



## M.A. Comprehensive Examination

The following pages will familiarize you with an important event in your efforts to attain a Master of Arts degree in English at La Sierra: the M.A. Comprehensive Exam.

### Exam Description:

At the end of your program, you must satisfactorily complete a **comprehensive examination over English and American literature**. The material covered on the exam is not limited to texts, authors, or periods covered during your course work. Instead, the exam is comprised of material deemed essential to a broad knowledge of the discipline at the graduate level by the current faculty members of the department.

Your faculty encourage you to read outside of your class assignments on a regular basis, and more intensively during breaks between quarters, in order to augment your knowledge of the canon of English and American literature in preparation for taking the exam. Your exam responses may reflect both in-class and out-of-class reading

### Exam Format:

The format of the exam is regularly adjusted by the graduate advisor, in consultation with the entire department, to better reflect the goals of the MA in English program. Any information provided to you about previous tests should not be assumed to indicate precisely how future exams will be written. The following three pages, however, will provide a sense of how the exam operated last year, which will likely parallel this year's exam.

### Exam Grading

The English Department faculty will each read all sections of your exam, marking each with a tentative grade. Faculty then meet to discuss the exams and collectively determine section grades using the following scale:

HP = High Pass

P	= Pass
LP	= Low Pass
NI	= Needs Improvement

## Exam Retakes

Students receiving an NI on one or more sections of the Exam will need to retake those sections, typically within a few months.

## Sample MA Comprehensive Exam Format

The M.A. Comprehensive Exam consists of seven sections, taken over two days (normally the Friday and Sunday of Memorial Day weekend), as indicated below:

	TIME	SECTION	LENGTH	TOPIC
<b>Friday</b>	9 am	A	3.5 hours	Authors / Titles / Dates
		B		Literary Terms
		C		Literary Period
<b>Friday</b>	2 pm	D	3 hours	Methods & Materials
		E		CWIs Only – Comp/ Rhet
<b>Sunday</b>	9 am	F	4 hours	Theme
		G		Genre

Sections C – G are essays.

The following pages provide more information regarding the components of the Exam, often using language similar to the Exam's actual instructions.

## Periods of literature in English

The designations below are used throughout the M.A. Comprehensive Exam to identify the major periods of English-language literature. Students completing Section A should use these designations in assigning approximate dates for authors and works. The three periods in Section C will come from the 11 listed below.

Eng med	Old/Middle English (600-1500)
Ren/17 <sup>th</sup>	Renaissance/Seventeenth Century (1500-1660)
Rest/18 <sup>th</sup>	Restoration/18th Century (1660-1798)
Eng Rom	Romantic (1798-1832)
Eng Vic	Victorian (1832-1901)

Eng 20 <sup>th</sup>	Twentieth Century English
Early Am	Early American (1620-1820)
Am Rom	American Romantic (1820-1865)
Am Real	American Realism (1865-1900)
Am 20 <sup>th</sup>	Twentieth Century American
World	World literature (any period)

### Day 1: Part 1 [3.5 hours]

#### Section A: Identification of Authors, Periods, Titles

*Instructions:* Fill in at least 50 [of 60] spaces, providing periods, authors, or titles as indicated by the blanks [about 35 works / authors will be provided, using a three-column format as shown below]. Please write in the name of the period using the abbreviations provided [see page 6]. For titles, you may use any major work by the author.

Date by period (use the period demarcations provided)	Title of work (any work by the author when blank will suffice)	Author's name (Please provide the full name as much as possible. "Anonymous" is a possible correct answer.)
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#### Section B: Definition and Examples of Literary Terms

*Instructions:* Briefly define at least fifteen [out of twenty] of the following terms in a literary, critical, or rhetorical context and give an example or application to support your definition. Examples can be generated or recalled. Type your answers in the boxes at the right allowing your word processor to expand the boxes to provide the necessary space.

Term	
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#### Section C: Discussion of a Literary Period

*Instructions:* Choose one of the periods listed below. Write an essay in which you

- Discuss the period's literary characteristics in relationship to its major historical events and/or social trends;
- Consider and analyze three texts by three authors that exemplify the characteristics of the period you are describing;
- Position the chosen period between its previous and succeeding periods; your discussions of the previous and succeeding periods should each be no more than 25% of your essay.

*Sample Period Options:* [see page 2]

## Day 1: Part 2 [3 hours]

### Section D: Methods and Materials of Research in English

1. *Defining Textual Criticism Terms:* Select ONE pair of terms (either "a." or "b." below). Define the terms in relationship to one another. Suggest ways that the issues represented by these terms might play a role in a literary research project. You can address both terms in a single short answer response.
  - a. Term 1
  - b. Term 2
2. *Defining Edition Terms:* Select ONE pair of terms (either "a." or "b." below). Define the types of literary editions, distinguishing between them in content and purpose. Suggest a research project for each type of edition (or a joint project that might use both). You can address both terms in a single short answer response.
  - a. Term 1
  - b. Term 2
3. *Essay Question:* Read [the passage provided] by [its author]. Taking into consideration its content, style, period, and what you can surmise about the author, write an essay in which you describe the process you would go through to do research on this poem. Suggest a possible topic and title for the paper you would write.

### Section E: Rhetoric and Composition (required of CWIs only)

*Instructions:* Write an essay in which [you respond to composition theory / theorists and practical applications of theory to the classroom]. Please do reference your own classroom experience to illustrate how you have applied the theorist's ideas.

Day 2: Part 3 [4 hours]

## Section F: Theme Essay

*Instructions:* Pick one theme from the list below and write an essay in which you

- Define and expand upon the theme in your own terms (i.e., you may wish to narrow or broaden the concept as described);
- Specify how and why the chosen theme changes or remains consistent over time and in the hands of different authors;
- Discuss at least two periods, two authors, and two genres, being sure to justify the choices of periods, authors and genres you make

*Sample themes:* (six themes will be provided to choose from)

The Domestic Sphere

God and Man

The Revenge Motif

Section G: Genre Essay {*NOTE: This section revised for Spring 2015*}

*Instructions:* Choose one of the genre: sub-genre combinations listed below and write an essay in which you

- Define the major characteristics of the genre;
- Provide a brief history of the development of the genre in English;
- Examine the place of the sub-genre within the genre;
- Discuss the development of the sub-genre over time and in the hands of different authors;
- Reference and differentiate three literary works that exemplify the sub-genre.

The exam topics will be chosen from the following genre: sub-genre pairs; the exam will contain one drama sub-genre, one poetry sub-genre, and three fiction sub-genres.

Drama: comedy

Drama: tragedy

Drama: farce

Drama: melodrama

Poetry: epic

Poetry: lyric

Poetry: narrative

Poetry: dramatic

monologue

Fiction: short story

Fiction: novel of manners

Fiction: picaresque novel  
Fiction: mystery  
Fiction: historical  
Fiction: gothic

Fiction: science fiction  
Fiction: epistolary  
Fiction: realism

## Notes on writing the exam:

- While the exam is not a test of your writing skills, your readers will enjoy seeing your writing at its best; revise your work carefully to express yourself with clarity, conciseness, and correctness
- Since sections C through G involve writing essays, create good titles that will focus your reader's attention
- When discussing literary works, avoid summarizing, and instead analyze them

## Selected Recommended Reading in World Literature

While no list should be viewed as complete, the following lists classic and modern texts in "World Literature," works written in a language other than English but readily available through English translations:

### **World Literature**

Homer: *Iliad, Odyssey*

Sophocles: *Oedipus Rex*

Euripides: *Medea*

Plato: *The Republic*

Virgil: *The Aeneid*

Dante: *The Divine Comedy*

Boccaccio: *Decameron*

Cervantes: *Don Quixote*

Goethe: *Faust*

Voltaire: *Candide*

Flaubert: *Madame Bovary*

Tolstoy: *War and Peace*

Dostoevsky: *Crime and Punishment*

Ibsen: *Hedda Gabler, A Doll's House*

Chekhov: *Short Stories*

Kafka: "The Metamorphosis"

Camus: *The Stranger*

Proust: *Remembrance of Things Past*

## Suggested 2-year Comprehensive Exam Preparation Plan

The following strategies will help you gain a comprehensive working knowledge of English and American literature:

### Year One:

- Identify the **major periods** of English and American literature
  - Note beginning and ending **dates** or events
  - Summarize the **characteristics** of each period
- Identify the **major authors** associated with each period and cannon
  - Reflect **diversity** of gender, race, etc.
  - Note the authors preferred **genre(s), themes, and stylistic traits**
  - List 2-3 **representative works**
- Identify a few **lesser known authors** for each of the periods
  - List one representative work
- Begin systemically **reading** authors / works you have not yet experienced, particularly those you are not likely to encounter in future classes
- Develop a basic list of **literary terms and definitions**
  - Continue adding to the list as you take more classes and read more
- **Form study groups** to aid one another in the above exercises
- Use **course syllabi and reading lists**
  - Save course syllabi and reading lists from classes you take
  - Collect materials from classes you don't take (these provide insight into how faculty in this department view periods and materials they teach, indirectly suggesting how they might form questions concerning them)

### Year Two:

- **Continue reading** authors / works you have identified as significant
- Create **outlines or drafts** of potential exam questions addressing:
  - The literary periods you have identified (for section C of the Exam)
  - The major literary genres (for section G of the Exam)
  - Literary themes (for section F of the Exam)
- **Quiz** your study group members on literary terms (for sections A & B of the Exam)
- **Review materials** from Year One:
  - Important dates and names (i.e., periods, authors, texts)
  - Methods and Materials (for Section D of the Exam)
  - Composition Theory and Practice (for Section E of the Exam)

- Draft an outline of the most valuable material learned in those classes
- Attend any **study sessions** formed by peers or faculty
  - Offer to present a session yourself on a literary period, theme or genre
- **Attend meetings** and **watch for announcements** from the Grad Program Director on Exam content, preparation, strategies, etc.
- Continue to **read, read, read**