

Counselling Psychology and School/Applied Child Psychology programs

Comprehensive Examination Procedure

This procedure is aligned with the requirements for comprehensive examinations defined by Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies in 2022-2023

As stated by Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (GPS) guidelines, the primary purpose of a prospective comprehensive examination is to evaluate the student's ability to conduct independent and original research. The comprehensive examination in the Counselling Psychology and School/Applied Child Psychology programs is a program-required project that the student must complete independently from the supervisor as evidence of the student's deep understanding of research literature and the ability to synthesize and critically assess relevant theoretical, empirical, or clinical body of literature (e.g., including but not limited to critical, systematized, systematic, scoping reviews, etc.). Specifically, the goals of the comprehensive examination project are to (a) synthesize and critically evaluate a body of literature; (b) identify scholarly gaps, contradictions, and limitations, indicating areas that may warrant further investigation; and (c) demonstrate the highest quality written presentation of ideas. The expected quality of the comprehensive examination project is that of a publishable manuscript in a refereed scientific journal. It is therefore encouraged that the work eventually be disseminated to the research community in some form, including publication in a refereed scholarly journal or as a conference presentation.

Timing and Registration

The student must register for the Comprehensive Examination course (EDPC or EDSP 701 Comprehensive Examination) during the term in which the project is to be completed. The comprehensive examination can be initiated at any time during the PhD1 or PhD2 years, and a decision as to the most opportune time is to be made in consultation with the student's research supervisor. However, as per [McGill University Programs, Courses & University Regulations](#), the comprehensive examination must be completed by the end of the PhD3 year (the year appearing in your transcript). If you decide to complete the Comprehensive Examination during your PhD3 year, the **comprehensive proposal must be submitted on or before April 1st of PhD3**. Additionally, best practice requires that the comprehensive examination must be passed before the student proceeds to defend their doctoral dissertation proposal. Exceptions to this rule may be granted with a written approval from both the research supervisor and the GPD.

Format

COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION PROPOSAL

The Comprehensive Examination Proposal, developed in collaboration with the research supervisor and submitted for approval to the two examiners, must be a maximum of 3 double spaced pages (excluding Appendices and references), in 12-point Times New Roman font, with 1-inch margins on each side. There is no need for an abstract in the proposal. The proposal needs to communicate three major points:

- 1) A description and rationale of the problem or question being addressed in the proposed paper.
- 2) A description of the methods or approaches used to address the problem and rationale. For reviews, this should include the final selection of papers that will be included with a corresponding PRISMA flow diagram as an Appendix.

- 3) The implication or relevance of the proposal to theory or practice.

FULL COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION

The final (full) Comprehensive Examination document can be a maximum of 30 double-spaced pages (excluding references and tables) and respect the current APA style, using 12-point Times New Roman font, with 1-inch margins on each side. The comprehensive examination is an independent project, so consultation or collaboration with the supervisor, peers, and other research partners is not permitted during the writing of comprehensive examination document once the student “starts the clock”. The proposal needs to communicate three major points:

- 1) A description and rationale of the problem or question being addressed.
- 2) A description of the methods or approaches used to address the problem and rationale.
- 3) A description of the results as related to the problem and rationale.
- 4) The implication or relevance to theory or practice.

Role of supervisor and second rater for study selection

The supervisor can provide guidance and comments while the student is writing the Comprehensive Examination Proposal (it is recommended that the study selection be finalized when writing the Proposal) and in reviewing examiner comments about the Proposal, but the supervisor’s input must cease once the Comprehensive Examination writing process has initiated (the “start the clock date”). Once the comprehensive examination writing process is initiated, the student is **to work independently** until the comprehensive examination is submitted to the examiners.

If a second rater is involved during study selection process of the comprehensive examination (i.e., in the case of a systematic review for example), their contribution must cease once (i) study selection is finalized (it is recommended that the study selection be finalized when writing the Comprehensive Examination Proposal) or (ii) the Comprehensive Examination writing process has initiated (the “start the clock date”) - whichever comes first. Once the comprehensive writing process is initiated, the student is **to work independently** until the comprehensive examination is submitted to the examiners.

Comprehensive Examination Process

COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION PROPOSAL

1. The paper topic is discussed, negotiated, and developed in close collaboration with the supervisor.
2. Two examiners are confirmed by the student and the supervisor. One examiner must be a faculty member of the Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology. It is recommended that the second examiner be external to the Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology and have subject matter expertise. Examiners must be secured before the submission of the comprehensive examination proposal (see template email below). **N.B. Examiners can also act as doctoral committee members, but not as co-supervisor.**

Once completed, a maximum three-page comprehensive examination proposal (double-spaced, excluding references) is submitted via e-mail to the two examiners by the student, with gpsacp-cp.ecp@mcgill.ca¹ and the research supervisor/s in cc, by the April **1st deadline in PhD3**.

¹ The Graduate Program Director monitors this mailbox. With support from the Graduate Program Coordinators, the Graduate Program Director will be responsible for tracking the milestones for comprehensive examinations from the proposal

3. The two nominated examiners will have 10 working days (*See FAQ) to evaluate the comprehensive examination proposal. See the *Comprehensive Examination Proposal Grading Rubric* for details of passing criteria.
4. If the proposal is accepted, then the full comprehensive examination can begin. The student uploads the two grading rubrics indicating that the comprehensive examination proposal is a PASS in one single PDF to MyProgress and informs the program and Graduate Program Director by email that they have done so (email gpsacp-cp.ecp@mcgill.ca and counsellingpsych.education@mcgill.ca or schoolpsych.education@mcgill.ca, please include student ID in email) in order for the program to mark the comprehensive examination proposal milestone as complete in MyProgress.
5. The full comprehensive examination is due 6 weeks after the student “starts the clock”. It must be submitted to the two examiners by the student, with gpsacp-cp.ecp@mcgill.ca and the research supervisor/s in cc.
6. Students may choose to “start the clock” **no more than 3 months** after their comprehensive examination proposal is passed by communicating their intention to their supervisor(s), the Graduate Program Director (gpsacp-cp.ecp@mcgill.ca), and upon approval from the Graduate Program Director to the examiners.
7. Student must register for the Comprehensive Examination course (EDPC or EDSP 701 Comprehensive Examination) in the semester where they will be submitting the full comprehensive examination to examiners.
 - i. **NB.** The full comprehensive examination must be completed (PASSED) by the end of PhD3, so students must cautiously select their “start the clock” date if they do so in PhD 3, allowing enough time for remediation procedures to be put in place if needed.
8. If the comprehensive examination proposal is not PASSED, then the student will receive point-by-point recommendations for revising and resubmitting the proposal.
9. The student submits a revised comprehensive examination proposal to all examiners (even an examiner who would have passed the proposal) within 10 working days of receiving the *Comprehensive Examination Proposal Grading Rubric*.
10. If the revised proposal is accepted, i.e. the two examiners provide a rating of PASS, the student follows steps 4-7.
11. If the revised proposal is not PASSED by at least one of the examiners, the student should meet and consult with the Graduate Program Director. The Graduate Program Director can facilitate obtaining a review of the comprehensive examination proposal from a third impartial examiner. To proceed to the full comprehensive examination, the comprehensive examination proposal must have been passed by at least two (out of three) examiners. Alternatively, the student can change the topic of their comprehensive examination proposal and repeat the steps 1-11 with a new topic and new examiners; the student will inform the Graduate Program Director if they choose this option.
12. The student cannot proceed to complete the full comprehensive examination until steps 1-8 are met.

submission to the attribution of a passing grade using the dedicated mailbox. If evaluations or revisions are not submitted after the deadline has passed, the Graduate Program Director will be responsible for sending reminders to the examiners or students.

FULL COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION

1. The full comprehensive examination project is to be submitted to the examiners (see template email below), cc'ing the research supervisor and the Graduate Program Director (gpdsacp-cp.ecp@mcgill.ca); their decision is due 10 working days after submission. See *Comprehensive Examination Grading Rubric* for details of passing criteria.
2. If the full comprehensive examination receives a grade of PASS from **both examiners**, then this is a PASS of the comprehensive examination. The student uploads the two grading rubrics in one single PDF to MyProgress and informs the program and Graduate Program Director by email that they have done so (email gpdsacp-cp.ecp@mcgill.ca and counsellingpsych.education@mcgill.ca or schoolpsych.education@mcgill.ca, please include student ID in email) in order for the program to mark the comprehensive examination milestone as complete in MyProgress and for the student to receive a passing grade for the Comprehensive Examination course.
3. If the full comprehensive examination receives a PASS grade from one examiner and NOT PASS from the second examiner, then a **third impartial examiner** (faculty member of the Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology) chosen by the Graduate Program Director will be asked to make a final decision within 10 working days (*See FAQ). The result of the third evaluation will determine the result of the evaluation of the first submission of the full comprehensive examination.
4. If the full comprehensive examination receives a NOT PASS grade from (1) both initial examiners or (2) the third additional examiner, then this is a first failure (FAIL) of the comprehensive examination.
5. After the student and the research supervisor are advised, the program will mark the initial **comprehensive examination milestone as UNSATISFACTORY in MyProgress** and will create a new (second) comprehensive examination milestone in MyProgress with a new deadline date. **The student will receive a grade of HH for the Comprehensive Examination.**
6. The Graduate Program Director will ensure that all detailed feedback including recommendations for improvement will be provided by all examiners involved to the student. The student can meet with the examiners and supervisor to discuss the feedback as long as the student's work remains independent. The student will have an opportunity to submit a revised comprehensive examination to the examiners. The Graduate Program Director must inform the student of the first failure of the comprehensive examination in a face-to-face meeting and in writing and clearly indicate in writing the deadline to submit the revised comprehensive examination to the examiners in a maximum of 6 months.
7. The student will submit a revised version of their full comprehensive examination to all three examiners, who will again have 10 working days (*See FAQ) to assess the revised version. The student should send the revised version to all three examiners along with a document explaining how they responded to the examiner comments and the grading rubric; cc'ing the research supervisor and the Graduate Program Director (gpdsacp-cp.ecp@mcgill.ca).
8. If the revised full comprehensive examination receives a grade of PASS from **at least two of the three examiners**, then this is a PASS of the comprehensive examination. The student uploads all grading rubrics (for the initial comprehensive examination and for the revised comprehensive examination) in one single PDF to MyProgress and informs the program and Graduate Program Director by email that they have done so (email gpdsacp-cp.ecp@mcgill.ca and

counsellingpsych.education@mcgill.ca or schoolpsych.education@mcgill.ca, please include student ID in email) in order for the program to mark the second comprehensive examination milestone as complete in MyProgress and for the HH grade to be replaced with a passing grade for the Comprehensive Examination course.

9. In the case where the revised full comprehensive examination receives a grade of NOT PASS from **at least two of the three examiners**, then this is a final FAIL of the comprehensive examination. The student to receive a failing grade for the Comprehensive Examination course.
10. ****If the student does not submit the revised comprehensive examination at least 10 days before the deadline for the second comprehensive examination milestone in MyProgress or if the student FAILS the comprehension examination, the student will be withdrawn from the program.** A student withdrawn due to failure of their comprehensive examination has 30 days to appeal this decision. They must follow the steps specified under *Requesting an appeal in case of withdrawal due to failure* in the [Failure Policy](#).

NB. In the event of a significant delay in receiving an examiner's response at any stage in the process, students should contact the Graduate Program Director.

Comprehensive Examination FAQs

When should comprehensive examinations be completed?

As aforementioned, the comprehensive examination can be initiated at any time during the PhD1 or PhD2 years but **must be completed** by the end (Aug. 30th) of the PhD3 year (the year appearing in your transcript).

*Please note that that faculty members are frequently unavailable or on an irregular schedule from May through September months, when time-sensitive Masters' project and Doctoral Theses evaluations are typically due and thesis defense are often scheduled. In addition, late summer is when most students and faculty members and administrators plan personal/family vacations. Consequently, the time required to review Comprehensive Examination may exceed the usual 10 working days during the summer months.

What are the characteristics that make up a successful comprehensive examination?

Comprehensive examinations consist of a literature review that contributes to the student's field of study. The comprehensive examination document should be a significant addition to theory or practice based on a literature review (e.g., including but not limited to critical, systematized, systematic, scoping reviews, etc.) that compares multiple theories of a phenomenon, selectively review literature focusing on a segment of a theory or application, or carefully and critically analyse research methods used in a field of study. There are various sources that can help students learn how to conduct literature reviews including following the PRISMA guidelines, attending McGill Libraries workshops, and meeting with librarians.

Should comprehensive examinations be related to the doctoral thesis?

There is no requirement that comprehensive examinations be explicitly related to the doctoral thesis. However, it is logical to share literature between your comprehensive examinations and your doctoral thesis. Ideally, the results of your comprehensive examinations will inform the rationale of your doctoral thesis proposal. A comprehensive examination may be included as a chapter in your doctoral thesis as a

non-empirical component that adds to your work. This option can be discussed with your research supervisor.

What kind of accommodations can be offered to students for equity, diversity, and inclusion related issues?

Students registered with the Office for Accessibility and Achievement may discuss possible accommodations with their supervisor. Other equity, diversity, and inclusion considerations may also warrant accommodations, but this will be determined on a case-by-case basis with the supervisor and the Graduate Program Director.

Email templates

For the invitation of examiners:

Dear Dr. [insert name],

I would like to invite you to be an examiner for my comprehensive examination on [insert brief topic description]. After discussion with my supervisor, Dr. [insert name], we determined that your expertise on the subject matter would be of great help in this process.

In our program, the comprehensive examination process starts with the evaluation of a three-page comprehensive examination proposal. **I plan on submitting this proposal to you by [insert date], with a deadline to submit your evaluation by [insert date].**

Once the proposal is passed, the student can initiate the full comprehensive examination no more than three months after this time. The final version of the completed comprehensive examination is due 6 weeks after the student initiates the writing process. If everything goes according to plan, **my anticipated submission date to you for this final version is [insert date], with a deadline to submit your evaluation by [insert date].**

You will be asked to assess the proposal and final completed comprehensive examination using a rubric.

Would you agree to be an examiner for my comprehensive examination? If so, do you anticipate being able to submit your evaluations according to the timeline detailed above? If you anticipate not being able to submit your evaluation by these dates, please notify us in advance with alternate dates. It is important to note that deadlines for comprehensive examinations are not flexible to ensure that students reach this milestone by the strict deadline determined by the university.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this request.

For the proposal:

Dear Dr. [insert name],

Thank you for accepting to act as an examiner for my comprehensive examination.

In our program, the comprehensive examination process starts with the evaluation of a three-page comprehensive examination proposal. Once the proposal is passed, the student can initiate the full comprehensive examination no more than three months after this time. The final version of the completed

comprehensive examination is due 6 weeks after the student initiates the writing process. You will be again asked to assess the final completed comprehensive examination using a different rubric.

Attached are .doc and .pdf versions of my comprehensive proposal, as well as the scoring rubric to be filled out.

As per the Counselling Psychology and School/Applied Child Psychology programs regulations, **you have 10 working days to submit your assessment**, which is due on [**insert date**] or earlier. If you are not able to submit your evaluation by this date, please notify us in advance with an alternate date. Note that deadlines for comprehensive examinations are not flexible to ensure that students reach this milestone by the strict deadline determined by the university.

N.B. An unsatisfactory mark in any category results in an automatic NOT PASS.

Please send me your evaluations and feedback to [insert email address], [insert supervisor email address], and gpdscap-cp.ecp@mcgill.ca when completed.

Thank you in advance for your time and efforts.

For the proposal: (reminder 3 days before the due date – student should “reply all” to the message above sent with the proposal attached)

Dear Dr. [insert name],

Thank you again for accepting to act as an examiner for my comprehensive examination.

This is a gentle reminder that your evaluation of my 3-page comprehensive examination proposal is due on [**insert date**]. If you are not able to submit your evaluation by this date, please notify us with an alternate date. Note that deadlines for comprehensive examinations are not flexible to ensure that students reach this milestone by the strict deadline determined by the university.

Please send me your evaluations and feedback to [insert email address], [insert supervisor email address], and gpdscap-cp.ecp@mcgill.ca when completed.

Thank you in advance for your time and efforts.

For the final comprehensive examination:

Dear Dr. [insert name],

Thank you again for accepting to act as an examiner for my comprehensive examination.

Attached are .doc and .pdf versions of my final comprehensive examination, as well as the scoring rubric to be filled out.

As per Counselling Psychology and School/Applied Child Psychology programs regulations, **you have 10 working days to submit your assessment**, which is due on [**insert date**] or earlier. If you are not able to submit your evaluation by this date, please notify us in advance with an alternate date. Note that

deadlines for comprehensive examinations are not flexible to ensure that students reach this milestone by the strict deadline determined by the university.

N.B. An unsatisfactory mark in any category results in an automatic NOT PASS.

Please send me your evaluations and feedback to [insert email address], [insert supervisor email address], and gpdsacp-cp.ecp@mcgill.ca when completed.

Thank you in advance for your time and efforts.

For the final comprehensive examination :(reminder 3 days before the due date – student should “reply all” to the message above sent with the final comprehensive examination attached)

Dear Dr. [insert name],

Thank you again for accepting to act as an examiner for my comprehensive examination.

This is a gentle reminder that your evaluation of my final (full) comprehensive examination is due on **[insert date]**. If you are not able to submit your evaluation by this date, please notify us with an alternate date. Note that deadlines for comprehensive examinations are not flexible to ensure that students reach this milestone by the strict deadline determined by the university.

Please send me your evaluations and feedback to [insert email address], [insert supervisor email address], and gpdsacp-cp.ecp@mcgill.ca when completed.

Thank you in advance for your time and efforts.

APPENDIX

Counselling Psychology and School/Applied Child Psychology programs
Comprehensive Examination Proposal Grading Rubric (one per examiner)

To be completed by student
External evaluation form due date:
Name of student:
McGill ID:
Name of the research supervisor:
Title of comprehensive examination project:
Anticipated date to start the comprehensive examination:
Anticipated date of final submission of the comprehensive examination to examiners:

The comprehensive examination in the Counselling Psychology and School/Applied Child Psychology programs is an independent project that demonstrates depth of knowledge in the research literature and the ability to synthesize and critically evaluate a substantive and relevant theoretical, empirical, or clinical body of literature. Specifically, the goals of the comprehensive examination project are to (a) synthesize and critically evaluate a body of literature; (b) identify gaps, contradictions, and limitations in the existing literature, thus areas that may warrant further investigation; and (c) demonstrate the highest quality written presentation of ideas.

Please use the below rubric for grading.

To be completed by examiner		
	Unsatisfactory	Satisfactory
Is APA style adhered to?		
Is the writing clear, concise and supportive of the rationale?		
Is the relevant background literature presented in a comprehensive and clear manner?		

Are the goals clearly stated and well-articulated?		
Are the methods clearly stated and appropriate to achieve the goals?		
Are the implications for research and/or practice explored?		

Note. An unsatisfactory in one of these categories warrants an overall rating of NOT PASS.

Overall Evaluation: PASS / NOT PASS

If the evaluation is a NOT PASS then please provide comments on the rationale for the evaluation of NOT PASS and a point-by-point, specific description of the revisions required to achieve a PASSING evaluation.

Please return your evaluation via e-mail to the student, supervisor, and gpdscap-cp.ecp@mcgill.ca (Graduate Program Director) by the deadline in order to avoid jeopardizing the student's timely completion of this important milestone.

Name of Examiner: _____

Signature of Examiner: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX

Counselling Psychology and School/Applied Child Psychology programs

Comprehensive Examination Grading Rubric (one per examiner)

To be completed by student
External evaluation report due date:
Name of student:
McGill ID:
Name of the research supervisor:
Title of comprehensive examination project:

The comprehensive examination in the Counselling Psychology and School/Applied Child Psychology programs is an independent project that demonstrates depth of knowledge in the research literature and the ability to synthesize and critically evaluate a substantive and relevant theoretical, empirical, or clinical body of literature. Specifically, the goals of the comprehensive examination project are to (a) synthesize and critically evaluate a body of literature; (b) identify gaps, contradictions, and limitations in the existing literature, thus areas that may warrant further investigation; and (c) demonstrate the highest quality written presentation of ideas.

Please use the below rubric for grading.

To be completed by examiner		
	Unsatisfactory	Satisfactory
Is APA style adhered to?		
Is the writing clear, concise and supportive of the rationale?		
Is the relevant background literature presented in a comprehensive and clear manner?		
Are the goals clearly stated and well-articulated?		

Are the methods clearly stated and appropriate to achieve the goals?		
Are the results reported clearly?		
Are the implications for research and/or practice explored?		

Note. An unsatisfactory in one of these categories warrants an overall rating of NOT PASS.

Overall Evaluation: PASS / NOT PASS

If the evaluation is a NOT PASS then please provide comments on the rationale for the evaluation of NOT PASS and a point-by-point, specific description of the revisions required to achieve a PASSING evaluation.

Please return your evaluation via e-mail to the student, supervisor, and gpdscap-cp.ecp@mcgill.ca (Graduate Program Director) by the deadline in order to avoid jeopardizing the student's timely completion of this important milestone.

Name of Examiner: _____

Signature of Examiner: _____

Date: _____