

Dept. of English & Comparative Literature, SJSU

NEW MA EXAM GUIDELINES

The Department of English & Comparative Literature has adopted a new format for the MA comprehensive exam. The new exam will go into effect in Fall 2020. The old exam will be discontinued and not be offered after Spring 2020.

The new MA exam has two parts, both written. Both parts will be offered once each semester. Dates will be announced in advance in the [Graduate Newsletter](#).

You must sign up for the exam by emailing the graduate coordinator:

Revathi.krishnaswamy@sjsu.edu

Deadline to sign up for Fall semester exam: **May 1**

Deadline to sign up for Spring semester exam: **Dec 1**

You must pass both parts in order to pass the comprehensive exam as a whole.

Part 1: An in-class timed exam (90-120 minutes) to be taken at the end of English 297. You must take the exam even if you register for thesis units instead of English 297. English 297 is typically offered only in the Fall semester; you should therefore plan to take the class and the exam in the fall. The exam alone will be offered in the spring semester as needed.

The part 1 exam will have two sections:

Section A-- literary terms (50%)

Section B -- poetry analysis (50%)

Section A will be based on [this list of literary terms](#). You will be expected to demonstrate your knowledge of the terms, including definitions, history, usage, applicability, implications, contestations, and limitations. Questions will be in multiple-choice format. See sample questions at the end of literary terms list.

Section B will be an essay involving close-reading and critical analysis of poetry. You will be expected to demonstrate ability to explicate a poem, displaying knowledge of poetic forms and understanding of poetic devices. See [scoring criteria here](#).

You must score a minimum of 80% total to pass Part 1. If you score below 80%, you may retake the Part 1 exam once. Failure to score at least 80% in the second attempt will compute as Fail on the comprehensive exam as a whole and result in termination of the MA degree.

Part 2: Three take-home essays, one in each area from the groups listed below. Exam questions will be based on the area reading list. [Reading lists for each area and sample questions are available here](#). Examiners will assume that you have read all the works in the list and will frame questions accordingly.

You will be able to choose one of two questions in each area. Essays must demonstrate in-depth knowledge of the period and the texts included in the list as well as ability to critically analyze and interpret the texts using close reading or textual evidence, and field-appropriate vocabulary or terminology. Avoid using secondary sources or other materials unless they are required or recommended in the list. Original thinking will be valued more highly than ideas derived from secondary sources. See detailed [scoring rubric here](#).

The take-home exam will be generally scheduled in the fourth or fifth week of the semester. Dates will be announced in advance in the [Graduate Newsletter](#). You will be given a 4-day period (Fri 9 am – Mon 5 pm) to write and submit your essays.

You will follow instructions and submit your essays in Canvas, where it will be automatically checked for plagiarism by Turnitin before being graded by two faculty experts in the area. As per the university's [Academic Integrity Policy](#), plagiarism in any one of the three essays will automatically result in a Fail grade on the exam as a whole. Plagiarism may also lead to placement on probation pursuant to disqualification from the MA program.

The minimum required to pass Part 2 is Two Pass essays and one Low Pass essay (see **rubric**). If you score a Fail in one or more essays, you will get a second chance to take the failed area(s); failure to earn a Pass on the second attempt will compute as Fail on the comprehensive exam as a whole and result in termination of study toward the MA degree.

Choose **ONE** Area from each Group.

Group A

European Classical & Medieval Literature

British & American Literature - Early Modern & Neoclassical (17th-18th C)

Group B

British & American Literature - Romanticism to Modernism (Long 19th c)

British & American Literature – 1900 to Present

Multiethnic American Literature

20th & 21st C World/Global Literature

Group C

Literary Theory & Criticism

Rhetoric & Composition

(updated 2/29/20)