

McGill University
Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology
Human Development Program

Comprehensive Examination Document

This document contains essential information regarding the comprehensive examination (comps hereafter) doctoral trainees in the Human Development (HD) Program are required to complete, typically in PhD3 year. All aspects of comps development can be supported by the trainee's research supervisor up to the proposal stage, and by the instructors of the HD Seminar 3 (EDPE683, Fall) and Seminar 4 (EDPE686, Winter) courses. Instructors in these seminar courses should confer with the Graduate Program Director (GPD) prior to sharing this comps document with trainees as a guideline every year. This document should be subjected to review and confirmation in May of every year to ensure timely feedback and adaptation as per the GPS Comprehensive Exams guidelines: <https://www.mcgill.ca/gps/students/comprehensive-exams>

This comps document is prepared by referencing GPS' Best Practices guide for prospective comps dated April 2022:

https://www.mcgill.ca/gps/files/gps/guidelines_for_prospective_comprehensive_exams_april_2022.pdf

Some information in this document is adapted to reflect program-level specific circumstances.

General information

The HD program adopts a prospective examination as comps. The goal of the comps process is to assess trainees' level of independence in conducting original research. Typically, most trainees are expected to pass their comps in PhD3 with two submission milestones: proposal in December and final comps in June of the following year. (See additional information in the 2. Timeline section)

HD comps can take a few formats, with most trainees completing their comps using one of the following options:

- A *systematic or scoping review* that covers a topic with current up-to-date literature.
- A *meta-analysis* that takes a quantitative approach to reveal new understandings of the empirical literature.
- A *unique lens/theory* paper that offers a unique perspective on a topic by applying a new theoretical model or by integrating separate literatures that have not traditionally been investigated together. The synthesis is expected to provide an integrated picture of behavior/development.
- A *methodological critique* that provides a systematic overview of the methodology prevalently used in the literature. Alternatively, the critique could be applying new methodologies from a different field to a topic of interest.
- An *Open Science milestone* that includes study replications or preregistrations.

The comps can be completed in another format if agreed upon by the trainee and their research advisor(s). In this case, the GDP must be advised before the comps proposal process is initiated. The following resources may be helpful to selected comps. Additional resources will be provided at the HD seminars.

- <http://www.prisma-statement.org/>
- <https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/abs/10.1146/annurev-psych-010418-102803>

Trainees are also strongly encouraged to use the Faculty of Education Library resources available to them during the comps process.

Timeline and specific information

PhD3 Fall

1. Enroll in HD Seminar 3 (EDPE 683, Fall) & Seminar 4 (EDPE686, Winter)
2. Consult with advisor on comps topic and format
3. Develop search strategy and manage literature
4. Submit draft 3-page proposal
5. Submit proposal to GPD by the first Wednesday of December.

- Prior to comps proposal submission, research advisors can support trainees in developing their comps topics and format.

- The comps proposal is to be a maximum of three pages long (excluding references, supplementary materials, etc.), double-spaced using a 12 pt font size.

- The comps proposal will be evaluated by two ECP faculty members, selected by the GPD according to the fit between the comps topic and the faculty members' expertise, and faculty member availability. The GPD may seek advice from the trainee's advisor regarding faculty member expertise. **Importantly, the trainee's proposal will not be evaluated by their research advisor(s).**

- The comps proposal should be emailed to the GPD directly in both .docx and .pdf. In the academic year 2023-2024, the comps proposal due date is **December 6, 2023**.

- The evaluators will have 10 working days to review the comps proposal from the date of invitation.

- The comps proposal will be evaluated based on a 5-point scale according to the following criteria:

- ★ **Rationale:** Describe the goal of the comps and the associated literature in a connected and coherent manner
- ★ **Approach:** Justify the methodology as a scholarly examination of the topic
- ★ **Assessment of feasibility:** Propose a sound plan to complete the project independently in ~6 months. Trainees can provide a timeline in a table that does not count toward the three-page limit
- ★ **Originality:** Contribute new knowledge to the existing literature through synthesis. Replication is considered a form of originality.

★ **Writing/APA style:** Address the proposal in a coherent and clear manner.

- Reviewers will provide ratings on the rubric and may either comment on the proposal directly using tracked changes or add a short paragraph to justify the ratings in the rubric.

The comps proposal rubric

Criteria/rating	1	2	3	4	5
Rationale	No goal stated	Presents a project goal, without justification	Presents a project goal with weak justification	Presents a project goal with coherent justification	Presents a project goal with strong and coherent justification
Justification of selected approach	No approach described	Weak approach with little description and no justification	Weak approach with description and some justification	Strong approach with description and justification	Strong and innovative approach drawing on comprehensive literatures
Assessment of feasibility	No feasibility or plan/timeline assessment	States feasibility without elaboration (no timeline)	States feasibility with some elaboration (simple timeline is present)	States feasibility with strong justification (detailed timeline)	Justifies feasibility with timeline and resources identified
Potential contribution	Neither a knowledge gap nor a potential contribution presented	A knowledge gap is defined. But how it is addressed by the comps is not	A knowledge gap is defined. But how it is addressed by the comps is mentioned but not justified	A knowledge gap is defined. But how it is addressed is mentioned and somewhat justified	A knowledge gap is clearly defined with the comps' contribution addressed clearly and justified
Writing / APA style	Unacceptable text or non-compliant to APA style	Many spelling, grammar, and APA errors	Some spelling, grammar, and APA errors	Good flow of the paper with only a few spelling, grammar, and APA errors	Excellent writing with no spelling, grammar, and APA errors

PhD3 Winter

1. Receive comps proposal evaluation and feedback from GDP
2. Revise **independently without advisor's input.**
3. Write comps with support from instructor and/or peers in seminar 4 (EDPE686)
4. Submit the comps draft on the due date as stated in EDPE 686 syllabus

As a prospective comps, students are expected to work independently on the comps without advisor's assistance after the proposal submission.

By the first week of January, the GDP will communicate the results of the comps proposal with trainees. The two possible outcomes are as follows:

1. **Revise & resubmit:** (when one or more categories scored at "1" or "2") Trainee revises proposal and resubmits to the GDP within 10 working days after receiving the decision. The GDP sends the revised proposal back to the evaluators who then have 10 working days to review the resubmitted proposal and submit a second evaluation.

2. **Accept with minor revision:** (when one or more categories scored at "3") Trainees revise proposals and resubmit to GDP within 10 working days of receiving the decision. The revised proposal is not sent back to the evaluators for review. Once the GDP deems the evaluators' queries have been adequately addressed, the trainee proceeds to work on the comps.

3. **Accepted with no revision:** Trainees proceed to work on the comps

- Suggested steps to prepare the comps:

1. Write an outline that reflects the flow of the comps
2. Organize information into sections that provide transition and evolution of ideas
3. Refer to the comps rubric for evaluation criteria
4. The comps should be a maximum of 30 pages using double-spacing and a 12pt font size, excluding references and supplementary materials (e.g., tables with references included in a meta-analysis, additional analysis findings, transcriptions or quotes...etc.)



Register for EDPE708 in the summer when registration opens.



PhD3 Summer

1. Receive feedback from seminar 4 instructor
2. Revise comps according to the comments
3. Submit comps by **June 28** to GPD. If June 28 falls on a weekend, then the following Monday.
4. GPD invites two evaluators to return evaluation in 15 working days

Notes:

- Trainees should submit the final comps in both .docx and .pdf by **June 28, 2024**.
- For the final comps, one of the two evaluators will be the student's research advisor and another faculty member from the department of ECP. When a trainee has co-advisors, only one of the trainee's advisors can evaluate the comps using the rubric presented below. *Please note that this is different from the GPS policy, and it is contingent on students completing the comps independently after submitting the proposal.*
- The evaluators will have 15 working days to provide evaluation and feedback to the GPD.
- The GPD will share the evaluation of feedback based on or before the last day of July.
- The possible decisions are:
 1. Pass - when both evaluators rate 3 and above in all categories. In the case that both evaluators give a score of 5 in six of the seven categories (and a 4 in the remaining category), the comps is considered as "Pass with Distinction". The GPD will issue a recognition letter.
 2. Fail - In case one evaluator rates 1 or 2 in one or more categories, the student will work with the advisor to improve the comps. The comps should be resubmitted to the GPD in eight weeks (approximately the end of September, before the submission of the progress tracking form). The comps will be sent back to both original evaluators for another round of evaluation.

The comps rubric:

Criteria/rating	1	2	3	4	5
Rationale	No goal is stated	Presents a project goal, without justification	Presents a project goal with weak justification	Presents a project goal with coherent justification	Presents a project goal with strong and coherent justification
Addressing the research context	No elaboration on the research context	Some description of the context/ discipline	Sufficient description of the context/ discipline	Comprehensive description of the context/ discipline	Rich and extensive coverage of the context/ discipline
Analysis	No analysis	State opinion without evidence	Competent analysis with some evidence	Proficient analysis with evidence from the literature and simple/direct synthesis	Excellent analysis with systematic organization of evidence and sophisticated synthesis
Critique	No critique	Unclear critique	Competent and clear critique of the literature	Proficient critique with some comparisons showing contradictions, gaps, or inconsistencies in the literature	Excellent critique with clear and strong comparisons showing contradictions, gaps, or inconsistencies in the literature
Original contribution	No contribution	Cursory or unclear contribution	Competent contribution without stating innovation	Good description of original contribution with indication of innovation	Excellent description of original contribution with substantive innovation
Sophistication of writing	Disjointed and convoluted	Difficult to follow	Competent with occasional detraction from main theme(s)	Proficient, clear, and concise writing that adheres and substantiates theme(s)	Excellent writing with logical and substantiated statements
Writing mechanics/APA style	Incomprehensible writing and non-compliant with APA style	Many spelling, grammar, and APA errors	Some spelling, grammar, and APA errors	A few spelling, grammar, and APA errors	Excellent writing with no spelling, grammar, and APA errors