

General Examinations

After the satisfactory completion of two years of full-time study, the modern language requirements, the coursework outside the specialization, and the second year review, a student prepares for the General Examinations. Ph.D. students usually take their “generals” at the end of the third year.

Written examinations take place in October during fall term and in April during spring term. The Committee announces the exact dates six months ahead of time, and students are asked to submit a "Notice of Intent To Take Generals", signed by their advisor and each of their examiners, by late October for spring term generals, or by late March for fall term generals.

The overall pattern of the written general examinations required of all Ph.D. students follows. The student should consult with his or her advisor in formulating the plan for the exams and deciding upon examiner(s) for each exam.

1. Theory and Method in the Study of Religion
2. Context of Study Exam (Religious Tradition or Historical Complex)
3. Specialization within Context of Study
4. Specialization within Context of Study

Exam 1: Theory and Methods Exam

The description of this General Examination is available as a separate document.

Exam 2: Context of Study Exam

This is a general examination on the religious tradition or historical complex chosen for the context of study (Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Ancient Near East, Modern West, India, etc.)

Exams 3 & 4: Fields of Specialization within Context of Study

Students should consult with their advisor(s) and chosen examiners on both the topics and bibliographies for these examinations.

A two-hour **oral examination** will be held within one to two weeks' time following the written general exams. The examining committee for the oral normally consists of three or four of those who prepared written exams for a given student.

Please note: Papers may not be substituted for general exams.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND RULES FOR THE PHD AND THD GENERAL EXAMINATIONS

- 1). PhD and ThD students are each enrolled in an area or field with its own intellectual tradition and organization at Harvard University. Students are asked to participate in the activities of those areas and fields, particularly the colloquia, to fulfill their language requirements and to respect, when they exist, the inherent and written rules of that field or area.
- 2). PhD and ThD students are expected to develop their own thinking and to find their own topics of interest. With their advisor's help, each student will test his or her ideas and methods enriched by relevant bibliographies. Interdisciplinary enterprise will be welcome, and the advisor, as well as the doctoral subcommittee, will facilitate its implementation.
- 3). For their General Examinations, PhD and ThD students will each submit a list of the members of their General Examinations Committee (normally three faculty members from the relevant fields). They will also prepare a list of topics for the General Examinations according to their interests, the fields chosen, and the usual requirements when they exist in an explicit way. These topics must be accepted by the General Examinations Committee of the student.
 - a) PhD and ThD students will generate bibliographies of relevant literature for each of their examinations (total 10-15 pages). The bibliography must be international and include titles in languages other than English whenever relevant. Each bibliography must begin with a paragraph explaining the nature of the topics chosen and the rationale for selecting the materials listed. The bibliography is presented to the candidate's General Examinations Committee for acceptance and signature. It is then checked and signed by the PhD or ThD director.
 - b) The student's primary academic advisor chairs the General Examination Committee. It is the advisor's responsibility to confer with each examiner in the writing of examination questions and to insure that topics are covered appropriately and that there is no obvious repetition among questions.
 - c) The General Examinations are taken in four days for PhD students (the first day being the Theory and Method examination) and three days for the ThD (for whom the Theory and Method examination is optional).
 - d) The Theory and Method examinations have their own requirements.
 - e) The last day of the General Examinations is devoted to the special field of interest of the candidate, usually a field in which the dissertation will be written.
 - f) The two other days of the General Examinations are devoted to the general field and area in which the candidate is enrolled.
 - g) Each examination is taken in a three-hour period.
 - h) Each examination or part of an examination offers a choice of 2-3 questions.