

Guidance Sheet for Students and Faculty

PhD Preliminary Examination and Mentoring-Committee Process

The Graduate School places responsibility on the faculty of each School to determine when a PhD student is ready to be admitted into candidacy for the PhD degree. This process culminates with a required preliminary examination, which is administered by the student's PhD Thesis and Mentoring Committee, with the purpose of evaluating whether the student is prepared to complete independent research for their dissertation.

Admission to candidacy does not require that substantial dissertation work be completed or that all training is completed, rather it only requires that the student demonstrate their readiness to perform independent research for the completion of their dissertation project and to obtain the remaining necessary training for career development.

Preliminary examinations must be completed no later than the end of the first semester of the third year of the PhD program; however, end of the second year is highly recommended.

For more information on the Preliminary Exam process, please read the full description of the rationale, expectations, logistics, and resources for the [Prelim-Exam Process](#).

Brief Summary Guidance

- Written Exam Submission Package includes (combined into 1 PDF):
 - **Cover Sheet**
 - **Research Proposal** (6-12 pages, format and required sections described in Full-Process document)
 - **Training Plan** (includes CV, Student Background and Goals for Training)
 - **Individual Development Plan** (IDP, signed by student and main advisor in current year)
 - **Unofficial transcript**
- **Evaluation** of the Written and Oral portions of the Preliminary Exam will be based on the specific expectations in the "**PhD Preliminary Examination and Mentoring-Committee Rubric**"; a separate document available to both student and faculty members.
 - [Pre-Exam Preliminary Rubric](#)
 - [Post-Exam Prelim Rubric](#)
- The written research proposal will be passed through *Ithenticate* plagiarism-detection software by the Chair (Advisor) upon submission and the report will be distributed to all committee members prior to the exam. **Plagiarism in the prelim-exam document will be grounds for failure of the exam and will be reported to the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities (OSRR).**
- **Suggested itinerary** for the two-hour Prelim-Exam and Mentoring meeting:
 1. a ~45 min public **oral presentation** by the student of the material in the written submission (Research and Training Plans)
 2. ~15 min **questions from the public** audience
 3. ~20-30 min closed-door **discussion on student's research proposal**
 4. ~15-20 min closed-door **discussion on student's training plan**
 5. ~10 min private discussion among the committee, and **completion of group Post-Exam Qualtrics rubric with constructive feedback** (student is excused from the room)
 6. ~5-10 min **discussion with student of rubric feedback**

Student-specific Guidance

- Overview of Timeline for Students
 - Initial and ongoing discussions of readiness for scheduling the Prelim Exam should happen with primary research advisor(s) sometime in the second year of PhD training and **approximately 4-6 months ahead** of the potential exam date.
 - The student should poll their committee **approximately 2-3 months ahead** of the potential exam date to find availability for the exam. Scheduling the exam with committee members must be done using a scheduling tool like [when2meet](#), [doodle](#), etc.
 - The oral exam must be formally scheduled with the Graduate School **at least 15 days prior** to the proposed exam date (via GS Form 8). This form must be initiated by the student and signed by the BME graduate office, the research advisor, and the BME Head at least 15 days before the proposed date of the exam. In the case of co-advisors, only one of them will need to sign. **The exam is not officially scheduled until the Purdue Graduate School grants the final approval.**
 - A written prelim document following the [Prelim-Exam Process](#) guidance must be sent as **one PDF** to the committee **two weeks before** the scheduled oral exam (committee must approve any delays).
 - **Note: There must be at least two full semester sessions (can include summer) between when the preliminary exam is passed and when the final exam/defense is taken.** However, we expect that Preliminary Exams are completed much earlier than this to allow for input and feedback from the Thesis Advisory and Mentoring Committee at an early stage to help improve research question formulation, experimental design and the student's training plan.
- While the Prelim is a formal exam, it is also a mentoring meeting – use it to your advantage to obtain the research and career mentoring you desire from your full committee.

Faculty-specific Guidance

- **All committee members should complete the *Pre-Exam Feedback Rubric* (fillable PDF)** to provide written feedback to the committee Chair (Primary Research Advisor) **at least 24 hours prior** to the Exam date. The purpose of this is to facilitate effective use of time in the Exam for evaluation and mentoring discussions to focus on areas for which the students can benefit from more mentoring.
- Based on the committee feedback and their own observations, **the Chair will provide any significant concerns to the committee** prior to the meeting.
- During the final discussion section of the Prelim Exam/Mentoring meeting the **Chair will complete the Post-Exam [Qualtrics Evaluation Rubric](#)** with help from the committee to provide a summary of committee feedback to the student at the end of the meeting. This combined rubric and constructive feedback is shared with the student to help them understand their performance and areas for growth and have a record to guide subsequent training and performance.
- Overview of Timeline for Committees
 - At least **two weeks prior** to Exam, completed Prelim documents should be received by the Committee from the student.
 - **Within a few days of submission**, Chair sends iThenticate plagiarism-screening report to Committee. Results should be addressed in the Pre-exam rubric.
 - **24 hours before Exam**, Committee members submit Pre-Exam feedback rubric to Chair based on written documents.
 - **During exam**, Committee completes final Post-Exam Qualtrics rubric together and reviews constructive feedback with student.
 - **Note: Written submission package (1 document provided by student) will need to be uploaded in the Qualtrics survey.**
- Resources:
 - [Pre-Exam Preliminary Rubric](#)
 - [Post-Exam Prelim Rubric](#)