Doctoral Comprehensive Guidelines

The Doctoral Comprehensive is a two-part examination comprised of

1. A Qualifying Paper
2. A Dissertation Proposal

If you entered the program with an MA,

- You must take the Doctoral Comprehensive Examination in your 3rd year
  - Your preparation should begin at the end of your 2nd year.

If you entered the program without an MA,

- You must take the Doctoral Comprehensive Examination in your 4th year
  - Your preparation should begin at the end of your 3rd year.

Before taking the doctoral comps, you must have

- Completed all of the course work requirements (and received final grades for all)
- Demonstrated proficiency in two languages (must be reflected on your transcript)
- Demonstrated proficiency in logic (also, must be reflected on your transcript).

Passing both parts of the exam before May 1st is required in order to maintain good standing and to be eligible to receive your final year of funding (University Fellowship) the following year.
Part I: Qualifying Paper

The qualifying paper is a paper of publishable quality on a systematic question or on an author(s). Ideally, it should correspond to what will become an Area of Competence for you. It may be a course paper that has been improved with the feedback of the instructor.

Finding a Qualifying Paper Supervisor:
You will need to secure a paper supervisor by the end of your 2nd (3rd) year. Consult with your adviser or dissertation supervisor to find a qualifying paper supervisor.

When to begin writing:
You are strongly encouraged to begin research and writing towards the end of year 2 (or 3) and over the summer, under the guidance of your qualifying paper supervisor.

When to Defend your Qualifying Paper:
The paper should be defended in the fall semester of year 3 (or 4).

Qualifying Papers Criteria

Qualifying papers should be of publishable quality (i.e. would earn at least a “revise and resubmit” in a blind peer review). The department recognizes that they may reflect a plurality of philosophical styles and methodologies (historical, hermeneutical, phenomenological, analytical, textual criticism, and so on). Their exact form and content will also depend upon the journals intended for potential publication. Nevertheless, the qualifying papers should have the following general features, and will be evaluated accordingly:

(1) Form
(a) The prose is clear and precise. The flow, pacing, and wording are excellent.
(b) The essay’s structure is easily discernable: the paper stays focused on the objective stated in the introduction; the way in which the middle sections develop and support the paper’s thesis is manifest; the progression of ideas is plain; the thinking moves logically from one paragraph to another; a clear outcome is reached in the conclusion (even if a negative one—for example: “It is impossible to establish that...”).
(c) The bibliographical information and mode of citation of the sources are consistent and conform to scholarly standards (depending on the journals).
(d) A 200-word abstract precedes the paper.
(e) The length of the paper is appropriate (to be determined with the supervisor, as it depends on the topic, the approach, the outlets envisioned, etc.). The maximum length is set at 14,000 words, abstract and bibliography included.

(2) Content
(a) A clearly formulated question or problem is stated at the outset. The paper aims at making a significant contribution to the relevant literature (challenge to established opinion(s), investigation of an overlooked point or text, etc.).
(b) The methodology is appropriate to the topic (e.g. historical research, hermeneutical approach, phenomenological analysis, literature review and critique). Presuppositions are made explicit.
(c) The question or the problem chosen is thoroughly investigated.
(d) All the relevant philosophical concepts are clearly defined and explained, and are correctly employed.
(e) All the relevant primary and secondary sources are taken into account.
(f) The summaries or interpretations of the sources are accurate. The quotations and paraphrases supporting the interpretation or the point being made are adequate.
(g) The paper makes a strong case for its central claim(s): it offers appropriate evidence in support and addresses possible objections with fairness.

**Procedure for Defending Your Qualifying Paper**

**Assemble your Board:**

The defense is oral, with a board of **three members** composed of the paper supervisor, the supervisor of the dissertation, and another faculty member. All board members must belong to the Philosophy Department faculty. If you have a date confirmed, reserve a room.

**Establish your Reading List:**

The defense is based on the paper and on a reading list of **6 to 10 authors and/or texts** from the history of philosophy (as broadly as possible) that raise significant questions or challenges for the thesis of the paper. This reading list is to be established ahead of the defense with the paper supervisor, and sent at least **two weeks before the defense**, with the paper, to the other board members. If you have not done so, contact the program administrative assistant to reserve a room.

**At least 2 weeks before the defense, fill out online the following Qualifying Paper Defense Form:**

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/18wz7lgIAWjJDB5RAXbSqt4Z5IT4d2ZPmZfK1Y1scvOog/edit

**Defend your Qualifying paper:**

Print, staple together, and bring to the defense all the Qualifying Paper Result Forms, aka ballots (see the attachment at the end of this document). Part I will be signed by your board members. Then, give all four pages to the program administrative assistant.

If the examination of the paper is failed, the paper may be resubmitted after improvement and defended again, only once, and not sooner than the following semester.
Part II: Dissertation Proposal

The formal approval of your dissertation proposal allows you to begin officially
the writing of your dissertation during your university fellowship year.

You should begin thinking about the proposal by the end of your 2nd year
(3rd if you did not enter the program with an MA).

You must pass the qualifying paper before you can advance
to the examination of the dissertation proposal.

Finding a dissertation supervisor:
In consultation with your academic adviser, you are responsible for finding a tenured/tenure-
track faculty member of the department who will work with you to write a dissertation
proposal and direct your dissertation.

When to begin writing:
At the end of year 2 (3 if you do not have an MA) at the latest, start working with your supervisor
on your dissertation proposal. For advice on what should go into a proposal see the “Dissertation
Proposal Guidelines” in the attachments of the graduate studies handbook.

Assemble your board:
The oral examination board is composed of 3 tenured/tenure-track faculty members, including the
dissertation supervisor. Except for the dissertation supervisor, they do not have to be the same
persons as for the qualifying paper.

The second reader of the dissertation should normally be appointed at that time and be a member
of the proposal examination board.

With approval of the Graduate Committee, one member may be a tenured/tenure-track faculty
from another department within Boston College or outside.

Procedure for Defending your Dissertation Proposal

The dissertation proposal is to be orally examined in the spring semester of the 3rd (or 4th) year in
the program, no later than May 1st.

Confer with your board at the beginning of the spring semester to select a date and time for your
defense and book a room with the program administrative assistant.

Fill out the Dissertation Proposal Defense Form at least two weeks before the defense:
https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScOWks1xr5P7aNMwblHYZTtWScuzw0lPCPzq23IoABxQ/viewform?usp=sf_link

Get from the administrative assistant the Doctoral Examination Result Forms (including part I
already completed) and bring them to the defense (see attachment).

A failed examination may be retaken once and once only, and not sooner than the following semester.
Final Result

At the end of the examination of the dissertation proposal, the board will complete part II of the Examination Result Forms, i.e. the Dissertation Proposal Result Form (p. 3 of the attached document), and the Doctoral Comprehensive Examination Report (i.e. the synthesis of the two parts for the registrar, p. 4 of the attached document). All the forms must then be given back to the Graduate Program Administrator.

A student attains the status of a doctoral candidate by passing the doctoral comprehensive exam. By Graduate School policy, doctoral candidates are required to register for Doctoral Continuation, Phil999901, each semester until completion of the dissertation.
ATTACHMENT

DOCTORAL COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION
RESULT FORMS, aka BALLOTS

Four pages, to be printed, stapled, and always circulated together
DOCTORAL COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION
RESULT FORMS

Student’s Name: ………………………………………………………………….

Eagle ID Number: ………………

The present form is composed of **one ballot for each part** of the exam, **and a synthesis** for the Registrar Office (“Examination Report”).

When the **qualifying paper** has been examined, **only the ballot for the first part should be completed**, and the whole form should be given to the Graduate Program Director.

A candidate cannot proceed to the defense of the dissertation proposal if the examination of the paper is failed. The board decides when the paper can be resubmitted and defended again (only once).

When the **dissertation proposal** has been defended, **the synthesis for the registrar should be completed together with the ballot for the second part**. The synthesis should be signed by the members of the second board, but not necessarily by the members of the first board (except the board chair person—the future dissertation supervisor—, who is present in both parts.) The whole form should be given to the Graduate Program Director.

In each of the two parts, the decisions “Passed with distinction”, “Passed” and “Failed” must result from a majority decision.

In the synthesis for the Registrar Office,

The decision “Passed with distinction” shall result from “Passed with distinction” in each of the two parts of the examination;

“Passed” shall result from “Passed” in one of the parts and “Passed with distinction” in the other, or from “Passed” in both;

“Failed” shall result from “Failed” in one of the parts.

If the board decides to attach any conditions or stipulations to its decision, they should be added in writing to this report.
Doctoral Comprehensive

Part I — Qualifying Paper Result Form

Student’s Name and Title of the Paper:

__________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________

Date of the Examination: ________ / ________ / ________

In the view of the examination committee, the student has:

☐ Passed the examination with distinction.

☐ Passed the examination.

☐ Failed the examination.

________________________________________

(Chair of the Examination Committee)

________________________________________

(Examination Committee Member)

________________________________________

(Examination Committee Member)
Doctoral Comprehensive

Part II — Dissertation Proposal Result Form

Student’s Name and Title of the Dissertation Proposal:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Date of the Examination: _______ / ________ / ________

The examination committee judges that the student has:

☐ Passed the examination with distinction.

☐ Passed the examination.

☐ Failed the examination.

________________________________________
(Chair of the Examination Committee)

________________________________________
(Examination Committee Member)

________________________________________
(Examination Committee Member)
BOSTON COLLEGE
OFFICE OF THE UNIVERSITY REGISTRAR
CHESTNUT HILL, MA 02167

DOCTORAL COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION REPORT

DATE: ________________

Examinee: ___________________________ BCID#: ___________________________

Department: ___________________________

The above examinee has completed the comprehensive examination. The board having considered and evaluated the totality of the examination judges that the examinee has:

Passed this examination with distinction ______________________

Passed this examination _____________________________

Failed this examination _____________________________

Therefore the examinee should/should not be promoted to the status of doctoral candidate.

Signatures: ____________________________(Chairperson)

______________________________________

______________________________________

______________________________________

______________________________________

______________________________________

N.B. To qualify, the examinee must be “passed” by a majority of the board.

The expressions "passed", "passed with distinction" indicate achievement in an ascending order of worth. The board’s selection among these expressions should result from a majority decision.

If the board decides to attach any conditions or stipulations to its decision, they should be sent in writing along with this report.