University of Florida  
Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders  
Master’s Program in Speech-Language Pathology  
Guidelines for Comprehensive Examination

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I. Introduction
As required by the Graduate School of the University of Florida, all candidates for the M.A. degree must pass a comprehensive examination. In accordance with Graduate School guidelines, the examination must cover at least the candidate’s field of concentration and, in no case, may it be scheduled earlier than the term preceding the semester in which the degree is to be awarded. (Additional general information about comprehensive examinations is available in the University of Florida Graduate Catalog at www.ufl.edu).

The form of the comprehensive examination will vary according to whether M.A. candidates complete a thesis or non-thesis option.

II. Thesis and Non-Thesis Options
Prior to the end of the first semester of graduate study, the M.A. student in speech-language pathology must decide whether to pursue a non-thesis or thesis option in fulfillment of the comprehensive examination requirement. (See attached declaration form.) Students selecting the non-thesis option are required to pass a comprehensive written examination and make an oral case presentation to a panel of no less than two faculty members. Students selecting the thesis option are not required to take the comprehensive written examination or to make the oral case presentation. Instead, they must complete an acceptable thesis and successfully defend it in an oral examination.

III. M.A. Degree with Thesis
Students must receive faculty approval to pursue a Master’s thesis. The approval of a student for the thesis option is made by the faculty in the Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders and is based upon the student’s demonstrated aptitude for research-related activities as well as faculty members’ availability to supervise such activities.

A. During the first semester of graduate study: Students who are considering the thesis option should consult with the faculty member or members who specialize in the students’ area of research interest. During this semester, students also should begin to identify a potential topic for thesis research and determine whether the pertinent faculty member(s) is/are willing and available to provide mentorship. Students who have identified a potential faculty supervisor should submit to the Department’s Program Director a written formal request to pursue the thesis option. The faculty will then review this request and inform the student whether he or she is approved for the thesis option. At this point, the faculty and student will work together to form a thesis committee, which will consist of a committee chair (typically the professor with whom the student
will work most closely) and two other faculty members whose interests or expertise are related to the student’s research interests. At least one of the additional committee members must be from the faculty of the Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders. The student should also consider enrolling in SPA 6930: Proseminar to participate in discussions of research with doctoral students and other thesis students.

B. **During second semester of graduate study:** Students who have been approved for a thesis should complete the University of Florida Graduate School’s *Supervisory Committee Form* (copies available from the Department secretary in 336 Dauer Hall). Upon completing the form, the student should submit it to the Department secretary. At this time, the student should also provide the secretary with a tentative title for the thesis.

C. **During the summer semester following the first academic year of graduate study:** The student should enroll in at least 1 hour of thesis credit (SPA 6971). To register for the course, the student must obtain the appropriate section number from the Department secretary in 336 Dauer Hall.

D. **During all semesters following formation of the thesis committee:** The student should do the following:
   - Enroll in 1 hour of thesis credit (a minimum of three credits total is necessary)
   - Consult regularly with the thesis committee chair
   - Provide the thesis committee chair with materials that document progress on the thesis.

E. **During the final semester of graduate study:** The student should:
   - Obtain a copy of the Graduate School booklet describing procedures for typing and submitting a thesis.
   - Enroll in at least one hour of thesis credit (SPA 6971). To register for the course, the student must obtain the appropriate section number from the Department secretary in 336 Dauer Hall.
   - Complete the thesis in consultation with the committee chair.
   - Present a synopsis of the thesis at Clinic Meeting/Grand Rounds or some other suitable forum. (The student should schedule a date for the presentation by contacting the faculty member who coordinates the Clinic Meeting/Grand Rounds early in the semester during which he or she plans to present. With the committee chair’s approval, the presentation may be done even if the written portion of the thesis is not yet complete.
   - Schedule an oral defense of thesis. The student is responsible for obtaining information about various deadlines for the oral defense from Graduate School). The student also is responsible for providing each committee member with a final copy of thesis at least ten working days prior to the defense. The faculty member who has supervised the thesis serves as the chair of the examining committee. The content of the oral examination primarily will concern issues related to the student’s thesis; however, related topics from the student’s program of study might also be addressed. The student and/or supervising faculty member will post a notice of the time and date of the oral examination, and the
examination is open to attendance by individuals other than the student and committee members.

- Upon completion of the oral examination, the examination committee will decide whether the student has performed satisfactorily and will formulate a statement that describes its assessment of the candidate’s potential for doctoral study. This statement is presented to the faculty of the Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders and, with their approval, is placed in the student’s permanent record within the Department. The faculty can consider this evaluation when deciding whether the student should be admitted to the doctoral program, if the student applies.

- If the committee has determined the student’s oral examination is satisfactory, the student should have committee members sign the yellow examination form (available from the Department secretary in 336 Dauer Hall) and the final copy of the Signature Page. The student should then return the yellow examination form to the Department secretary in 336 Dauer Hall.

- The student should then submit a copy of the thesis to the Graduate School, where it will be checked for format. Before a student submits the thesis to the Graduate School, he or she should be certain to address the specific formatting requirements. The student also should pay close attention to the deadlines that the Graduate School has set for submitting, correcting, and resubmitting the thesis.

- Complete the Exit Interview with Graduate Coordinator at the time announced and following published procedure.

**IV. M.A. Degree without thesis**

**A. General Information**

M.A. students who pursue the non-thesis option must complete a written, comprehensive examination and make an oral case presentation to a panel of no less than two faculty members. The comprehensive examination is designed to provide a broad and intensive assessment of M.A.-level students’ academic and clinical preparation in all areas within speech-language pathology. It also assists students in preparing for the Praxis Series Specialty Area Test in Speech-Language Pathology. The Praxis examination is developed and owned by the Educational Testing Service (ETS). A passing score on the Praxis examination is necessary to attain ASHA’s Certificate of Clinical Competence (CCC) in speech-language pathology. For more information on the Praxis examination visit ASHA’s website at [http://www.asha.org/certification/praxis/](http://www.asha.org/certification/praxis/).

M.A. students who pursue the non-thesis option must also successfully complete an oral “grand rounds” presentation, which will take place near the start of the semester before clinical externship. The student will select a hypothetical case from a pool of cases submitted by faculty members. The student will have a brief period to review the case and answer the designated questions. Additional details are presented below.

**B. General Format, Times, and Dates for Written Comprehensive Exam**
The M.A. written comprehensive examination takes place over the course of one day. It is offered once in the fall semester and once in the spring semester. The examination typically is not offered in the summer semester. Students should take the exam toward the end of the semester before their externship. For most graduate students, this will be the fall semester of the second year in the program.

Exact start and finish times will vary somewhat from semester to semester, but the general format will be something like this:

- 8:30 a.m. to 12:00 noon – Respond to three or four questions (~ 50 to 70 minutes per question)
- 12:00 noon to 12:50 p.m. – Break for lunch
- 1:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. – Respond to three or four questions (~ 50 to 70 minutes per question)

- The spring examination date is reserved for (a) those students who do not follow the customary course sequence (e.g., those who majored in something other than speech-language pathology as an undergraduate), (b) those students who will graduate in either the summer or fall semesters, and (c) those students who did not pass the examination during the fall semester and need to retake it.

- The faculty will notify students of the date, time, and location for the examination well in advance of the actual exam date.

C. Examination Content for Comprehensive Exam

Faculty, staff, and adjunct faculty associated with the Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders will prepare the questions that appear on the written examination. As its name implies, the examination covers a broad range of academic, clinical, and professional issues dealing with normal, nonstandard, and disordered aspects of speech-language production and swallowing, as well as information pertaining to research methods and interpretation.

- Questions dealing with normal aspects of development may include the following areas: speech anatomy and physiology, speech science (which includes the acoustics of speech sound production and the perception of speech), normal speech and language development, as well as aspects of racial and cultural diversity.

- Questions dealing with speech-language pathology may include the following areas: fluency disorders, voice disorders, articulation/phonological disorders, swallowing disorders, child language disorders, reading and written language disorders, acquired language and cognitive disorders, augmentative and alternative communication, and craniofacial disorders.

- Some questions may incorporate issues related to professional ethics, professional practice, and research methods.

The content for the questions will be drawn from the various core academic courses that M.A. students have taken as well as other courses such as Clinician’s Meeting, Research Methods, applied clinical courses, and clinical internships and externships. Broadly speaking,
the examination will reflect the knowledge and skills outcome statements that the
Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders has developed. (See course syllabi.)
Students who have retained textbooks, handouts, supplementary readings, class project
materials, and so forth, from their courses should not need to collect or purchase any other
materials to prepare for the examination.

Students will be given one or more questions relating to several different content areas (e.g.,
Voice, Fluency, Ethics). From the set of content areas, students must respond to a specified
subset (e.g., 6 of 8 areas, 7 of 9 areas). In this way, students have some choice in determining
the areas that they will address.

Questions dealing with speech-language pathology may be presented in "case study" format.
That is, students may be presented with some details about a child or adult, and then will be
asked to answer a question(s) dealing with procedures involved in the assessment and
treatment of the case.

Students requesting classroom accommodation must first register with the Dean of Students
Dean of Students office will provide documentation to the student, who must then provide
this documentation to the Program Director when requesting accommodation. Such
documentation must be presented at least one month prior to the scheduled date for the
examination.

D. Grading Procedures for Comprehensive Exam

Students’ responses to each of the questions will be reviewed by at least one primary reader.
Primary readers may be faculty, staff, or adjunct faculty associated with the Department of
Communication Sciences and Disorders. Except in unusual circumstances (e.g., faculty
sabbatical), the faculty member who writes and grades questions for a content area will be
the individual who taught the course(s) related to the content area.

Responses to each content area are graded on the following descriptive scale: Fail, Low Pass,
Pass, High Pass. These descriptive grades are then converted to a numerical score, i.e., Fail
= 0, Low Pass = 1, Pass = 2, High Pass = 3. Students’ grades across the content areas are
averaged. Thus, the average score for all comprehensive examination responses can range
from 0 to 3. Four outcomes are possible for the comprehensive examination.

- **Pass.** Students who attain an average response score of 2.0 or greater and receive
descriptive grades of Low Pass or above on all responses are considered to have
passed the comprehensive examination.

- **Incomplete examination.** Students who receive a grade of Low Pass or above on all
responses, but have an average response score below 2.0 are considered to have an
incomplete examination. These students must then schedule an “oral examination”
within two weeks of grade notification. At the oral examination, the student will be
asked to defend or elaborate upon all written responses that received a grade of Low
Pass. The oral examination component will be graded on a “pass/fail” basis. If the
faculty determines that the student has “passed” the oral component of the
examination, the student is then considered to have met the comprehensive
examination requirement. If the faculty determines that the student has “failed” the
oral component of the examination the student will rewrite the question within two weeks of the date of the oral component of the examination.

- **Fail one or two content areas:**
  - Responses that are assigned a grade of *Fail* will be assigned to a second reader for grading. When the first and second readers disagree on their ratings, they then will discuss their differences until they arrive at a consensus. Inter-reader agreement is needed before a student is assigned a failing grade on a particular question.
  - If the student fails one or two content areas on the written comprehensive examination, s/he must complete additional study and/or readings and re-write the answer to the failed content area(s) within one month of the original examination. Students will be allotted up to 90 minutes per content area for the re-writes. Failed responses must be re-written even if the students’ average response score is above 2.0.
  - If the student receives a “Fail” grade for any rewritten content area, s/he may be required to complete additional remedial work and re-take the failed area(s) when the comprehensive examination is offered the following semester. The professor whose question was failed will determine remedial steps. Remedial steps may include, but are not limited to, the following: (a) retaking courses in the failed area, (b) completing readings in the failed area, or (c) completing individual directed research or study in the failed area.
  - Note that a student’s graduation date and/or ability to commence a clinical externship may be affected (i.e., moved to a later date) when such remedial action is necessary.

- **Fail more than two content areas:**
  - A student who fails more than two content areas on the written comprehensive examination is considered to have failed the entire examination. In such cases, the student must complete remedial work (described in the section above) and then re-take the entire comprehensive examination the following semester.
  - If a student fails 1 or 2 content areas of the retaken examination, the student must rewrite these questions following the procedures outlined in the section 1, above.
  - If the student fails three or more content areas on the retaken examination, the students will not receive credit for the written comprehensive examination and will not be allowed to graduate from the program until the examination is completed satisfactorily.
  - Note that a student’s graduation date and/or ability to commence a clinical externship may be affected (i.e., moved to a late date) when such remedial action is necessary.
B. General Format, Times, and Dates for Oral Case Presentation

C. General Format, Times, and Dates for Oral Case Presentation

Introduction: A case presentation is required of all Master’s SLP students. Typically, you will complete your case presentation at the middle of the second-to-last semester (i.e., the semester before the externship). You will be asked to randomly draw a case description, then prepare a presentation of your approach to testing and/or treating the described case. You will present this information before a panel of no less than two faculty members. Faculty members may ask you to elaborate upon or defend specific clinical decisions you have made. The presentation is intended to help the faculty assess the development of your clinical skills and your ability to present clinical information to others.

Dates: Presentations will be done over the course of a few weeks during your second fall semester. A sign-up sheet will be posted outside Mrs. Vinson’s office. You will sign up for one time slot.

Focus and Length of Presentation: The entire presentation should take no more than 20 minutes. The oral portion of your presentation should last between 10 to 15 minutes. This will be followed by about 5 to 10 minutes of discussion with the faculty.

Content: The case presentation project is designed to assess your ability to:

(1) Summarize background information about the client, including pertinent test results and therapy history.

(2) Describe the components of the assessment battery or the treatment goals/objectives that you developed for the client. Be sure to state your rationale for each clinical procedure.

(3) Describe the outcome of your clinical activity. If you report on an assessment, describe also the treatment recommendations, referrals, etc. that could be expected to follow the testing. If you report on a treatment plan, describe the methods you would use to (a) improve the client’s communication and (b) assess treatment effectiveness. If possible, base your suppositions on published reports of treatment outcomes for similar cases.

(4) Be able to support your clinical decision-making with evidence you have learned during your academic and clinical education. (This component is important, so think about it carefully.)

Format: Presentations should be done orally, in a conversational format. In other words, do not read a prepared paper to your audience.

Evaluation: The faculty will grade your performance on a pass/fail basis. With either outcome, the faculty panel will offer feedback concerning the clarity, accuracy, and completeness of your presentation and how it reflects upon the development of your clinical decision-making skills. Recommendations for improving this aspect of clinical practice may be provided as well. In some cases, the faculty may recommend that you schedule a second presentation later during the same semester to address weaknesses that were identified in the first presentation.
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Due in Mrs. Vinson’s mailbox by December 1

Your name _________________________  Date __________________________

I am intending to the pursue the:

___________  Non-Thesis Option

(Students who pursue the non-thesis option must take the Department’s written comprehensive exam toward the end of the semester prior to when they plan to graduate.)

___________  Thesis Option

(By now, students who intend to pursue the Thesis Option should have identified a potential mentor for the project. Your request to do a thesis will be reviewed by the faculty. If your request is approved, you should enroll in 1 credit of Master’s Thesis research next semester.)

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Signature