

COMPREHENSIVE EXAM RUBRIC

Listed below are *typical* features; no single exam will exhibit all of these attributes, though certainly many of them.

PASSING EXAM

- Response indicates a clear understanding of the topic and addresses all aspect of the prompt intelligently and analytically
- Response has a clear, consistent focus, often expressed in a coherent thesis statement
- Response presents an argument and offers substantive support to make a convincing case. In some cases a response may offer an original approach; however, originality is not the principal objective of a response.
- Response indicates a clear understanding of effective methods of comparison and contrast; most prompts ask students to discuss a group of texts. Successful essays manage a balanced, intelligent analysis of individual works as well as integrative connections among all works under discussion.
- Response will marshal evidence effectively, choosing pertinent details or evidence, paraphrasing accurately, linking these to the essay's focus, and holding this evidence up to careful analytical scrutiny
- Response will contextualize its evidence and argument wherever appropriate. The general description of the exam, posted on the department's web page, makes this contextualization explicit.* The exam is not a seminar's final exam, but a test of comprehensive knowledge that presumes some familiarity with individual works as well as with biography, period, genre, etc.
- Response to the critical theory section will reveal a fundamental understanding of different interpretive strategies and avoid platitudes or windy generalizations. In other words, the response will concentrate on applying theory to specific literary texts.
- Response will reveal a strong, or at least solid, command of syntax, usage, grammar, sentence variety, and mechanics. In short, the response has a clear and effective sense of *readability*.

FAILING EXAM

- Response reveals a misunderstanding of the topic or only addresses a portion but not the whole of the prompt.
- Response is largely summary or narrative with no control and little analytical substance.
- Response has little or no clear focus; often in the absence of a clear thesis, the reader is left to presume what the connective idea(s) may be.
- Response may present little of no argument and fails to make a convincing or persuasive response to the issue(s) at hand.

*Students should understand that these texts are not isolated. Many stand in relationship to one another in ways of form and/or content. They are all products of a particular time and place. One should look for critical and historical help with any texts with which one is not particularly familiar. No literary work stands alone entirely; so seek help from the library, fellow students, and faculty.

- Response reveals a less than effective control of effective methods of comparison and contrast. Often such essays lack balance—more attention given to one text than another or some texts virtually or entirely ignored altogether.
- Response is inadequately developed and analyzed. Evidence is vague or generalized, and the essays fails to emphasize what is important and why. Often the focus disappears and ideas are listed simply for their own sake rather than as part of an evolving discussion.
- Response will have little or no sense of contextualization. Texts often appear as isolated phenomena united simply because they are listed in the body of the discussion. Such responses often reveal little knowledge of biography, period, genre, etc. The issue of comprehensive knowledge and command of material is dubious or absent.
- Response to the critical theory section will not reveal a fundamental understanding of different interpretive strategies and avoid platitudes or windy generalizations. These responses often reveal little understanding of a particular strategy's features and how specifically to apply that theory to selected texts.
- Response will reveal problems, sometimes serious, with issues of syntax, usage, grammar, sentence variety, and mechanics. In short, the response's *readability* is seriously compromised by persistent and varied sentence level problems.