same as those present at the initial examination. If changes are made in the composition of the examination committee, they must be approved by the Dean of the Graduate College prior to the examination.