

Preliminary Examination Guidelines

Th.D. Program



PREREQUISITES

To be eligible to take preliminary examinations, students must first:

- complete all required coursework. See “Coursework Guidelines,” <http://divinity.duke.edu/for-students/academic-resources/forms>;
- pass all required language competency exams. See “Language Exam Guidelines,” <http://divinity.duke.edu/for-students/academic-resources/forms>;
- assemble a preliminary examination committee and have its membership approved by the Th.D. director and oversight committee. See “Preliminary Examination Committee Approval Form,” <http://divinity.duke.edu/for-students/academic-resources/forms>.

PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION COMMITTEE

The student’s preliminary examination committee is normally made up of three to five faculty members, with the student’s principal advisor as chair.

- The student’s primary area of concentration should be reflected by the expertise of at least two members, the secondary area by at least one member.
- At least three members of the committee must be regular-rank faculty members in the Divinity School unless otherwise approved.
- The proposed committee list should be submitted for approval **by the middle of the student’s second year.**

TIMING OF EXAMS

Preliminary examinations should be taken **within six months of completing coursework**, optimally during Fall semester of the third year.

- Students registered for full-time study who have not completed preliminary examinations by the end of their third year must submit a letter to the Th.D. director explaining the delay and requesting an extension from the Th.D. oversight committee.
- Extensions will normally not be granted beyond the middle of the fourth year.

READING LIST

Students begin preparation for preliminary examinations by creating a reading list in consultation with their principal advisor and other members of the committee.

- This list of books, articles, and essays comprises the material for which the student is responsible and from which exam questions will be drawn.
- The largest portion of the list will reflect the student’s primary area of concentration, with smaller portions allotted to the secondary and dissertation areas.
- It is the student’s responsibility to make sure that all committee members have approved the reading list.

EXAM QUESTIONS

The principal advisor will submit a copy of all questions to the Th.D. administrative assistant, Diane Decker (ddecker@div.duke.edu), one week in advance of the first written examination.

COMPONENTS OF THE EXAMINATION

Written Exams: Preliminary examinations include at least three written exams:

- an exam in the primary area of concentration, ordinarily four hours in length
- an exam in the secondary area of concentration, ordinarily three hours in length
- an exam in the dissertation area, ordinarily three hours in length

These exams will be taken on campus in an assigned room. Students use a clean computer provided for the occasion by the Office of Academic Formation and Programs. After the exam, the student returns the computer to the Th.D. administrative assistant, who will download the exam and email it to the student and to the members of the student's preliminary exam committee. Paper copies are provided to committee members on request.

Oral Defense

An oral defense before the preliminary examination committee follows the written exams. All committee members must be present in person or participate by conference call. Students should confer with the chair regarding expectations for the oral exam. Committee members who have serious concerns about the written exams should notify the chair in advance of the oral defense.

SCHEDULING EXAMS

- Scheduling of all exams must be coordinated through the Th.D. administrative assistant, Diane Decker (ddecker@div.duke.edu).
- The written exams must be completed over the course of two weeks. They may be taken in any order and scheduled according to the student's preference and room availability.
- The oral defense should take place within two weeks of the last written exam.

PASSING AND FAILING EXAMS

For a three-person committee, passing requires at least three affirmative votes. For a four-person committee, at least three affirmative votes are necessary. For a five-person committee, at least four affirmative votes are required. In each case, the chair must vote affirmatively. A student may fail up to two written exams and, upon recommendation of the examining committee, retake these exams no sooner than three months after the oral defense. Students who fail three or more of their written exams, or who fail any exam a second time, will be dismissed from the program. In order for a student to pass exams on the second attempt, the committee's vote must be unanimous. See "Preliminary Examination Report," <http://divinity.duke.edu/for-students/academic-resources/forms>.

UPON COMPLETION OF PRELIMINARY EXAMS

Students should prepare and defend a dissertation proposal **within three months of passing preliminary examinations**. See "Dissertation Guidelines," <http://divinity.duke.edu/for-students/academic-resources/forms>.