



MISSISSIPPI STATE
UNIVERSITY™

SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY PROGRAM

**Guidelines for the
Doctoral Written Preliminary
Comprehensive Examination (WPE)
and
Oral Preliminary Examination (OPE)**

**Guidelines for the Doctoral
Written Preliminary Comprehensive Examination (WPE)
and
Oral Preliminary Examination (OPE)**

To assure full understanding of the WPE policies and procedures, the student must read this guideline, *Mississippi State University (MSU) Graduate Catalog*, which can be obtained at <http://catalog.msstate.edu/graduate/>. Also, the student should review the MSU Student Honor Code Operational Procedures Manual, which can be obtained at https://www.honorcode.msstate.edu/pdf/New_SHC_Operational_Procedures.pdf.

This manual is intended to provide guidance to the doctoral student regarding the preliminary examination process that is required prior to the student's internship and as a component of the requirements for the doctoral degree in Educational Psychology with a concentration in School Psychology. Coupled with the Master's Comprehensive Examination and the Praxis School Psychologists test (5402), this set of examinations is intended to evaluate the school psychology doctoral student across the discipline specific knowledge and profession wide competencies in health service psychology identified by the School Psychology core faculty, the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) Graduate Education Standards, and the American Psychological Association Commission on Accreditation's (CoA) Standards of Accreditation (SoA) and those expectations presented in the *MSU School Psychology Programs Graduate Student Handbook*.

The purposes of the doctoral examinations are for the School Psychology doctoral student to demonstrate: (a) thorough mastery of the current state of the art in the field of study supported by literature and/or related research; (b) understanding of the relationships among the various areas of the field of study and/or related fields of study; (c) the ability to apply, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate knowledge gained in relation to problems encountered in the field(s) of study; and (d) the ability to present answers in an organized and grammatically acceptable fashion.

As such, with the overarching theme of the MSU School Psychology Doctoral Program, the student will be expected to show evidence of professional orientation and data-based problem solving abilities within the following articulated objectives in four major areas:

1. Assessment.

Objective. Students will evidence knowledge and skills relative to the evaluation process and procedures with competencies in: (a) individual assessment, and (b) systems assessment.

2. Consultation and Intervention.

Objective. Students will evidence knowledge and skills relative to the provision of service through competencies in: (a) consultation, systems, and program evaluation; (b) the provision of services with skills relevant within a behavioral model; (c) crisis intervention; and (d) academic assessment and intervention.

3. Research and Statistics.

Objective. Students will evidence knowledge and skills relative to: (a) research design, implementation, and interpretation; (b) use of appropriate statistical procedures within research applications; and (c) theoretical framework related to the approved outline.

4. Professional Issues and Supervision.

Objective. Students will evidence knowledge and skills relative to ethical and professional practice, supervision, and teaching of school psychology.

Note: These are a preliminary and any of these areas may be assessed through the comprehensive examinations.

Guidelines for the Written Preliminary Comprehensive Examination (WPE)

The WPE is scheduled during the early fall semester to facilitate students' application for internship opportunities and are to be scheduled after the student has taken and passed the Praxis School Psychologists test (5402) with a score established for the National Certified School Psychologist (NCSP) credential. The student is to complete the WPE independently and should not seek input from their major professor. Should the student determine that clarification is needed regarding the assigned topic, they should petition the program coordinator who will then seek input from the core school psychology faculty regarding the student's request. Also, the student will be required to sign a statement indicating he/she will adhere to the MSU Student Honor Code (see attached form). See below for additional requirements.

AT LEAST 6 WEEKS BEFORE THE WPE IS SCHEDULED, the student must apply through the School Psychology Program Director and Departmental Graduate Coordinator to take the WPE as directed on the School Psychology Calendar. Doctoral students should read the information regarding both the written and oral portions of the Preliminary Examination in the *College of Education Doctoral Student's Guide* and the *MSU Graduate Bulletin*. Also, to be eligible to take the Written Preliminary Examination for the Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Psychology degree with a concentration in School Psychology, students must:

1. be within six-hours of completing all didactic course work* (exclusive of Internship and Dissertation Research hours);
2. have completed all research skill requirements (i.e., completion of research course work with the exception of the dissertation course work, presentation at a national conference or submission of a manuscript for publication, either accepted through the peer review process);
3. have passed all required examinations. These examinations include the Master's Comprehensive Examination and Praxis School Psychologists test (Note: The required score at the doctoral level must meet the requisite score for NCSP eligibility). The student must provide the School Psychology program coordinator with a copy of all examination results. These documents will be placed in the student's departmental file;
4. have the Dissertation topic approved by their advisor (the formal Dissertation Proposal does not have to have been approved); and
5. be enrolled for a minimum of one semester hour of credit during the semester in which the Preliminary Examination is administered.
6. have completed the Praxis School Psychologists test (5402).

*A student enrolled in more than six (6) hours of course work during the term but who will have completed all course work (excluding Dissertation and Internship hours) by the end of the semester term may be eligible to take the Written Preliminary Examination during the semester administration of the examination (assuming that all other prerequisites for eligibility have been satisfied).

WPE Content. The student must obtain approval from his or her major advisor and Department Graduate Coordinator to take the WPE. The WPE is constructed as a publication quality manuscript developed independently by the student. Once approval to take the WPE has been obtained, the student should develop a topic to be approved by their major advisor that will result in an outline of the contents of the manuscript (see example on page 10). Generally, it is recommended that this topic be related to the student's dissertation topic. It is highly recommended that the student meets with their major professor to obtain guidance in the development of the outline. This outline must be submitted to student's dissertation committee and the program coordinator according to the dates established on the School Psychology calendar for the fall semester. The faculty will, through examination of the outline and faculty consensus, identify an aspect of the outline for the student to focus upon for written comprehensive efforts. It is expected that the student will provide a comprehensive examination of a topic related to the submitted outline leading to a 25 to 30 page manuscript (excluding the title page, reference section, and support figures/tables) that demonstrates the student's ability to identify the most important aspects of a topic (e.g., themes, theories, and trends), and integrate interpretations of research of that topic within a cohesive written product. Through discussions between the advisor and the student's doctoral committee members, a topic for the WPE will be determined, and the School Psychology program coordinator and/or the student's major professor will provide the student with a letter/email identifying the topic and granting approval for the WPE. This letter/email and the student's submitted outline will be placed in the student's file. Once approval of the outline is granted, the student will have six (6) weeks to complete the manuscript (see the School Psychology fall semester calendar for exact due dates). The format should follow APA style. The manuscript should have the attached title page as the first page (see example on page 11), and references should be complete and comprehensive. Any included tables and figures can either be incorporated into the manuscript or placed at the end (as is required under APA guidelines). The student will need to submit hard **AND** electronic copies to their major advisor and the program coordinator by the date specified in the outline approval letter and on the School Psychology fall semester calendar. The program coordinator will provide copies to all members who serve on the student's doctoral committee and an outside scorer for grading.

Withdrawal from WPE. A student may elect to withdraw from the WPE process prior to the deadline submission. If the student elects to withdraw from the WPE process, the student must provide a notification in writing via email or letter to his/her major advisor and the program coordinator 5 calendar days prior to the submission deadline. **Any student who elects to withdraw from the WPE process will be required to resubmit a new outline.**

WPE Grading Process. The student's dissertation committee will read the submitted manuscript using the attached scoring rubric. Grading will be obtained in the following manner: The faculty will independently read and score the manuscript. The Total Score will be averaged across all graders. A mean Total Score of 2 or above is considered passing. If a student obtains a non-pass Total Score and there is a greater than 1-point difference between any of the scores, the ratings from an outside scorer will be used to provide an outside evaluation of the student's work. This

grade will be added to the scores of the other faculty and all scores will be averaged. *If there is evidence that the student received assistance with the writing during the process or is suspected of academic dishonesty, then the student's actions will be reported to the MSU Student Honor Code Office and the notification of the WPE results may be delayed.* Any student who fails to submit the WPE by the deadline outlined in the letter/email and the approved outline will receive a score of non-pass.

Evaluation Criteria for the Doctoral Written Preliminary Examination

The dissertation committee and the outside reviewer will review the written document/manuscript and students will be graded across 4 major areas with regard to the WPE which include the following:

- 1. Introduction and Conceptual Framework for the Manuscript (20%).** Provide an introduction of the topic, a brief rationale for the importance of the topic, and review of the major components included in the manuscript. The conceptual framework identifies the major concepts for the reader and shows their relationships to one another. It is important to note that this information will be discussed in more detail in the literature review section of the manuscript. The student should also prepare the reader by discussing the major components that will be included in the manuscript. **The goal of this component of the manuscript is to demonstrate the ability to provide an overview of a topic of interest to the student and that the overview will prepare and guide the reader for the elements to follow within the manuscript.**
- 2. Review of Major Theories, Models, Concepts, and Terms (20%).** The student should provide an expanded discussion of the major theories, theoretical framework, professional models, and basic concepts related to the topic. The student should clearly integrate key theories and research models as appropriate to the topic. Finally, this section should address any important key terms used in this literature base and may include professional jargon, technical language, or specific words or phrases unique to the topic. **The goal of this component of the manuscript is to succinctly identify and examine key aspects (e.g., theories, models, concepts) as a foundation for the topic.**
- 3. Review of Important Research Bases and Related Studies (40%).** The student should review relevant key research studies related to the selected topic. When conducting this review the student should identify pivotal areas for in-depth coverage and integrate the findings or, perhaps, relevant aspects of the key research in a manner that is not simply a sequential listing of studies and their findings. The student may focus on one or several themes within the research related to: (a) overall purpose of the study and related research questions and/or hypotheses, (b) participants and setting, (c) methodology, design, and/or statistical procedures used to address the research questions or hypotheses, (d) independent variables, procedures, and materials, (e) dependent variables including operational definitions, (e) reliability and treatment integrity information (if reported), (f) results including a discussion of statistical and visual analyses, (g) discussion of the practice and research implications of the study as well as how the findings support or refute previous research efforts, (h) limitations including threats to internal and external validity, and (i) suggestions for future research provided by the researcher(s). **The goal of this component of the manuscript is to exhibit the ability identify key research, to provide comprehensive coverage of the relevant research on a topic of importance to the**

student, and integrate this research into a cohesive manuscript.

- 4. Summary, Clarity, Organization, and Adherence to APA Style (20%).** The student should provide a summary section that integrates all of the important literature into the specific focus on the proposed research topic. The faculty will also evaluate the student's clarity in presenting the written material and adherence to the current guidelines established for theses and dissertations at Mississippi State University as well as the current edition of the APA style manual. **The goal of this component of the manuscript is to demonstrate skills relevant to the written product (e.g., organization and coherence in the presentation of information, ability to provide summaries, adherence to editorial standards of the field of school psychology).**

The following scale provides the ratings appropriate to the quality of the required elements:

1 = "Below Expectations": does not meet expectations at the doctoral level (e.g., the area has not been adequately addressed as outlined within the requirements and goals of the component).

2 = "Meets Expectations": meets expectations at the doctoral level (e.g., the requirements and goals for the component were adequately addressed).

3 = "Exceeds Expectations": student demonstrates exceptional skill that exceeds expectations for doctoral students with the G-4 status (e.g., exceptional skill demonstrated with regard to the requirements and goals for the component).

Faculty may choose to use incremental scoring (e.g., 2.5 for areas that meet expectations at a high level). Students will receive the average of the faculty's scores for each component and must attain an overall average threshold of 2.0 "Meets Expectations" or higher to pass the WPE.

Failure to Pass the WPE

If a student fails the examination, he or she will be required to take the entire examination again at the next WPE administration. Before students take the examination a second time, they must meet with their advisor and develop, and file with the School Psychology program coordinator, a written remediation plan designed to assist in passing the WPE. This plan may include taking additional course work, auditing courses, scheduling regular meetings with their advisor (notably the advisor cannot offer editorial comments to the manuscript beyond those made within the WPE process in response to the original submitted manuscript), completing and summarizing assigned readings, writing position papers, etc. These remediation steps are extremely important and the documented plan and accompanying evidence (as appropriate) will be placed in the student's file. A student who fails the WPE twice will be dismissed from the program.

Appeal Process

If the student fails to pass and wishes to appeal the findings, he or she would have to follow College of Education and MSU guidelines in an attempt to appeal a failed WPE (see *MSU Graduate Catalog*).

Guidelines for the Doctoral Oral Preliminary Examination (OPE)

OPE Content. The student's dissertation committee will conduct the OPE. Each committee member will be given an opportunity to question the student. The faculty should ask for clarification of any weaknesses or questions from the WPE at this time. Additionally, the faculty will ask questions relevant to the field of psychology, school psychology, and other course requirements for completion of the Degree in Educational Psychology with a concentration in School Psychology. The student is expected to demonstrate knowledge in the four major areas listed on pages 1-2 (i.e., assessment, consultation and intervention, research and statistics, and professional issues and supervision). Adequate performance in the OPE requires the ability to think quickly, orally express ideas and thoughts fluently and competently, and express opinions in a well-articulated, logical, and comprehensible manner.

The Oral Preliminary Examination (OPE) needs to be scheduled immediately (typically within 2 weeks, see the School Psychology Fall Calendar for exact dates) after notification from the School Psychology program coordinator that the WPE has been passed. The OPE will be conducted by the student doctoral committee. The student will be expected to demonstrate (a) thorough familiarity with psychology and school psychology literature; (b) understanding of the relationships among the various areas of related fields; (c) general knowledge and training including the ability to apply, synthesize, and evaluate relevant knowledge; and (d) specific professional orientation to the field of psychology. To perform well on the OPE, the student will need to be able to think quickly, express ideas and thoughts fluently and competently, and express opinions in a well-articulated, logical, and comprehensive manner.

The student's dissertation committee will meet immediately at the completion of the student's OPE to evaluate the student's performance across all aspects of the examination process. The committee will determine whether the student's performance shows adequate understanding of the required knowledge- and skill-base to be allowed to apply for internship. If the faculty agree that the student has all appropriate knowledge/skills for successful completion of internship, they will provide the student with documentation to show successful completion of the OPE and will provide permission for the School Psychology program coordinator to provide a letter of program support for the student to engage in the internship experience.

Withdrawal from OPE. A student may elect to withdraw from the OPE process prior to the scheduled time. If the student elects to withdraw from the OPE process, the student must provide a notification in writing via email or letter to his/her major advisor and the program coordinator prior to the scheduled time. **Any student who elects to withdraw from the OPE process will be required to contact the program coordinator to schedule an alternative time.**

OPE Grading Process. The student's dissertation committee will evaluate the student using the attached scoring rubric. Grading will be obtained in the following manner: The faculty will independently score the student's oral responses to all questions collectively. The Total Score will be averaged across all graders. A mean Total Score of 2 or above is considered passing. ***If there is evidence or suspicion of academic dishonesty, then the student's actions will be reported to MSU Student Honor Code Office. Any student who fails to participate in OPE at the scheduled time and fails to submit a notification of withdrawal in writing will receive a score of non-pass.***

Evaluation Criteria for the Doctoral Oral Preliminary Examination

The dissertation committee and the School Psychology Program core faculty will evaluate the students across four major areas with regard to the OPE which include the following:

- 1. Provide an Understanding of Conceptual Framework for Oral Defense (20%).** Provide an introduction of the topic, a brief rationale for the importance of the topic, and review of the major components. The conceptual framework identifies the major concepts and shows their relationships to one another. **The goal of this component is to demonstrate the ability to provide an overview of a topic and that the overview will prepare and guide the listener for the elements to follow within the oral defense.**
- 2. Reference Major Theories, Models, Concepts, and Terms in Oral Defense (20%).** The student should provide an expanded discussion of the major theories, theoretical framework, professional models, state/federal regulations, and basic concepts related to the topic. The student should clearly integrate key theories and research models as appropriate to the topic. Finally, the student should discuss any important key terms used in this literature base and may include professional jargon, technical language, or specific words or phrases unique to the topic. **The goal of this component is to succinctly identify and examine key aspects (e.g., theories, models, concepts) as a foundation for the topic.**
- 3. Reference Relevant and Important Research Bases and Related Studies in Oral Defense (40%).** The student should discuss relevant key research studies related to the selected topic. When discussing the topic, the student should identify pivotal areas for in-depth coverage and integrate the findings or, perhaps, relevant aspects of the key research in a manner that demonstrates the ability to defend responses with empirical evidence and/or state/federal legislation. **The goal of this component is to exhibit the ability to identify key research, to provide comprehensive coverage of the relevant research on a topic of importance to the student, and integrate this research into an oral response.**
- 4. Demonstrate Clarity, Data-based Problem Skills; Well Organized and Integrated Arguments in Oral Defense (20%).** The student should provide an overall summary that integrates all of the important literature into the specific focus on the proposed area. The faculty will also evaluate the student's clarity in presenting oral responses and adherence to adequate use of grammar during oral responses. **The goal of this component is to demonstrate skills relevant to the oral response (e.g., organization and coherence in the oral presentation of information, ability to provide summaries, and adherence to rules of grammar).**

The following scale provides the ratings appropriate to the quality of the required elements:

1 = "Below Expectations": does not meet expectations at the doctoral level (e.g., the area has not been adequately addressed as outlined within the requirements and goals of the component).

2 = "Meets Expectations": meets expectations at the doctoral level (e.g., the requirements and goals for the component were adequately addressed).

3 = “Exceeds Expectations”: student demonstrates exceptional skill that exceeds expectations for doctoral students with the G-4 status (e.g., exceptional skill demonstrated with regard to the requirements and goals for the component).

Faculty may choose to use incremental scoring (e.g., 2.5 for areas that meet expectations at a high level). Students will receive the average of the faculty’s scores for each component and must attain an overall average threshold of 2.0 “Meets Expectations” or higher to pass the WPE.

Failure to Pass the OPE

If a student fails the OPE, he or she will be required to retake the OPE. Before students take the examination a second time, the student is required to attend a meeting with his or her the advisor to develop, and file with the School Psychology program coordinator, a written remediation plan designed to assist in passing the OPE. This plan may include taking additional course work, auditing courses, scheduling regular meetings with the advisor, completing and summarizing assigned readings, writing position papers, etc. These remediation steps are extremely important and the documented plan with accompanying documentation (as appropriate) will be placed in the student’s file. A student who fails the OPE twice will be dismissed from the program.

Appeal Process

If the student fails to pass and wishes to appeal the findings, he or she would have to follow College of Education and MSU guidelines in an attempt to appeal a failed OPE (see the *Graduate Catalog*).

There are a number of policies and rules regarding the OPE. They appear most succinctly in the *Graduate Catalog*. Once again, students are urged to know these rules and policies.



MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY™
SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY PROGRAM

MSU Student Honor Code

“As a Mississippi State University student I will conduct myself with honor and integrity at all times. I will not lie, cheat, or steal, nor will I accept the actions of those who do.”

My signature below indicates that I will adhere to the MSU Student Honor Code and I have carefully and thoroughly read all the requirements outlined in the *MSU School Psychology Program Guidelines for the Written Preliminary Comprehensive Examination and Oral Preliminary Examination*.

Graduate Student's Signature

Date

Major Advisor's Signature

Date

Example WPE Outline

- I. Trauma and the School Setting (Chafouleas, Johnson, Overstreet, & Santos, 2015; Little, & Akin-Little, 2013)
- II. Interpersonal Problem Solving Model (D’Zurilla & Goldfried, 1971)
- III. Overview of Trauma
 - a. Common types of trauma (Brock et al., 2016)
 - i. Human-caused
 - ii. Natural disasters
 - iii. Summary
 - b. Protective and Risk Factors
 - i. Protective Factors
 1. Coping Strategies (Hofman, Hahn, Tirabassi, & Gaher, 2016; Park, Chang, & You, 2015)
 - ii. Risk Factors
 1. Environmental Factors (Eslinger, Sprang, & Otis, 2015)
 - iii. Proximity Exposure to Trauma
 1. Physical (Pynoos, Frederick, Nader, Arroyo, Steinberg, Eth, & ... Fairbanks, 1987)
 2. Emotional (Galea, Ahern, Resnick, Kilpatrick, Bucuvalas, Gold, & Vlahov, 2002)
 - c. Child and Adolescent Outcomes of Trauma (Armsworth & Holaday, 1993; Deković, Koning, Stams, & Buist, 2008; Overstreet & Mathews, 2011; Porche, Fortuna, Lin & Alegria, 2011)
 - i. Academic (Porche, Costello, & Rosen-Reynoso, 2016)
 - ii. Behavioral (Snyder, Roberts, Crusto, Connell, Griffin, Finley, & Kaufman, 2012)
 - iii. Emotional (Hopfinger, Berking, Bockting, & Ebert, 2016)
 - iv. Social (Powell & Bui, 2016)
- IV. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
 - a. DSM-5 Criteria for PTSD (American Psychiatric Association, 2013)
 - b. PTSD in children and adolescents (Evans & Oehler-Stinnett, 2006; Luthra et al., 2009)
- V. Assessment of PTSD (Meyer, Gold, Beas, Young, & Kassam-Adams, 2015)

Running head: CONDUCT PROBLEMS

Example Title Page

CONDUCT PROBLEMS AND ATTENTION DEFICIT HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER IN
ADOLESCENT PSYCHOPATHY

By

Excellent A. Student

A Written Examination Manuscript
Submitted to the School Psychology Faculty at
Mississippi State University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Educational Psychology with a Concentration in School Psychology
in the Department of Counseling, Educational Psychology & Foundations

Topic Approved:

Faculty Member, Ph.D.
Assistant/Associate Professor or Professor
(Major Advisor)

Program Coordinator, Ph.D.
Assistant/Associate Professor or Professor
(Program Coordinator)

School Psychology
Doctoral Written Examination Evaluation Sheet
 (To be completed by Individual Committee Member)

Student: _____ **Date:** _____

COMPONENT	RATING		
	1	2	3
Introduction and Conceptual Framework for the Manuscript (20%).			
Review of Major Theories, Models, Concepts, Terms (20%).			
Review of Important Literature Bases and Related Studies (40%).			
Summary, Clarity, and Organization (20%).			
Total Score of Overall Rating (Total of points for each section)			

Comments:

Faculty Reviewer: _____

School Psychology
Doctoral Written Examination Composite Evaluation Sheet
 (To be completed by Program Examination Coordinator)

Student: _____ **Date:** _____

COMPONENT	RATER					
	1	2	3	4	5	Ave
Introduction and Conceptual Framework for the Manuscript (20%).						
Review of Major Theories, Models, Concepts, Terms (20%).						
Review of Important Literature Bases and Related Studies (40%).						
Summary, Clarity, and Organization (20%).						
Total Score of Overall Rating (Average of the averaged points for each section)						

Comments:

Faculty Reviewers: _____

School Psychology
Doctoral Oral Examination Evaluation Sheet
 (To be completed by Individual Committee Member)

Student: _____ **Date:** _____

COMPONENT	Rating (1=Below Expectations; 2=Meets Expectations; 3=Exceeds Expectations)				
	Assessment	Consultation & Intervention	Research & Statistics	Professional Issues & Supervision	Ave Rating
Provided an Understanding of Conceptual Framework for Oral Defense (20%).					
Referenced Major Theories, Models, Concepts, and/or Terms in Oral Defense (20%).					
Referenced Relevant and Important Literature Bases, Related Studies, and Key Theorists/Research in Oral Defense (40%).					
Demonstrated Clarity, Data-based Problem Skills; Well Organized and Integrated Arguments in Oral Defense (20%).					
Total Score of Overall Rating					

Comments:

Faculty Reviewer: _____

Doctoral Oral Examination Evaluation Summary Sheet

(To be completed by Program Examination Coordinator)

Student: _____ **Date:** _____

COMPONENT	RATER					
	1	2	3	4	5	Ave
Provided Conceptual Framework for Oral Defense (20%).						
Referenced Major Theories, Models, Concepts, and Terms in Oral Defense (20%).						
Cited Relevant and Important Literature Bases, Related Studies, and Key Theorists/Research in Oral Defense (40%).						
Demonstrated Clarity, Data-based Problem Skills; Well Organized and Integrated Arguments in Oral Defense (20%).						
Total Score of Overall Rating (Average of the averaged points for each section)						

Comments:

Program Coordinator Signature: _____