SCS Rubric for Comprehensive Exams Students' Version

The purpose for comprehensive exams is to ensure that students have mastered the underlying theoretical perspectives, debates, issues, as well as current and classic research in philosophical, historical, social, and cultural foundations reflected especially in core course content. Comprehensive exams may take more customized form to reflect a student’s research interest, but still reflect the purpose of the program as a whole. Additionally, it is expected that students write scholarly, knowledgeable, well organized, and well reasoned arguments in response to questions on the examination. Faculty want students to be ready to work effectively and independently on their dissertations.

All of these expectations are detailed in the rubric which will be used to evaluate students’ responses to comprehensive examination questions based on four criteria:

1. **Knowledge of the literature**: consistency with the concepts, scholars, and ideas found in the foundational and current literature,
2. **Organization**: organization, accuracy and comprehensiveness,
3. **Argument**: the production of a logical, valid, and persuasive argument, and
4. **Scholarly writing**: the correct use of appropriate vocabulary and sentence and paragraph structure, correct grammar and usage.

A comprehensive exam is comprised of 4 questions for each of which the student will write an essay response. Faculty will evaluate each of the 4 responses using a 5 point scale to assign a value to each of the 4 criteria listed above. The student must average at least a 3 on each question in order to pass the entire comprehension exam.

Exam readers will be asked to keep the following elaborated description of the 4 criteria in mind as they read and evaluate the exams.

The Reading Guidelines:

**Knowledge of the Literature**: Consistency with the concepts, scholars, and ideas found in foundational and current scholarly literature as appropriate to the topic.

5—Offers a supple and relevant synthesis and analysis of the literature cited using concepts, debates, and frameworks in constructing and supporting the essay’s argument pertinent to the question. The most salient points are prioritized and supported with strong documentation. All pertinent issues and debates are included and demonstrates awareness of nuances in the literature, as well as an awareness of the significance of the theories or research cited to the question/response. Accurate use of vocabulary and concepts. Not an annotated bibliography

4—Offers a relevant synthesis and analysis of the literature cited using concepts, debates, and frameworks in constructing and supporting the essay’s argument pertinent to the question. Employs a mix of appropriate and relevant primary and secondary sources, with not much differentiation between them, may miss some nuances and/or debates present in the literature, appropriate documentation, indicates some awareness of the significance of theories or research cited to the question/response. Not an annotated bibliography

3—May use appropriate literature, but may be more like an annotated bibliography, demonstrating a noticeable lack of synthesis. Unless it was specifically requested, the essay may not offer an analysis of the significance of the cited literature to the question. Does not acknowledge fully the
debates and nuances in the area of scholarship cited; may seem unsure of how the theories and research cited are significant to the question/response. Appropriate documentation, but may be skimpy. Satisfactory.

2—Omits the majority of the literature relevant to the question/response; demonstrates a misunderstanding of key concepts, vocabulary, and ideas relevant to the question; uses inappropriate or irrelevant literature to respond to the question; relies on secondary sources rather than primary or the most relevant to the topic. Inadequate documentation, omission of debates and/or nuances in the literature cited, does not demonstrate understanding of how the literature cited replies to the question.

1—Irrelevant literature cited, misinterprets the literature, incomplete documentation, incorrect use of vocabulary and/or concepts, does not cite peer reviewed research articles, shows lack of understanding of the literature, misquotes or does not acknowledge major scholars in the field pertinent to the question.

**Organization: structure, direction, connection**

5—Organization enhances reader's understanding and leads the reader clearly through the purpose, argument, and effective supporting documentation to a resounding conclusion. Use of subheadings and sequential sections cohere but move the essay along without repetition of ideas, phrases, discussions, or belaboring of any points. Sophisticated transitions link well-crafted sentences and link paragraphs. Adapts and applies working definitions of professional vocabulary critically and masterfully.

4—Organization guides the reader's understanding through the purpose, argument and supporting documentation with subheadings and fully formed paragraphs within each section. Some momentum may be lost with some repetition of ideas or inadequate transitions/connections between paragraphs and/or sections. Applications of professional vocabulary respectable if not masterful. Essay successfully begins and concludes the argument but may lack some sophisticated writing structures and/or ease with relevant concepts.

3—Organization attempted and moderately successful, but shows evidence of somewhat unclear, ineffective or awkward connections, misdirections, or sequencing of points in the argument. Use of subheadings is questionable or problematic. Placement or relevance of some details may be questionable, such as interruptive or irrelevant information (the goats are where the sheep should be), or the writer gets to the point in a roundabout fashion. Inconsistency in overall cohesion: organized paragraphs but inadequate transitions or sequencing interrupts the flow and slows momentum.

2—Organization is haphazard and disjointed. Very limited use of subheadings. Examples, details, or events identified seem unrelated to a central idea. May be strung together in no apparent pattern and with no apparent end goal. Gaps in the argument and/or information.

1—Organization is noticeably missing. Essay consists of a random and haphazard collection ideas and points.

**Argument: the production of a logical, valid, and persuasive argument in response to the question**
5—Forwards a clear, relevant, insightful, and convincing argument in response to the question through careful and thoughtful development and progression from purpose to conclusion effectively using supporting literature and key concepts from a theoretical framework appropriate to the question. Theoretical framework is fully explained including its possibilities and possible limitations. Argument articulates a sophisticated relationship with the literature through supporting, extending, and/or refuting connections/applications to the chosen framework.

4—States a clear purpose and intention for the essay in response to the question, but may show some weak conceptualization and connection in the development and progression to a conclusion. Chooses an effective and appropriate theoretical framework but may not offer a full development of its possibilities and limitations. May articulate a somewhat shallow connection/application with the relevant literature cited. The purpose of the essay is fulfilled but without resounding insight.

3—Essay responds to the question, but may waver in its progress from purpose through argument to conclusion by offering an unclear purpose statement, repetitious or irrelevant details that lose traction in building the argument. Steps in building the argument may be missing or out of order so that the conclusion doesn’t have a solid foundation. Still a satisfactory essay.

2—Essay offers a literature review or annotated bibliography instead of an argument. No clear purpose is stated. Subsequent argument may not follow or support the stated purpose. Argument does not respond to the question. Conclusion does not fulfill or address the stated purpose of the essay.

1—Essay does not answer the question at all. No argument or even adequate literature review is offered.

Scholarly Writing

5—Critical and masterful use of professional vocabulary adapted and or operationalized to suit the argument. Sentences, paragraphs, sub-sections demonstrate control of a range of scholarly writing constructions. No incomplete or run-on sentences. No full page paragraphs. All quotes are relevant and synthesized into the argument, and explained by the writer. Few or no grammatical or usage errors.

4—Appropriate use of professional and relevant vocabulary. Sentences, paragraphs, sub-sections demonstrate knowledge of how they are constructed. May be some usage, punctuation, sentence or paragraph errors but not distracting from the substance of the essay.

3—Professional and relevant vocabulary evident in the essay, but may demonstrate some misuse or inadequate understanding of terms. Occasional use of non-professional vocabulary. Some incomplete or run-on sentences and page long paragraphs. Some grammatical, punctuation or usage errors.

2—Does not show evidence of professional vocabulary. Distracting and obfuscating sentence and/or paragraph structure to the extent that writing becomes difficult to understand. Essay is rife with grammar, punctuation and usage errors to the level of distraction.

1—No attempt to use professional vocabulary or demonstrates erroneous use of it. Very poor sentence and/or paragraph structure so that the writing is incomprehensible. Distracting and confusing errors in grammar, punctuation and usage.