MA Exams FAQ Sheet

When and where will the exams take place and how long are they?
MA Exams take place during week 7 of spring term, in Friendly 102. There are two four-hour exams, to be completed on two separate days during the exam week.

Do I have a choice of which of the two exams to take first?
Yes, but if you wish to take Exam #2 (close reading) before Exam #1 (questions on the four periods/fields), you need to inform the graduate coordinator of this by Friday of Week 6. If she has not heard from you by the end of the day on Friday that you are requesting to take Exam #2 first, you will be given Exam #1 first.

How do I know on which days I will be taking my exams?
You will sign up for exam days and times with the graduate coordinator.

Is there anything I need to do to prepare for the actual exam sessions?
You are strongly encouraged (and may be required by your committee) to use a spell-check on your exam. It is your responsibility to locate and familiarize yourself with this software prior to exam days.

Can I use my own computer?
Yes, you need to use your own laptop computer.

Can I have access to my reading lists during the exams?
Yes.

How and to whom will I turn in my exam?
You will send your finished exams by email attachment to the graduate coordinator at the end of the exam period, or if you choose to handwrite your exam, turn in your exam in person. Once you have submitted your exam, you must delete it from your computer. Please, make sure your exam was received before deleting it! When the exam week is over you can request a copy of your exam from the graduate coordinator.

What should I have been doing during winter term to prepare for these exams?
In winter term you should have met with the members of your committee to finalize your reading list. Don’t forget that your list also needs to include two literary histories or general literary surveys that cover the four periods. The final Examination Reading List must have been approved by your committee and a copy signed by the chair filed with the graduate coordinator by the end of winter term.

What should I be doing early in spring term to prepare for these exams?
As you continue to read and prepare the works on your lists, you may wish to consult with the members of your exam committee. They can answer your questions and give you general guidance about how to approach your readings and the exams. They will not give you any specific information about what is going to be covered in the exams. At the beginning of spring term, you should also check in with all the members of your committee to make sure that they have a copy of your final reading list.
What is the difference between the two exams?
The first exam consists of four questions, one in each of the four literary periods or fields. The second exam consists of a detailed analysis of a short text from one of the periods (comprising a reading and a consideration of social, historical, cultural and/or literary contexts).

I’m doing my MA in Romance Languages. Will my first exam cover all four periods in both languages?
This will depend on what you have discussed with your advisor and members of your committee. In the first exam you will be asked to draw on examples from both your major and your minor literatures in your answer to at least one of the questions. You are encouraged (but not required) to refer to both literatures in your answers to the other three short questions, but this will also depend on your questions and what you have discussed before. Some students develop a reading list in which half of their list is in one language and the other half in the other language. Students in consultation with the members of the committee may write a comparative analysis of both literary traditions in all of the periods covered in the First Exam.

How is the period for the second exam determined?
In consultation with your exam committee during winter term, you will have decided in which of the four periods this second exam will be done.

Will there be choice of questions in these exams?
Yes. In the first exam, you will be given a choice between two questions for each period and field. In the second exam you will be given a choice between two proposed passages.

Will the questions be based on my reading list?
Yes. The members of your committee will keep your list in mind as they draft the exam. The questions will be of a more general nature but will ask that you support and illustrate your responses with specific and intelligent reference to works on your list.

Are there formatting requirements for these exams? Must they be done on the computer?
Is there an expected page length for my responses?
The exams must be typed double-spaced using a 12-point font and should be between 8-12 double-spaced pages. Quality is more important than quantity.

Do I write the exams in English or in my major Romance language?
At least one of the two four-hour exams must be answered in your major language. The language of the other exam can be the major language or English. Choice of language is determined in consultation with your committee chair. Note that if you write the second exam in English, all four questions in the first exam must be written in the major language.

Can I use a dictionary? What about notes or books or other supplementary materials?
Yes, you can use a dictionary. You can use an online dictionary and an online spell-checker but no other online resources.

What rubrics will be used in grading these exams?
In the first exam evaluation will be based on how successfully you demonstrate your competence in critical thinking, literary analysis, knowledge of literary history, comparing multiple texts, and situating texts in their literary, social, cultural, and historical contexts. In the second exam, evaluation will be based on how successfully you develop and articulate a close reading that considers formal properties, language, semantics, and stylistic techniques in the selected text and how clearly and accurately you situate the passage in its literary, social, cultural, and historical contexts. Students examined in Spanish sociolinguistics and Cinema studies will receive evaluations specific to the field.

**How will the final exam grade be determined?**
All four members of your exam committee will read and grade both exams. The chair will consult with the other members to reach a consensus on the grade. Grades are: High Pass, Pass, Low Pass, No Pass. The student passes the MA Exams when the grade for each exam is satisfactory (Low Pass, Pass or High Pass).

**What happens if I fail the exams or if I pass one exam and fail the other?**
Students who fail the Master of Arts examinations in whole or in part will be allowed to take them over (in whole or in part) once.

**When will I learn the results of my MA Exams?**
The members of your exam committee will need time to read and consult with each other on the grading of the exams. You should have the results by the beginning of week 10. You will not get back the graded exams, but your committee chair will communicate the results to you, including a summary of the graders’ substantive comments.

**Do you have any recommendations for how best to approach this exercise?**
For the first exam, remember that you will have only one hour to answer each of these questions. Before you start writing, plan out the structure of your essay. The most successful exam essays are those that follow a clear and concise roadmap. Do not waste time and space on plot summaries. A sentence or two to provide context for an example you discuss will be sufficient. Your focus should be on answering the questions intelligently, with references to specific textual examples to support your ideas and claims. For the second exam, remember that your goal is to construct a coherent and clearly developed reading of the proposed passage, a detailed analysis of the text. Your close reading should combine perceptive observation and intelligent commentary. Students examined in Spanish sociolinguistics and Cinema studies will receive instructions specific to the field.

In general, you will find that four hours pass very quickly. Time management and balance among answers will be crucial. On the first exam, for example, strong answers in three periods/fields will not excuse a weak or very short answer for the fourth. Plan your time very well: in the first exam, since you have four responses to write, you should devote one hour per question/period/field. Similarly, on the second exam, the close reading (part 1) and the contextualization of the passage (part 2) should be given equal weight.

Don’t panic. Get a good night’s sleep the night before…. We all wish you the very best!!!