

Comprehensive Exam Guide
Master of Science in Education,
Elementary Education and Secondary Education
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Tips on Preparing For and Taking Comprehensive Exam

The emphasis of the exam is on the application of skills and knowledge learned in the program to practical issues in teaching. Graduate comprehensive exams are closed book, and prepared notes are not allowed.

It is recommended that the candidate develop a plan describing what you need to respond to each question and then follow the plan. A four to eight (4–8) week study plan is employed by most graduate students. The length of study is dependant on your current level of knowledge and your current level of comfort to take the exam. To reduce your stress level prepare thoroughly for the exam.

Suggested General Study Tips:

1. Set up a schedule for your studying – early morning, lunch time, after dinner... Try to stick to your schedule.
2. Carefully review the pool of questions, as your questions will be randomly selected from the list.
3. For each question from the pool, write down key words, terms, theories, and theorists that could be used to build a strong response.
4. Study at a broad overview level rather than tiny details. The questions are broad with more than one reasonable mode of answering. A broad overview helps in synthesizing the material. This does not mean you should neglect detail in your exam answers. Details can add much to your answers by showing a real grasp of the material when integrated with more general explanations and examples.
5. Review your textbooks from your graduate courses; be aware of key issues and authors in the field.
6. Do not limit yourself to textbooks. Read journal articles and additional books on the materials that will be covered on the exam, remember their references.
7. Search the Internet for leaders in the field, but look for only reliable sources. Filter out information from unknown and possible unreliable sources.
8. Keep a three-ring binder with important documents in different sections for different topics and different courses. As you study each section, minimize your materials to only the key points you will use during your writing sessions.
9. Type up charts (or other types of visual summaries) for quick references whenever the information lends itself to this format (i.e. theorists, research). Use the Research Topics and Theorists list as needed.
10. Memorize all of your references and have a family member or friend quiz you on theorist names and dates, saying the names/dates aloud will help you memorize them. Use mnemonics as needed in the memorization process.

11. Make outlines on relevant information for each of the questions in the pool. You will begin to see how classes are interrelated, and how all topics complement each other.
12. Memorize the most important information within these outlines.
13. Be ready to cite a minimum of three relevant theorists/theories/literature (see rubric). This does not need to be exhaustive, but you should know major works in the field.
14. Apply relevant concepts from your course work to the question.
15. Practice writing responses, including timed writing sessions.
16. If you feel you need to strengthen your writing skills have someone with good writing skills (such as a High School English Teacher/Professor/Writing Center) go over a couple of your essays and give you feedback.
17. Grade your practice responses using the Teacher Education Comprehensive Exam Rubric.
18. Rewrite responses as needed to increase your rubric scores.
19. Join a study group if there is one in your area.
20. Talk to your advisor on study tips, research, and writing tips.
21. Talk to students who have taken the exam for study tips, research, and writing tips.
22. Before exam days get a good night's sleep and have a good breakfast.

Additional Things to Remember:

1. Sharpen skills needed for the exam session, including memorization (for references), writing, APA knowledge, and typing.
2. Follow your game plan to study for the exam - do not procrastinate!
3. Be calm – prepare yourself well enough through your studying that you are confident.
4. Be mentally prepared for the exams.
5. Always read the instructions and questions carefully: the greatest cause of failure is misreading either instructions or questions, not answering required questions, and not addressing all sub-questions embedded into a single question.
6. Deliberately use what you have learned in the program to answer the question. Do not give an answer that any reasonably well-informed citizen might give. Do not be afraid of controversy; you are better served taking a strong point of view and then defending it carefully than giving a bland answer that you think the faculty wants to hear.
7. Proofread carefully.
8. Use every minute of your time productively - do not leave early.

FINAL NOTE: STUDY.....STUDY.....STUDY.... AND THEN STUDY SOME MORE! DO NOT WALK INTO THE COMPREHENSIVE EXAM COLD – YOU MUST STUDY EXTENSIVELY IN ORDER TO PASS (30% - 50% of our students have to rewrite one or more questions and some even have to rewrite all comprehensive exam questions). You may have taken your courses from more than one university over several years. You are responsible for information learned in courses at other institutions for your Master's Degree. You may need to visit with the FHSU professor(s) who teach FHSU course equivalents for recommendations on how to study for specific topic areas and any differences between the class you took and what they will be expecting from you during the exams. Look at this as an opportunity to review everything you have learned, plus studying the latest trends and issues in the field. Challenge yourself to learn as much as possible about EVERYTHING you think might be on the exam. So, challenge yourself and be proud of what you are doing to better yourself. Good luck and happy studying!

Testing Day Information

Comprehensive exams are written for four hours on two consecutive days. You will reply to four questions each day. The questions will be randomly selected from the pool of questions. Day one questions will cover all of the topics listed in the table below.

Day One Question Topics and Alignment with Core Courses

Day One Question Topics	Core Course Alignment to Review in Preparation for Exam
Curriculum Planning and Evaluation	EAC 859 Curriculum Planning and Evaluation and TEEL 867 Instructional Design and Assessment
Educational Research	EAC 803 Education Research or SPED 800 Research
Theories of Learning	TEEL 845 Theories of Learning and EAC 801 Educational Sociology
Educational Technology	TECS 800 Intro. To Utilization of Technology in the Classroom Or TECS 805 Instructional Technology Theory and Practice
Diversity	All Core Courses SPED 880 Cultural Diversity

Day Two Question Topics and Alignment with Core Courses:

Day two questions topics will be developed from your action research project and/or your area of specialization.

Supplies Needed during Testing Days:

Materials you may bring –

- Dictionary
- Thesaurus

Materials Provided –

- Packet with your questions
- Paper for note taking
- Additional paper on request

Time Management Tips

Dedicate a block of time to plan, write, and edit. Plan **50 minutes per question** using your time wisely by structuring the writing process for success. Use the final **30 minutes** for the global final editing of all responses.

Suggested strategies include:

- Prewriting strategies
- Organizing your thoughts
- Outlining
- Essay writing including introduction, thesis, body and idea development, and conclusion
- Editing

Tips for Developing a Structured Game Plan:

Consider these tips as you develop your game plan for successfully writing your responses.

Your goals should include:

1. Write a minimum of five paragraphs that address the assigned topic
2. Write a well developed essay that is relatively free of major writing/editing errors
3. Manage your time efficiently and effectively

Break the writing process down into accomplishable tasks. Except where the question asks for your opinion or reaction, it is most appropriate to write in **third person**.

You will need to key in the last four digits of your **social security number in a header** at the top of each page of your response. **Number your pages and remember to save frequently.**

Step 1: Read the question carefully and determine the main topic, along with subtopics you are being asked to write about.

A. Prewriting Strategies – Generate ideas and a pattern of organization on the topic.

Strategies to support the flow of ideas for your response may include:

1. Concept Mapping
2. Webs
3. Clustering, etc.

Step 2: Establish a “working” thesis statement

- A. A thesis statement is – *The exact topic + your approach toward that topic*
- B. The thesis statement helps you establish the tone and direction for your writing.
- C. Thesis Checklist
 1. Does your thesis focus on a specific writing idea?
 2. Is the thesis stated in a clear, direct sentence (or sentences)?
 3. Can you support the thesis with enough information to effectively state your case?
- D. Does the thesis suggest a pattern of development for your essay?

Step 3: Brainstorm using concept mapping, webs, clustering, etc. to generate ideas that support your thesis.

- A. Organize your ideas into similar, or related, topics. You can label the topic with letters to cluster ideas (use key words/phrases only).
- B. Decide a logical order to present your ideas. You can use a numbering system to distinguish this order. Presentation order could include:
 1. Begin with the most important idea first and progress in your writing to your least important idea
 2. Begin with the least important idea first and move to the most important idea,
 3. Chronological Order (time-based order of events)
 4. Comparisons
 5. Cause/Effect
 6. Problem/Solution, etc.

(See the Comprehensive Evaluation Rubric– Organization and Presentation)

Step 4: Introduction and Developed Thesis Statement (1st Paragraph)

- A. Restate the question.
- B. Develop a strong introduction – set up for the reader the direction in which you will take your arguments.
- C. Make your thesis statement clear – defining your position in response to the question

- D. Develop topic sentences that support the thesis.
- E. You may choose to include anecdotal information relevant to the question or thesis statement.
- F. Preview the structure of the paper

Step 5: Body and Idea Development (3 to 4 Paragraphs)

- A. State your case in a manner that supports your position, use relevant facts appropriately and **accurately**.
- B. Use your content area background and applied research from your content area.
- C. Personalize your response by bring your own experience into your writing.
- D. Integrate your response pulling information from all your coursework. Include plenty of compelling evidence to support your thesis.
- E. Present each main point. Expand upon each main point with supporting facts, examples, research, theorists, etc.
- F. Demonstrate your **breadth of knowledge** to support your position, including at least three (3) references/citations of theoretical and research support.
- G. Demonstrate your **depth of knowledge** using relevant research/theorists to support your position. Go beyond brief surface statements and convince the reader that you truly know what you are talking about. Be detail oriented in your response.

Step 6: Writing the Closing

- A. Review and/or tie together important points in the essay, reinforce or stress one particular point, and/or reassert the thesis.
- B. What are the professional implications to consider?
- C. The closing's final lines may expand the scope of the text by making a connection between the essay and the readers' experience, or between the essay and life in general.
- D. Little to no new information should be added at this stage, although leaving the reader with something to think about can be appropriate.
- E. Other possible writing strategies could include:
 1. Use a relevant quote and briefly tie it back to the overall purpose of your essay.
 2. Create a scenario that will help the reader to remember and apply what your essay has advocated.
 3. Use a rhetorical question that will force the reader to think about what your essay has advocated.
 4. End with a call for action to resolve whatever issue you have presented.
 5. Use a rhetorical question that will force the reader to think about what your essay has advocated.
 6. Present a "worst case scenario" regarding what would likely happen if no action is taken.
 7. Present results or consequences of the problem, being careful not to add additional details.
 8. Refer the reader to other sources for additional information.

(See the Comprehensive Evaluation Rubric Categories –Accuracy of Information, Breadth of Knowledge, Depth of Knowledge)

Step 7: Revising and Editing

- A. Think globally at first – look for gaps in the overall development of your essay. Is your explanation, argument, or analysis complete? Do your basic parts work together and point to one main idea, your thesis?

- B. Then carefully examine each part of the essay. Does the opening paragraph draw readers into the essay and state your thesis? Have you supported each main point with effective examples, research, analysis, etc.? Does the closing tie up any loose ends and help readers appreciate the significance of your essay?
- C. Know your weak areas. If you have a tendency toward sentence fragments or are a bad speller, read through your essay slowly, looking for these mistakes.
- D. USE SPELL CHECK!
- E. Look at your entire essay more than once. You will be able to find and fix more that way.
- F. We are not expecting your writing to be absolutely faultless, but be careful not to make errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the content.

(See the Comprehensive Evaluation Rubric Categories – Writing Style and Mechanics of Writing)

Evaluation Process:

The comprehensive exams will be read by two or more of the Teacher Education faculty (other College of Education and Technology faculty may also review exam questions, especially questions in your area of specialization) and will be evaluated on the basis of content and form.

Procedure for Rewriting Failed Question Responses and Primary Reasons for Failing

The Teacher Education Department may require students to rewrite comprehensive exam questions that do not meet the approval of the faculty evaluators. Individual improvement plans and timelines will be developed by the student with their advisors to assist the student in preparation to rewrite their comprehensive exam questions at the next scheduled examination date.

Research Topics and Theorists

Relevant Theorists to Review for Citations (core questions):

Maslow	Piaget	Vygotsky	Gardner	Skinner	Tyler
Kagan	Gilford	Bloom	Boyer	Krashen	Bandura
Banks	Cushner	Toffler	Grant	Chomsky	Dewey
Gollnick	Kohlberg	Bennett	Sleeter	Friedman	Katz
Tiedt	Cummins	Nieto	Collier	Tharp	Terrell
Larson-Freeman		VanPatten	Oblinger	Iangukes	

Topics to cover for ESOL:

- *Pluralism and assimilation
- *Syntax and morphology
- *Assessment instruments
- *Research
- *Relationship between the native language/target language
- *ESOL methods
- *Semantics and phonology
- *Teaching strategies
- *Language proficiency level
- *Assess the target language
- *Linguistic and cultural barriers

Topics to cover for Library Media Specialists:

- *Administrative issues
- *Curriculum support techniques
- *Selection criteria
- *Organizational issues
- *Cataloging techniques
- *Policies
- *Technology application
- *Roles
- *Challenged materials issues
- *Procedures
- *Program development

Topics to cover for Reading Specialists:

- *Curricular Models
- *Vocabulary development strategies
- *Alphabetic principle
- *Word recognition strategies
- *Assessment instruments
- *Corrective reading strategies
- *Current reading research
- *National Reading Panel results and topics
- *Before, during and after reading comprehension strategies
- *Literature awards on all levels w/ current winning titles and authors
- *Writing Strategies
- *Vocabulary development strategies
- *Phonemic awareness
- *Assessment practices
- *Current research topics
- *Reading theories
- *Learned societies associated w/ reading

Relevant Reading Theorists for Citations:

- *Clay
- *Rosenblatt
- *Chall
- *Routman
- *Rasinski
- *Numerous authors and illustrators for young people
- *Goodman
- *Rosenblatt
- *Durkin
- *Manzo
- *Sulzby
- *Daniel
- *Graves
- *Flood
- *Pinnell
- *Fountas
- *Ogle
- *Person
- *Johns
- *Flynt
- *Raphael
- *Calkins
- *Fry
- *Cooter