



Specialty Examination Paper Guidelines

Approved September 14, 2017

General Overview

The Specialty Examination Paper (hereafter, the “Specialty Paper”) is the second of two preliminary examinations required for the PhD in Sociology. The purpose of the Specialty Paper is to ensure that students are able to articulate a set of questions, acquire and read a large number of sources, and synthesize information coherently about a specific sociological field or set of sub-fields. Although it is not necessary for the Specialty Paper to be on the same subject as the dissertation, in most cases the work involved in producing a successful Specialty Paper will give students a head start on the literature review for their dissertations.

The guidelines below provide important information about important features of the paper, the timeline for completion, and the procedures to be followed after the paper is graded.

Format, Scope, and Length

The Specialty Paper should be similar in format to a chapter in the *Annual Review of Sociology*. While such papers vary extensively, they all review a body of literature corresponding to a set of related theoretical, substantive, or methodological questions. The paper should be specific enough to be clearly located within an ASA section or sociological subfield, but broader than the dissertation topic. That is, a well-crafted Specialty Paper provides the structure to develop a number of related research projects, only one of which would be the dissertation.

While the specifics of the paper will be worked out in collaboration with the committee (see below), a good model is to organize the review around three distinct subareas of the field or fields in question—depending on the topic, these subareas can be empirical subfields, theoretical approaches, or analytical questions located in one or more larger bodies of literature—and conclude with a review of one or more gaps or weaknesses in that literature.

The paper length will vary depending on a number of factors (the areas of study, the bodies of pre-existing literature). However, a good benchmark is 25-35 pages of text (not including bibliography, tables, figures, etc.).

Faculty Oversight

A two-person committee (one chair, one member) selected by the student and composed of department faculty who have agreed to serve, will oversee the Specialty Paper process. As soon

as the committee has been constituted, the committee members must inform the Director of Graduate Studies via email. The committee alone will decide the acceptability of the paper.

The labor should be divided between students and committees as follows:

- Students should take the lead in designing the Specialty Paper and determining which bodies of literature are relevant for the review.
- Students should discuss the content and organization of the Specialty Paper extensively with the committee members, especially in the early phases (the first few months) of the writing process. The more clearly the goals of the paper are articulated, the greater the likelihood that the student will complete an acceptable paper within the stipulated time frame (see below).
- The committee chair will bear primary responsibility for helping the student develop the one- and five to seven-page proposals described below, but will seek input and secure the approval of the committee member. The final product will be written without faculty input so that it is truly a student-produced paper.

Timeline for Completion

Students will be given one calendar year to finish the Specialty Paper from the date of notification that they have passed the General Prelim. Although the precise timeline may vary somewhat and must be arranged with the committee, one similar to that shown below and in the table on page 4 of these guidelines is strongly recommended. The proposed dates are based on successful completion of the General Prelim in the fall of each year; for students who pass the prelim after re-take in the spring, the dates would be revised accordingly.

- Within three months of notification of having passed the General Prelim, students should produce (1) a **one-page prospectus** of the Specialty Paper and (2) a **one-page bibliography** of core readings. In general, this prospectus will, at a minimum, identify the general topic the paper and the three or so areas of focus. After one or more iterations, this prospectus must be approved by the committee.
- Within three months of the approval of the one-page prospectus, students should produce and have approved (1) a detailed **5-7 page proposal** of the paper and (2) a **2-3 page bibliography**. In general, this proposal will include more fully developed main sections and some description of the primary sub-sections to be reviewed. For example, if a main section is “Theories of X,” two sub-sections might be “Classical Theories of X” and “Contemporary Theories of X.” This proposal also must be approved by the committee.
- Assuming the paper has not been submitted for grading by this time, students will submit a **progress report** six months after notification of passing the General Prelim. This report should explain (1) the stage the student is in the process and (2) the plan for successful completion of the Specialty Paper within the one-year time frame, and must be signed by both the student and committee chair.

- After approval of the 5-7 page proposal, and on a date agreed upon by the student and the committee, a three-month “clock” will start, during which the student will write the paper without faculty input or feedback.
- The student will submit the paper via email to the committee chair, after which time the faculty will deliberate for a period not to exceed one month, unless the paper is submitted more than one month prior to the beginning of the following fall semester, in which case the committee will render a decision no later than two weeks into the fall semester.

Grading

The initial draft of the Specialty Paper will receive one of the following evaluations:

- High Pass (exceptional quality);
- Pass (acceptable quality); or
- Revise and resubmit (the paper is deemed unacceptable in its current form).

After grading, the committee chair will notify the Director of Graduate Studies of the committee’s decision. For students who pass, the Specialty Examination Paper is complete. For students who do not pass, the committee will provide feedback for revisions as close to the date of grading as possible.

Students who must revise the paper will be given six weeks from the date the initial Specialty Paper grade is received to produce a revised paper. Students whose revised paper is judged acceptable will receive a grade of “pass.” Students whose revised paper is judged not to be acceptable will fail and be dismissed from the program.

Petition for Extension

Students who do not submit an initial draft of the Specialty Paper by the one-year deadline will be dismissed from the program unless they successfully petition the Graduate Program Committee for a single six-month extension period, during which they would complete the paper. Petitions should be co-signed by committee chairs and submitted to the Director of Graduate Studies via email. Failure to complete a Specialty Paper by the end of the petitioned period would result in dismissal from the program.

Sample Timeline and Approximate Deadlines for Students for Completing the Specialty Preliminary Exam

	Approximate deadline		No. of weeks
	Case 1: General Prelim passed in September 2017	Case 2: General Prelim passed in January 2018	
Notification of General Prelim pass	September 30, 2017	January 31, 2018	—
One-page prospectus approved	December 1, 2017	April 1, 2018	9
Five- to seven-page prospectus approved	April 1, 2018	August 1, 2018	26
Progress report due	April 1, 2018	August 1, 2018	26
Paper "clock" starts	May 1, 2018	September 1, 2018	30
First draft due	August 1, 2018	December 1, 2018	44
Grade due from committee	September 1, 2018	January 1, 2019	48
Petition for extension due (if applicable)	October 1, 2018	January 31, 2019	52
Revise and resubmit due (if applicable)	October 1, 2018	January 31, 2019	52
Notification from GPC of petition for extension (if applicable)	October 15, 2018	February 15, 2019	54
Revise and resubmit grade due from committee (if applicable)	October 15, 2018	February 15, 2019	54
First draft due with extension (if applicable)	April 15, 2019	August 15, 2019	80
Grade due from committee for papers written with extension (if applicable)	May 1, 2019	September 1, 2019	83