PhD in English

Rev. Oct. 2026

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

CONTENTS

I. Admissions 1

Transfer of Credits 1

II. Course Requirements 1

Required Coursework 1

Coursework Policies 1

Core Courses 2

Pedagogy Coursework 2

Certification of the Completion of Coursework 2

III. Language Requirement 2

Outline of the Language Requirement 2

Language Requirement Policies 3

Certification of the Language Requirement 4

IV. Teaching Practicum Requirement 4

V. Comprehensive Exams 4

Phases of Exams and Deadlines 4

Generative AI and Exams Policy 4

The Comprehensive Exam Committee 5

The Comprehensive Exam Proposal & Preliminary Bibliography 5

Annotated Bibliography and Synthesis 6

Written Examinations 6

Oral Examinations 7

Earning the MA 7

VI. Prospectus 7

Formation of the Dissertation Committee 7

The Prospectus 8

Prospectus Meeting & Approval 8

Admission to Doctoral Candidacy 8

VII. Dissertation 8

The Doctoral Examination (Defense) 8

Statute of Limitations 9

I. ADMISSIONS

Individuals must have a US bachelor's degree or its equivalent from an approved undergraduate institution in order to enroll in the English PhD Program in English. Applicants with a master's degree or its equivalent are also invited to apply. A previous master's degree is not required to be considered for admission to the PhD program.

TRANSFER OF CREDITS

Students will not ordinarily be allowed to transfer credits from previous degrees toward their PhD coursework requirements. With the approval of the Director of Graduate Studies, students who earned a previous graduate degree at the University of Pittsburgh may count up to 6 credits of graduate coursework in the Department of English to satisfy requirements for the PhD.

The principal exception is for the PhD's language requirement. See the "Language Requirement" section below, under "Additional Language Requirement Policies."

II. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

The Dietrich School of Arts & Sciences at the University of Pittsburgh requires that students complete a minimum of 72 credits at the 2000-level or above to graduate with the PhD. Of these 72 credits, 34 credits will be earned through seminars or required courses for the English PhD.

REQUIRED COURSEWORK

The following course of study comprises the required coursework for the English PhD:

1. ENGLIT 2993: Introduction to Graduate Study (1 credit) in the fall of the student's first year
2. ENGLIT 2500: Seminar in Pedagogy (3 credits) in the spring of the student's first year
3. ENGLIT 2995: Dissertation Workshop (3 credits) to be completed as soon as possible after the student passes comprehensive exams (held in the fall of each academic year)
4. Three core courses (3 credits each), at least two of which must be in the student's home program (Composition, Film, or Literature)
5. At least one 1-credit practicum in professional development
6. Six additional elective courses (3 credits each) approved by the student's faculty advisor

The remaining credits of coursework shall be taken in the form of graduate seminars approved by the student's faculty advisor, or as dummy credits. Depending on the student's degree progress, this would either be ENGLIT 3910 (Comprehensive Exams), ENGLIT 3000 (Dissertation Research). Students who are admitted to candidacy enroll in FTDA 3999 (Full-Time Dissertation Study in the Humanities) each term.

COURSEWORK POLICIES

1. Courses outside the Department: Ordinarily, no more than 1 seminar (3 credits) shall be taken outside the English department, with advance permission of the DGS. Students pursuing the Interdisciplinary Film & Media Studies PhD may take up to 2 courses (6 credits) outside the English department in order to fulfill the requirements of the FMS degree. If a student wishes to take additional courses outside the English Department, they and their faculty advisor must

petition the DGS with a rationale explaining why the additional courses outside the department are necessary.

2. Directed Studies: A student may count no more than 1 Directed Study (3 credits) toward the PhD. See the Introduction to the Graduate Handbook, Section IV.C, for additional policies governing Directed Studies.
3. Undergraduate Courses for Graduate Credit: Enrollment in undergraduate courses for graduate credit is by petition only. Only 1000-level undergraduate courses may be taken for graduate credit. The student & their faculty advisor will each submit a rationale to the DGS explaining why the undergraduate course is necessary. If approved by the DGS, a graduate component in the form of additional and advanced readings and writings must be devised by the instructor. Students must also inform the Graduate Administrator and register for 3 credits of ENGLIT 3910 (Comprehensive Exams) or ENGLIT 3000 (Dissertation Research), in addition to enrolling in the undergraduate course itself, to receive credit towards the PhD. An outline of the graduate component should be placed in the student's file.

CORE COURSES

Students must take at least 3 core courses (9 credits in total), 2 of which must be in the student's home program. These courses must be completed with a grade of B or better to count towards the degree requirements.

PEDAGOGY COURSEWORK

ENGLIT 2996 (WRITING PEDAGOGY 1) AND ENGLIT 2997 (WRITING PEDAGOGY 2) ARE PART OF THE PHD PROGRAM'S PREPARATION IN WRITING PEDAGOGY AND UNIVERSITY-LEVEL TEACHING. THEY WILL NORMALLY BE TAKEN DURING THE SECOND YEAR OF THE PHD PROGRAM. CERTIFICATION OF THE COMPLETION OF COURSEWORK

Prior to scheduling Project Examinations, the student must communicate with the chair of their Projects Committee about their transcript. The chair must certify that the student has completed all coursework, using the "PhD Requirements Certification Form." This form must be submitted to the Graduate Administrator no later than the scheduling the student's written comprehensive exams.

III. LANGUAGE REQUIREMENT

It is important for scholars in the humanities not to be monolingual, as knowledge of languages can be important to PhD students in a number of ways: it exposes us to new ways of thinking and new cultures and enables us to participate in a wider range of conversations or draw on additional resources. In that sense, "language" includes not only natural/spoken languages but also programming languages, in parallel but not the same ways. This requirement asks students to advance their knowledge of at least one language other than English as part of their graduate studies unless they have already made the study of languages a significant part of their education.

This requirement must be completed before taking comprehensive exams unless a deferral is approved by the Director of Graduate Studies. Any language relevant to the student's doctoral work or, more generally, to the anticipated conditions of future scholarship and teaching may fulfill this requirement. A student should, in consultation with their advisor, consider which languages are most relevant to their professional and research plans.

OUTLINE OF THE LANGUAGE REQUIREMENT

Students may fulfill the language requirement in one of three ways: a reading knowledge of two languages, undertaking advanced study of one language, or beginning a new language. Throughout this section, "language" means either a natural language (French, Arabic, Hindi, Swahili, etc) or a programming language (Python, Ruby, R, JavaScript, etc).

1. Reading Knowledge of Two Languages: Students may demonstrate a reading knowledge of two languages, in one of the following ways:
    a. A student may pass an examination administered by a faculty member in a University of Pittsburgh language department. In the case where there is no faculty member at the University able to examine the student, the student may demonstrate reading knowledge of a language via examination by a faculty member at another institution. Such an arrangement must be approved by the Director of Graduate Studies.
    b. A student may earn a B or better in a fourth-semester language course or a course designed to provide an equivalent reading knowledge of a language. The courses that satisfy this requirement vary by language department; students should consult with the Director of Graduate Studies, who can provide a list of current courses at the University of Pittsburgh that fulfill the requirement. Students who would like to fulfill this requirement on the basis of coursework completed at another institution must apply to the Director of Graduate Studies, who will determine whether the coursework is equivalent.
    c. A student may petition the Director of Graduate Studies to count other evidence of reading knowledge of another language, such as translation work, fulfillment of a comparable language requirement in another graduate program, completion of equivalent coursework at another institution, or previous schooling in which the language was the language of instruction.
2. Advanced Study in One Language: Students may demonstrate that they have undertaken advanced study in one language other than English by earning a B or better in an upper-level undergraduate course or graduate seminar in which materials in the language (in any medium) are examined or produced or in which the language is studied or employed in a more advanced or intensive way. The instructor of the course must certify in writing to the Director of Graduate Studies that the student demonstrated facility in the language by completing course readings in the language or by using the language in discussion, translation work, or composition.
3. Beginning Knowledge of a New Language: students who prefer to begin studying a language (either because they have not seriously studied a language other than English before or because they have a reason to take up a new language) may fulfill the language requirement by achieving a grade of B or better in a second-semester course in the language, or in one intensive course (usually requiring 5 credits or more).

LANGUAGE REQUIREMENT POLICIES

1. A student may not use English to fulfill the language requirement.
2. Students who have satisfied a language requirement at another recognized graduate school may request that this be accepted as fulfilling the English Department's language requirement. All proof of language ability transferred from an examination at another university will satisfy the requirement of reading knowledge only.

CERTIFICATION OF THE LANGUAGE REQUIREMENT

Prior to scheduling written comprehensive exams, the chair of the student's Project Committee must certify that the student has completed the language requirement, as part of the "PhD Requirements Certification Form." This form should be submitted to the Graduate Administrator.

IV. TEACHING PRACTICUM REQUIREMENT

All PhD students are required to complete ENGLIT 2500 (Seminar in Pedagogy) and Writing Pedagogy 1 and 2. Any exceptions to this policy must be approved by appeal to the Director of Graduate Studies.

V. COMPREHENSIVE EXAMS

The University requires a comprehensive examination prior to initiating dissertation work. The exam is meant to demonstrate a breadth of knowledge in tandem with the ability to work on a focused area or an interrelated set of questions. In English, the PhD comprehensive exam process involves a proposal; an annotated bibliography with a synthesizing introduction; written responses to questions posed by a faculty committee; and an oral exam.

Through this process, students demonstrate expertise in disciplinary subfields relevant to their research area, with an eye to both historical/genealogical and theoretical exploration defined by a set of questions or problems. The bibliography should be useful for both dissertation work and for teaching beyond the dissertation.

Deadlines for completing each phase are as follows:

PHASES OF EXAMS AND DEADLINES

Preliminary bibliography and proposal document	Year 2, last day of spring semester
Annotated bibliography and synthesis	Year 3, October 15
Written exam	Year 3, November 30
Oral exam	Year 3, last day of fall semester

If students are unable to meet deadlines from any part of this process, they have a 30-day grace period and should endeavor to get back on track. In order to make good degree progress, students must pass the Written & Oral Examinations no later than the end of the spring semester in their 3rd year in the program.

To the extent that delays are not resolved within this timeframe, students will move to the requisite stages of warning, discipline, and academic notice as defined by university policy.

If a student fails the examinations, the committee will discuss the reasons for failure with the student. Failed PhD Comprehensive Examinations may be repeated only with permission of the student's Exam Committee.

Examinations may be retaken only once and must be retaken within one academic term of the original examination date.

GENERATIVE AI AND EXAMS POLICY

Students are expected to refrain from using generative AI tools (e.g. Claude, Gemini, ChatGPT, etc.) in composing or revising throughout their exams: proposals, annotations, synthesis, and written answers.

Exceptions to this policy may be made for particular portions, but only with the explicit approval of the committee members and chair. Such exceptions must still abide by the university's policy on Acceptable Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence Tools.

However, for the written exam, no exceptions are allowed: the written portion is a context in which students should be leaning into their own learning, allowing the ideas they've been weighing and mixing to come together and bond. For the constrained time of producing these essays, we therefore expect a solo effort.

THE COMPREHENSIVE EXAM COMMITTEE

Each student will form an Exam Committee of three or more Department of English Graduate Faculty members, with one member serving as the chair. Students should form their Exam Committees no later than the end of the fall term of their second year, or their third term of residence in the program. Students should inform the Director of Graduate Studies and the Graduate Administrator in writing once their Exam Committee has been formed.

THE COMPREHENSIVE EXAM PROPOSAL & PRELIMINARY BIBLIOGRAPHY

The proposal is a document (1,250–2,500 words) that describes the issues and goals of the student's research, accompanied by a bibliography that will guide the student's reading over the course of the exam. Almost inevitably these will be somewhat revised as a result of ongoing study, yet it is necessary to set some limits on the scope of material being studied.

The bibliography should:

1. Consist of two named lists, each identifying a broad area of a scale and length suitable to a graduate-level seminar. The lists may be further divided into subunits as needed.
2. Include both primary texts (i.e. objects of direct analysis, sources of evidence) and secondary texts (i.e. arguments, theories, sources of prior claims or questions or lenses for analysis).
3. Prepare the student to address questions from both segments of the written exam, as described below, i.e. segment 1 on historical concerns, precedents, and issues within the field of study, and segment 2 on methods and models for the student's planned dissertation research.

The proposal document should:

1. Articulate the student's research interests and motivating questions.
2. Situate the student's inquiry with respect to critical issues and ideas in the disciplinary fields under study.
3. Place the reading lists in conversation with one another, showing how they provide a historical and methodological foundation for understanding scholarship in the field.

Once the members of the Exam Committee agree that the proposal is ready, the committee must convene to advise the student and sign the Comprehensive Exam Proposal Approval Form, blank copies of which can be obtained from the Graduate Administrator. The Proposal document, bibliography, and cover sheet should be sent to the Graduate Administrator to be deposited in the student's file and retained by the department for purposes of assessment.

In order to make good degree progress, students must have their Exam Proposals & Preliminary Bibliographies approved by their committee and sent to the Graduate Administrator no later than the last day of the spring semester of their second year.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY AND SYNTHESIS

Once the Exam Proposal & Preliminary Bibliography are approved, students will read and write through their lists in consultation with their Exam Committee. It is not advised to rely on memory alone, but nor is it necessary at this stage to produce an original argument.

Ultimately, students will submit a brief contextualizing introduction (1,500–2,500 words) along with compact notes on sources from the bibliography, revised for the committee as an audience. The notes should be ~50–250 words per source, though students have the option to combine some sources under a single annotation, scaled accordingly.

This final bibliography should reflect the works on which students would like to be examined during their Written and Oral Examinations. This bibliography may delete items from the initial proposed bibliography and add new ones. However, the revised Bibliography must be similar to the first one in terms of topic, scope, and number of works, and it must meet with the approval of the Exam Committee.

Students should expect to complete this process no later than the end of August before their third year in the program, so that final revisions can be prepared in a timely manner. The Final Bibliography must be completed and submitted to the Exam Committee no later than 15 October of the student's third year. The written examination must be completed no later than November 30 of the student's third year.

WRITTEN EXAMINATIONS

The written and oral components of the Comprehensive Examinations explore issues and questions raised by the Proposal, the Annotated Bibliography, and the conversations along the way. After the Exam Committee receives the final annotated Bibliography, each committee member will submit questions to the Exam Committee chair, who will then compose the written exams as described below and will work with the student and the Graduate Administrator to schedule the exam.

The written exam consists of two sets of 3–6 questions, as follows:

> **Segment 1** focuses students on historical concerns, precedents, and issues within the disciplinary fields under study as they relate to the student's areas of inquiry.
>
> **Segment 2** asks students to think methodologically about the work they plan to do for their dissertation, with reference to models and gaps identified through their bibliographic preparation.

Students will write a total of three responses, including at least one response from each segment (~3,500-5,000 words per answer). The other questions remain available for discussion during the Oral Exam. Students have one week (7 days) to compose these responses.

Because the written component of the Comprehensive Exam is administered by the Graduate Administrator, the Chair of the Exam Committee must give a copy of the exam questions to the Graduate Administrator. The Graduate Administrator will be responsible for giving the student exam questions, collecting the written exam

answers at the end of each segment, and distributing the answers to the Committee. A copy of the exam and the student's answers will be deposited in their student file.

ORAL EXAMINATIONS

After the written examination is complete, the Exam Committee will conduct an oral examination of 1–2 hours. This exam may focus on issues in the written examinations, exam questions the student didn't answer, and other issues relevant to the Proposal and Bibliography as a whole. Following their oral examination, the student withdraws and waits for the Committee to come to a decision about the student's performance on both the written and oral portions of the examinations. In terms of judging whether or not a student has passed the Comprehensive Exam, there is no fixed or quantitative relationship between the written and oral portions.

After the oral examination, the Committee members sign a Comprehensive Exam "Report on Exam" Milestone Card provided by the Graduate Administrator indicating whether the student has passed. This card must be signed by all committee members and sent to the Graduate Administrator to be filed with the Office of Graduate Studies. The Committee may pass the student with distinction if they believe the student's performance on the written and oral examinations warrant such recognition.

EARNING THE MA

PhD students may elect to earn the MA as they progress in the PhD program, although they are not required to do so. If they wish to earn the MA, they must meet the coursework & foreign language requirements, and either successfully complete the Master's Research Paper (outlined in the MA portion of the Handbook) or successfully complete their PhD Comprehensive Examinations. Both options require students to apply for graduation through the instructions provided by the Graduate Administrator. Because the statute of limitations on MA degrees at the University of Pittsburgh is four years, any student who wishes to earn their MA must apply for graduation to receive before the end of their fourth year in the program. After four years have passed, they become ineligible to receive this degree.

VI. PROSPECTUS

After a student has passed the comprehensive examinations, they will register for ENGLIT 3000 (Dissertation Research for the PhD) in order to write a prospectus for their eventual dissertation. The student should choose a dissertation committee chair and the other members of the dissertation committee at this time.

FORMATION OF THE DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

A dissertation committee must consist of at least three members of the Graduate Faculty of the Department of English and an outside reader. The dissertation committee must have a designated chair, and they must be a member of the Graduate Faculty in the Department of English. The outside reader may be a member of the Graduate Faculty in another department at the University of Pittsburgh, or a faculty member from another University (in English or another department). A faculty member at another university may also serve as a regular committee member. If they do so, they will be a fourth regular member, but there still must be three Graduate Faculty from the Department of English on every dissertation committee. A faculty member from another university may not chair a dissertation committee, although they may co-chair if the other committee members consent to this arrangement.

In order for a faculty member at another university to be able to serve on a dissertation committee in any capacity, they must be approved by the Assistant Graduate Dean. The student's chair must submit a memo of support to the Graduate Administrator justifying the appointment of this committee member, along with a copy of an updated curriculum vitae of the faculty member they are requesting approval for. The Graduate Administrator will submit these to the Graduate Office for consideration.

THE PROSPECTUS

Once a dissertation committee has been formed, the student will submit a formal dissertation prospectus to their committee for approval. The prospectus will be approximately 2,500 words in length and will be accompanied by an initial bibliography.

PROSPECTUS MEETING & APPROVAL

The dissertation committee will meet with the student to discuss the prospectus. At this meeting, the student can expect to receive initial advice about the writing of the dissertation and appropriate research resources. Students must have their dissertation prospectus approved no later than the end of their third year in the program, or their sixth term in residence.

Hybrid or remote prospectus meetings may be held without pre-approval. Students should report if any attendees participated remotely to the Graduate Administrator, who will send a Remote Defense Participation Certification form as part of the student's application for admission to doctoral candidacy.

ADMISSION TO DOCTORAL CANDIDACY

When the dissertation committee has approved the prospectus, the committee will fill out and sign an Application for Admission to Candidacy, which can be obtained from the Graduate Administrator. This form must also be signed by the department chair. The Graduate Administrator will submit this application to the Office of Graduate Studies. After the office reviews it, the Assistant Dean of Graduate Study will either approve or deny the student's application to candidacy and formalize the student's dissertation committee.

VII. DISSERTATION

Once a student has passed their prospectus and has been admitted to candidacy, they should begin the work of researching and writing their dissertation. practices of the current *MLA Style Sheet* or those found in the *Chicago Manual of Style* should be observed.

THE DOCTORAL EXAMINATION (DEFENSE)

The completed dissertation, revised in accordance with the dissertation committee's suggestions, must be submitted at least two weeks (and preferably four weeks) before the anticipated date of the doctoral examination, otherwise known as the dissertation defense. Each dissertation committee member must be given a copy of the completed dissertation.

The dissertation committee will decide the form and length of the doctoral examination. The examination need not be confined to the materials in or related to the dissertation.

The student and dissertation committee chair should inform the Graduate Administrator of an impending dissertation defense. The name of the doctoral candidate, the date, and the subject of the dissertation

must be submitted in the University Times Calendar at least a month in advance of the examination. Doctoral examinations are public.

Upon a student's completion of their examination, the Graduate Administrator will send the chair & committee a Dissertation Defense "Report on Exam" Milestone Card. All members of the committee and the chair must sign this card indicating the results of the exam. This will be submitted by the Graduate Administrator to the Office of Graduate Studies. Once the final dissertation is approved, the Graduate Administrator will send a second "Report on Exam" Milestone Card to report the committee's approval of the dissertation to the Graduate Office.

Students who pass the doctoral examination must submit a copy of their dissertation to Electronic Theses & Dissertations (ETD) as part of their application for graduation, along with other forms & surveys. Students should consult with the Graduate Administrator and the Assistant Director for Graduate Studies in the Office of Graduate Studies well in advance of their examination regarding the procedures & template for submitting electronic dissertations, and the application for graduation.

STATUTE OF LIMITATIONS

All requirements for the doctoral degree must be completed within ten (10) calendar years of the student's first registration for graduate study if the student entered with only a bachelor's degree. If the student entered with a master's degree or its equivalent, they must complete the degree within eight (8) calendar years of study.