

Qualifying Examination

The Qualifying Examination is completed after the student has completed and fulfilled all coursework requirements, which generally happens during the third year of study. The exam is intended to gauge the depth of knowledge, evaluate the ability to think critically, and to assess the student's skill at presenting ideas and arguments persuasively.

Qualifying Examination Committee

The Qualifying Examination Committee is comprised of three full-time Washington University faculty members who are authorized to supervise PhD students and have appropriate expertise in the proposed field of study. The chair of the committee will typically hold a primary appointment in Otolaryngology. The membership of the committee must be approved by PACS at least three months prior to the scheduled exam. Students should submit the request for committee memberships by email to pacs@wustl.edu. This request should include the date of the request, student's name, committee chair, other committee members, and any relevant comments. This Committee may also serve as the student's Research Advisory Committee during the dissertation phase.

Examination Format

The student will complete a written paper, similar in format to the type submitted to journals, followed by an oral defense of that paper in front of the Qualifying Examination Committee. This is completed in two phases.

- 1) Students develop the written paper, which provides a review of the literature related to two research questions (identified by the student) within the student's area of specialization. While the goal of the Qualifying Examination is to lead the student to a proposal for a dissertation research project, the topics(s) of the examination can expand beyond the scope of the future dissertation, with advance approval from the student's mentor.
- 2) A one-hour oral defense will be conducted after the written portion and will focus on topics either covered in the written portion or directly related to topics covered.

Guidelines: Timing and Scheduling

It is the student's responsibility to initiate and schedule both parts of the Qualifying Examination.

- 1) 3-6 months before the desired written exam due date, the student should work with their mentor to form the Qualifying Examination committee. (See Qualifying Examination Committee section.)
- 2) Once the committee has been formed, the student should submit a request for approval of their Qualifying Examination Committee to the PACS Office (see Qualifying Examination Committee section).
- 3) Once the committee has been formed and approved, the student should develop a reading list and outline for the written portion, both of which should be submitted to, and approved by, each individual member of the committee. (See Guidelines: Feedback Prior to Defense section.)
- 4) The student should also identify a date by which the written portion will be submitted (generally no more than 3-6 months from the date the reading list and outline have been approved by the committee members).
- 5) An oral defense should also be scheduled by the student for approximately 2-3 weeks after the date the written portion is due to the Committee. The PACS Office can assist with reserving a location for the oral exam, if needed.
- 6) When the oral defense has been scheduled, the student should notify the PACS Office at pacs@wustl.edu of the confirmed date, time, and location. **This must be received at least one month before the due date of the written portion.**

Guidelines: Creating Written Paper

For **each** of the two research questions, the written paper should include the following:

- 1) Scope of topic/question
- 2) Review of pertinent literature
- 3) Scientific importance
- 4) Key threads or gaps in the literature
- 5) Reading list
- 6) Annotated bibliography that includes key authors and papers that you have been studying and/or are relevant to your specific areas/topics

Guidelines: Feedback Prior to Defense

Students should submit their reading list and outline to each member of their committee for approval at the start of the process. Students may discuss the idea and get feedback on both from both committee members and peers before submitting the document in final form. If, in the course of reading and preparing the written paper, the student feels that the outline should change substantively, they should discuss this with their committee members.

Formal feedback on the written portion should not occur prior to submission of the document; committee members should only provide feedback on the document formally submitted to the committee for the written portion of the exam.

Criteria for Passing and Admission to Candidacy

At the conclusion of the examination, the committee members will discuss your performance and arrive at a recommendation that can include pass, conditional pass, and fail. This recommendation should be submitted to the PACS Office to pacs@wustl.edu in writing by the Committee chair.

In the event of a conditional pass, the committee will recommend the additional requirements that must be satisfied to achieve passing performance (e.g., a paper). In the event of a failed examination, the committee will recommend the remedial steps necessary before the exam can be taken again. Other than in exceptional circumstances, a retake of the exam should occur within three months of the first exam. Regardless of its form, the qualifying examination must be completed successfully before any work on the dissertation may begin.

Upon passing of the examination, the student will be admitted to candidacy for the PhD and may begin work on the dissertation and notification will be sent for notation on the student's official record.