ENGL. 500: Culminating Experience
Portfolio Exam

Portfolio-Exam

All students in the English MA will complete a comprehensive examination in the form of a portfolio. The portfolio will consist of three parts.

1. An essay of approximately 4-6 pages, double-spaced, explaining the methodological or theoretical principles that will guide your future work as a teacher, scholar, and/or creative writer. The essay must:

    a. identify any methods or theoretical frameworks that you have found most productive in your graduate studies, explaining how you encountered them in at least three graduate seminars taken at CSUS, and why you found them valuable in the context of these seminars; and
    b. explain how these methods and frameworks will inform your professional practice (teaching, research, and/or creative work).

    The essay must demonstrate synthesis, methodological self-awareness, and a clear connection between your graduate coursework and your professional trajectory.

2. A course syllabus that demonstrates your ability to synthesize and apply your graduate studies in English to a coherent teaching or curricular plan. This syllabus should be modeled on a college-level course (upper-division undergraduate or introductory graduate level) and should reflect your command of literary history, critical approaches, and pedagogical design. Total expected length: approximately 6-8 pages, including the pedagogical rationale, double-spaced.

    Your syllabus must be grounded in one or more authors, periods, or movements studied in your graduate coursework at CSUS. The goal is to showcase your ability to translate advanced literary knowledge into effective teaching materials. You may design a course focused on: a single author or small group of authors (e.g., "The Worlds of Virginia Woolf" or "Contemporary African Anglophone Fiction"); a literary period, movement or style (e.g., "Victorian Women Writers and the Public Sphere"); or a thematic or genre-based course (e.g., "Modernism and the City," "The Gothic Imagination"). Your syllabus should include the following:

    a. Course Title and Description: a clear, engaging description (approximately 150–200 words) suitable for a catalog or course schedule. It should define the course focus, its central questions or themes, and the rationale for the selected materials.
    b. Course Goals and Learning Outcomes: 3–5 specific, assessable outcomes describing what students will be able to do or understand by the end of the course (e.g., "Analyze narrative form in relation to historical context," "Engage critically with secondary scholarship," etc.).
    c. Primary Texts: a reading list of required primary works, including editions where applicable. These should reflect both breadth and focus, demonstrating your familiarity with literary traditions and textual study.
    d. Secondary Readings: at least three critical or theoretical readings (articles or chapters) that complement the primary texts and model graduate-level research engagement.
    e. Course Schedule or Reading Plan: a week-by-week outline (or comparable unit plan) showing how the material will be organized over a standard 15-week semester. Indicate reading assignments, discussion topics, and any major due dates.
    f. Assignments and Assessments: a brief description of the types of assignments you would use to evaluate learning (e.g., close-reading papers, research essays, creative responses, discussion facilitation, oral presentations, exams, or final projects). You need not include

detailed prompts, but you should show a balanced plan that supports your stated learning outcomes.

g. Pedagogical Rationale (1–2 pages): a concise reflective essay accompanying the syllabus. It should explain: how the course design draws on your graduate study at CSUS; how it incorporates one or more authors, methods, or ideas central to your MA work; and how the readings and assignments align with your learning goals and pedagogical philosophy.

3. An essay that connects your graduate seminar work to the wider field of professional scholarship by identifying and analyzing three peer-reviewed journals that could be suitable venues for a revised version of one of your 200-level seminar essays. Total expected length: approximately 4-6 pages, double-spaced. The essay should have three parts:

    a. Briefly describe the seminar paper you intend to revise: its main argument, methodology, and scope. Note which CSUS course it originated from and which author(s), period(s), or theoretical framework(s) it engages.
    b. Analyze three target journals. For each of the three selected journals, describe its editorial focus and scope (period, genre, critical approach, etc.); note its submission guidelines (word count, formatting, peer-review process, and typical article length); identify at least two relevant articles from recent issues, summarizing how their topics or approaches relate to your proposed piece; and include full citation details for each article discussed.
    c. In a comparative analysis, explain why these three journals are appropriate potential venues for your essay. Discuss what aspects of your original seminar paper would need to be revised, expanded, or refocused to make it publishable and to meet the expectations of the chosen journals.

    Overall, the essay should demonstrate your understanding of the landscape of academic publishing in literary studies, including awareness of disciplinary conventions, audiences, and the process of peer review.

Completion of the Exam

Students will develop the three components of their portfolio during the academic year preceding the semester in which they enroll in ENGL 500. Ordinarily, each student may submit the portfolio a maximum of two times. A student who does not pass the portfolio on the first attempt may attempt the examination once more, provided that at least four calendar months have elapsed. A third attempt is permitted only when the Department demonstrates extreme extenuating circumstances and receives approval from the Dean of Graduate Studies.

Students are expected to assemble the portfolio independently. Faculty members are not responsible for providing ongoing guidance or supervision during its preparation. While faculty may answer general procedural or clarifying questions, the portfolio must not become an informal independent study, nor should any faculty member function as its director. One purpose of this capstone requirement is to demonstrate each student's ability to work responsibly and autonomously at a professional level. Accordingly, no member of the Exam Committee will read or comment on drafts of any section of the portfolio prior to submission.

The Graduate Coordinator will hold one or more general information sessions for students enrolled in ENGL 500 to review portfolio expectations, submission procedures, and evaluation practices.

Evaluation of the Exam

An Exam Committee, consisting of three faculty members, will evaluate the portfolio as a whole and determine whether it satisfies the requirements for a passing evaluation. Each portfolio will receive a rating of

No Pass, Pass, or High Pass. Students whose portfolios earn a High Pass will receive a brief commendatory letter from the Graduate Coordinator, noting areas of excellence observed by the Exam Committee.

Academic Dishonesty

All examinees must sign and upload a statement acknowledging the following requirements.

The portfolio must represent the student's own work. Students may not use generative artificial intelligence or AI-enabled writing assistance to generate, rewrite, paraphrase, summarize, expand, translate, edit, or polish any portion of the portfolio. Standard spelling checkers and approved accessibility tools may be used, provided that they do not generate or revise the student's prose.

Any language taken directly from a source must be enclosed in quotation marks and properly cited. Any material paraphrased from a source must be clearly acknowledged and properly cited. All sources must be fully documented in a Works Cited list.

Portfolios will be submitted to Turnitin for similarity review and reviewed for evidence of unauthorized assistance. Automated reports do not by themselves establish academic dishonesty. Any suspected violation will be evaluated and addressed according to Sacramento State's Academic Honesty Policy and procedures. The student will be notified of the concern and given an opportunity to respond before a determination is made. Confirmed violations will be reported to the Office of Student Conduct and may result in sanctions prescribed by the University.

Exam Rubric

I. Methodology / Professional Trajectory Essay

A passing essay will:

1. engage at least three graduate seminars, describing in each case how and with what effect(s) an interpretive approach was incorporated into the curriculum (e.g., a type of close reading, use of theory, a methodological approach applied to texts, et c.);
2. demonstrate working knowledge of at least one clearly defined critical method or framework, explained in terms of what it requires a reader or writer to do (e.g., what questions it asks, what evidence it privileges);
3. present a sustained argument (not segmented by course) that links the practices described in part 1 and the working knowledge established in part 2 to at least one specific professional activity (e.g., designing a unit, framing a research problem, structuring an assignment); and
4. meet the length requirement and the other basic requirements of the exam as described in this document.

II. Course Syllabus + Pedagogical Rationale

A passing syllabus will:

1. be organized around a clearly identifiable central focus, which governs both text selection and weekly sequencing across the full schedule;
2. include a coherent body of primary texts (sufficient for a 15-week course) and at least three secondary readings placed at points in the schedule where they inform work on specific primary texts;
3. demonstrate functional course design, through:
    a. at least two distinct assignment types (e.g., analytical paper, presentation, exam or project), and
    b. a schedule in which weekly readings and topics prepare students directly for those assignments; and
4. meet the length requirement and the other basic requirements of the exam as described in this document.

III. Journal Analysis / Professionalization Essay

A passing essay will:

1. define the seminar paper by stating its central claim, primary texts or archive, and critical approach in a way that establishes its scope and importance to the field;
2. for each of three peer-reviewed journals, provide
    a. its primary area(s) of focus (e.g., period, field, method), and
    b. a discussion of at least two recent articles, identifying each article's argument and method;
3. demonstrate the fit between the essay and each journal by explicitly aligning the project in question with the articles examined in part 2 (e.g., shared methods, materials or critical problems);
4. identify at least two specific revisions to the seminar paper that would be required for submission to one or more of the three journals; and
5. meet the length requirement and the other basic requirements of the exam as described in this document.