Comprehensive Examinations ("Comps")

Department of Speech-Language Pathology
What is a capstone requirement?

- All Speech-Language Pathology graduate students must complete a capstone experience (e.g., culminating experience) in order to earn a Master’s degree in Speech-Language Pathology.

- Two capstone options are offered by the Department of Speech-Language Pathology:
  - A comprehensive examination option (aka “Comps”)
  - A thesis option
Who should take Comps?

- Most graduate students will complete Comps
  - Special Cohort M.A students are required to take Comps
  - Traditional M.A. students may select to take either Comps or complete a thesis

- Generally a thesis option requires:
  - Additional planning (starting typically in the first semester of graduate school)
  - A demonstrated ability to write and conduct research independently
  - A supervisor with an interest in supervising a thesis and expertise in your thesis subject matter
What is the format of Comps?

• One comprehensive written response to a question in each of the following topic areas:
  a. Adult Language Disorders/TBI
  b. Motor Speech Disorders/Dysphagia
  c. Preschool Age Disorders (Language/Phonology)
  d. School Age Disorders (Language/Phonology)
  e. Autism

• For each topic area, you will be given two questions to select from on the day of the examination
What happens when you take Comps?

- Comps are completed on-campus in designated rooms within the Department, across two separate day.
- Students are given 1.5 hours to complete each question, with a 30 minute break between questions.
- **Three questions are given on Thursday**
  - 9:00am – 10:30am (Preschool Age Disorders)
  - 11:00am – 12:30pm (School Age Disorders)
  - 1:00pm – 2:30pm (Autism)
- **Two questions are given on Friday**
  - 9:00am – 10:30am (Motor Speech)
  - 11:00am – 12:30pm (Adult Language/TBI)
When are Comps?

- **Traditional M.A. Students**
  - Traditional M.A. students complete Comps in the semester they graduate, as follows:
    - First week in November for Fall graduates
    - First week in April for Spring graduates.
  - Completion of Comps in semesters prior to graduation is not permitted

- **Special Cohort MA Students**
  - Special Cohort M.A. students complete Comps during final week of the final Spring semester of enrollment.

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*Note: Actual dates will vary based on the calendar year. Students should contact the Graduate Advisor at the beginning of the semester they are completing Comps to confirm the actual date.*
How do you request Comps?

- Special Cohort M.A. students do not need to request Comps as it is completed as per their official program plan.
- Traditional M.A. students must request to take Comps by submitting a “Petition for Comprehensive Examination” form (posted on-line) to the Graduate Advisor (Dr. Ostergren) no later than:
  - November 1st in the Fall semester prior to graduation
  - April 1st in the Spring semester prior to graduation
    - NOTE: Traditional M.A. students who do not request Comps in accordance with the above timelines will not be granted permission to complete Comps the following semester. This will delay graduation by a semester.
How do you enroll in Comps?

• Students must enroll in CD 695 (1 unit) associated with completion of Comps
  • Traditional M.A. students enroll in CD 695 in the semester of graduation (Fall or Spring)
    • Comps are not administered in summer semesters for Traditional M.A. students. Traditional M.A. students may only graduate in Fall or Spring.
  • Special Cohort M.A. students enroll in CD695 the final summer semester of enrollment
    • Special Cohort M.A. students graduate in a summer term, as per their official program plan.
Who grades Comps?

• Comp questions are written and graded by the instructor who taught the applicable graduate seminar
  • In instances where subject matter overlaps and you have more than one instructor (e.g., Adult Language/TBI), those instructors will collaborate to write and grade your Comp question
What is required to “pass” Comps?

• Students MUST PASS ALL 5 QUESTIONS with a minimum score of 80% on each question.
• Responses are graded on form and content.
• Responses must be reflective of **graduate level understanding** of the topic disorder.
  • You will have nearly completed a Master’s degree in Speech-Language Pathology. The next step is work as an SLP. This level of performance is expected in your response!
• A minimum of 10 sources are required for EACH question.
What happens if you don’t pass Comps?

- When a student fails a question, he/she will be allowed to re-take that question; however, when re-taking a question, both a written and oral examination will then be required.
  - The oral component will occur after the written response has been graded.
What happens if you don’t pass Comps?

• Based on the number of questions failed, students may need to delay graduation as follows:
  1. If a student fails only one (1) question, the student may re-take that question within the same semester.
  2. If the student fails more than one question, the student must delay graduation by one semester* and re-take all failed questions the following semester.

*Note: For Traditional M.A. students completing comps in the Spring, graduation would be delayed until the following Fall (as summer Comps are not offered for Traditional M.A. students). For Special Cohort M.A. students, graduation would be delayed until the following Fall semester.
What happens if you don’t pass Comps?

• Students may only re-take a question one time.
• If a student does not pass any question on the second attempt, an alternate assignment will be determined in conjunction with the Graduate Advisor and the faculty member(s) responsible for instruction in the topic area(s) failed.
  • 1. Students who require an alternate assignment (due to failure of one or more questions upon the second attempt), MUST delay graduation an additional semester (after the second failed attempt) so that appropriate planning and implementation of an alternative assignment can take place.

• **Students who do not pass the alternate assignment are in jeopardy of not receiving an M.A. degree in Speech-Language Pathology**
How can you prepare for Comps?

• Compile AND REVIEW resources from undergraduate and graduate coursework and clinical practicum on applicable topic

• Look up recent information on the topics discussed in your graduate seminar

• Organize your resources so that you are able to cite cardinal AND current sources in key areas
  • A minimum of 10 sources are required for EACH question
How can you prepare for Comps?

• Prepare as an SLP would.....think critically, clinically and given best evidence!
  • If you have a person with this disorder:
    • What are the theoretical foundations of this disorder?
    • What is known and not known about this disorder?
    • What important factors do you need to consider when working with individuals with this disorder?
    • What are current evidence-based principles and practices in the assessment and treatment of this disorder?
    • What are best practices in providing training and/or education about this disorder to clients, families, or other individuals involved in this client’s care (teachers, physicians, etc.)
Are study guides and sample questions be provided?

• NO

• Your graduate seminars and clinics in the topic areas are your study guides and sample questions
  • Look to the information you learned in your seminars as the foundation for Comp questions
Can you meet individually with Faculty to discuss Comps?

• NO

• Faculty are not available to meet with students individually to discuss their specific Comp questions
  • If you have general questions about Comps, please contact your Advisor or Dr. Ostergren
Are Comps open-book?

• NO
  • During Comps students are not allowed reference materials.
  • You are placed in a room with a computer without internet access. You are allowed to bring water. Scratch paper and pencils will be provided.
  • Your personal belongs (e.g., purse, cellphones, etc.) will be placed in a secure location.
  • You will be video taped during this examination.
Tips for Passing Comps

Tip #1

• **Read and make sure you address all parts of the question**

  Questions may have two or three subparts, all of which must be addressed in a student’s essay response. Omitting responses to even just one of the subparts of a question is a sure-fire way to fail that question.
Tips for Passing Comps

Tip #2

• **Know your sources, be able to use them from memory, and make sure you integrate them in a meaningful way.**

Failed responses contain citations to non-cardinal sources or do not cite any literature whatsoever. Alternatively, failed responses rely on only a single textbook or classic citation, without regard to integrating a sufficient amount of recent literature citations. **A minimum of 10 sources are required for each question.**
Tips for Passing Comps

Tip #3

• **Make sure you provide reasonable detail**

  **Part 1:** The types of questions asked call for more in-depth answers than a paragraph or two. While quality of the responses is certainly more important than the length of essay responses, it is safe to say that high-quality responses will consist of several pages of writing. Students who write only 3-4 paragraphs per essay are unlikely to have evidenced significant breadth and depth in their responses to warrant a “pass” on a master’s level comprehensive exam.
Tips for Passing Comps

Tip #4

• **Make sure you provide reasonable detail**

  **Part 2:** If you are asked to interpret a clinical case, be sure to provide details specific to the case information provided to you in the question. For example, if you are asked to outline a specific course of treatment for a given disorder or specific client, obviously your response must address THAT disorder or client. Do not simply respond in general terms applicable to all individuals with that disorder. Be specific and provide amble examples to show that you have integrated the question’s content into your response.
Tips for Passing Comps

Tip #5

• Make sure your responses are well-organized and well-written

To be clear, we do not expect our master’s students to write flawless essays under stressful testing conditions. We do expect, however, that the essays will be written well enough that they evidence a reasonable command of the English language. We cannot, in good conscience, graduate students with a Master’s degree in Speech-Language Pathology who cannot write a few pages clearly enough so that readers of their work understand what they are trying to communicate.