

Département de communication / Department of Communication

Examen de synthèse (CMN 9998) / Comprehensive Exam (CMN 9998)

Departmental Guidelines

The comprehensive examination is taken after the student has successfully completed 12 credits, that is to say after Year 1, before the doctoral seminar CMN 8902 (fall semester of the 2nd year). As a general rule, the comprehensive exam is to be completed over a period of four months (May to August).

The comprehensive exam questions are related to the student's broader field of research rather than the specific topic chosen for the thesis. The comprehensive exam is designed to assess the extent to which the student has acquired an in-depth knowledge of the fundamental theoretical, methodological or epistemological underpinnings of the field of communication.

The general objectives of the comprehensive exam are to assess the student's: a) knowledge of the field of communication; b) ability to select, interpret and synthesize key theories and concepts in communication; c) ability to position herself or himself as a researcher; and (d) ability to express her or his ideas clearly both in writing and orally.

The comprehensive examination committee is composed of two professors (identified in consultation with the thesis supervisor) plus the thesis supervisor her- or himself. The supervisor does not participate in the evaluation process during the written or oral parts of the exam. It should be noted that examination committee members, approved by the graduate studies committee, will automatically sit on the student's thesis committee.

The three members of the comprehensive examination committee are responsible for selecting materials for the reading list, which will cover the most salient publications pertaining to the student's broader field of study. As a general rule, it should be made up of some 50 academic entries (references) published in English or French. The reading list is approved by the department's graduate studies committee before being passed on to the student.

There are two parts to the Comprehensive Exam:

- 1) A written component and
- 2) An oral defense

The student must successfully pass both components of the comprehensive exam in order to proceed to the next stage of the program, i.e. the doctoral seminar (CMN 8902).

1) Written component:

Members of the exam committee each submit two questions and the thesis supervisor one — for

a total of five questions. All five questions are derived from the reading list.

Once the questions are formulated, the thesis supervisor forwards them to the graduate studies committee, which approves them and returns them to the examination committee, with feedback from the director of graduate studies. The examination committee selects a mandatory question and, on May 15th, forwards the list to the student, who chooses the second question out of the remaining four. The student then answers each question in a separate 25-page paper (or 7000 words for each paper, excluding the bibliography and table of contents) to be submitted by June 15th (to the graduate academic assistant).

Please note that all students will receive their finalized reading list and the list of questions at the same time so that all have the same amount of time to read the given works and write their responses.

The two questions are evaluated by the two members of the comprehensive exam committee who then submit their written evaluation by August 1st (to the graduate academic assistant), recommending, or not, to move on to the oral defense. In order to proceed to the oral defense, the student must have received a grade of SATISFACTORY on both questions.

- 1) Should the student receive a grade of UNSATISFACTORY, the student must register for a resit where one or two new questions (from the remaining three) will be assigned, following the same principle as above. A first UNSATISFACTORY grade (NS) will be officially recorded on the student's transcript.
- 2) During the resit, should any of the new questions receive a grade of UNSATISFACTORY, the student must withdraw from the program.
- 3) During the evaluation process of the written component, should an UNSATISFACTORY decision be submitted by only one of the two evaluators, that evaluator must explain her or his decision in writing and submit it to the graduate studies committee, which will make the final decision.

2) Oral defense:

When the evaluation of the written component of the comprehensive exam is SATISFACTORY, the thesis supervisor coordinates a date and time for the oral defence, preferably before August 15th. The student will have 15 minutes to make a formal oral presentation of his/her written answers and this will be followed by a 60 to 90-minute period of questioning by the comprehensive exam committee. Questions can be asked in French or in English, and the student may answer in the official language of her or his choice. After the oral defence, members of the committee (with the exception of the thesis supervisor) will deliver their decision (SATISFACTORY or UNSATISFACTORY).

The general evaluation criteria for the entire examination (written and oral part) are as follows:

- Quality of the writing, articulation between the ideas, rigor of the argumentation, originality (authorship);
- In-depth knowledge of the topics covered and ability to draw links between concepts;
- Ability to fully engage in communication debates;
- Ability to critically examine the different theoretical, methodological or epistemological issues of the discipline.