M.A. Qualifying Paper Guidelines

1. Preparing and Submitting the Qualifying Paper

- The paper comes in addition to any paper written for the course work, although it may (but does not have to) be derived from a class paper. It must be different from the M.A. thesis if you are writing one.
- You must work with your adviser on this paper, up to the final version, which your adviser should check.
- The maximum length of the paper is 9,000 words, abstract and bibliography included. The minimum length is to be determined with your adviser, depending on the topic, the approach, etc. The standard for the grading is a good research paper that demonstrates clarity of writing, solid argumentation, and familiarity with primary and secondary sources when applicable. See the detailed criteria below.
- Follow the template given at the end of this document.
- The paper must be anonymized and submitted electronically, using the online form [forms.gle/Wz9bxsMRt592uxxm6], before November 15 in the semester before the last in the program, for possible use as a writing sample in Ph.D. applications.
- You may submit up to three faculty names (from the department only) as preferred graders, excluding the adviser under whose guidance the paper has been prepared (when the paper is derived from a term paper, the course instructor may be included, except if he/she was also the adviser for the paper).
- The program director will choose two faculty members. While trying to find the most suitable graders, he/she is not bound by the names you submitted, as he/she has to spread out equally the work across the faculty.
- By December 1, the two graders will each send back a one-page report with their remarks and advice for improvement (especially in view of making the paper a good writing sample for future applications), and the final grade they have determined after consulting with each other (see below). Additionally, the paper can be annotated in electronic form.
- The program director will give you the grade and the reports, and the names of the graders as well, so that you can directly request from them additional feedback if needed.

2. The Evaluation Criteria

The department recognizes that papers may reflect a plurality of philosophical styles and methodologies (historical, hermeneutical, phenomenological, analytical, textual criticism, and so on). Nevertheless, a qualifying paper should have the following qualities, and will be evaluated accordingly:
(1) Form

(a) The prose is clear and precise. The flow, pacing, and wording are very good.

(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 a standard system (e.g. Harvard, Chicago, APA).

(d) The paper is preceded by a 200-word abstract.

(e) The length of the paper is appropriate (to be determined with the adviser, as it depends on the topic, the approach, etc.). Writing samples in PhD applications are typically between 15 and 20 double spaced pages long. The maximum length is set at 9,000 words, abstract and bibliography included.

(2) Content

(a) The intent of the paper is clearly formulated at the outset.

(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 key aspects of the topic are addressed.

(d) The pertinent philosophical concepts are clearly defined and explained, and are correctly employed.

(e) The primary and secondary sources are pertinent and satisfactory.

(f) The summaries or interpretations of the sources are accurate. The quotations and paraphrases supporting the interpretation or the point being made are suitable.

(g) The paper makes a good case for its central claim(s): it offers appropriate evidence in support and addresses possible objections with fairness.

3. The Outcome

- The possible grades are Passed with Distinction, Passed, Failed.
- If after consulting with each other the two graders do not settle on the same grade, the lower grade is adopted: “Distinction” from one grader and “Passed” from the other results in the
final grade “Passed”; “Failed” from one grader results in the final grade “Failed.” If however one of the graders disagrees with this outcome, the program director asks a third faculty member to grade the paper. If two of the three grades are “Failed,” the final result is “Failed.” If two of the grades are “Distinction,” the final result is “Distinction.” Otherwise, the final result is “Passed.”

- The qualifying paper must receive at least “Passed” for you to graduate.
- If the grade is “Failed,” you can rework your paper, taking into account the graders’ feedback and with your adviser’s help, and resubmit it, until it gets “Passed.”
Title; it should be descriptive of your paper’s content

[DO NOT ADD YOUR NAME]

M.A. Qualifying Paper

Date turned in [not the due date – this is an academic integrity issue!]
Abstract (200 words maximum, single spaced)

……

Text of paper begins here, double-spaced. For any quotes or references, use in-text citations, clearly linked to an item in your bibliography, with the following form: (Author’s last name or shortened version of title, page numbers [use n.p. if there are no page numbers]).

An example: If you are quoting *The Prince*, by Niccolo Machiavelli, you would have a full entry in your bibliography (see below), and for a quote in the paper, you could use an in-text citation like this: Machiavelli is famous for asking, “Is it better for a prince to be feared or to be loved?” (*Prince*, 67).

If you are not quoting but making claims about facts that are not common knowledge, you also need to provide an in-text citation to a source listed in your bibliography.

Alternatively, you may use footnotes, but be aware that if you are doing a lot of textual analysis with one or more texts that you quote frequently, it is distracting and heavy-handed to use footnotes for each quotation. In-text citation is usually far preferable and generally is the norm for academic work.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

It should be alphabetized by author’s last name. Use the Diana Hacker writing manual, or other reliable writing guide, to see how to construct a proper bibliography. A great internet resource is the Purdue University Online Writing Lab (OWL). As a default, APA style.

Some basics:

For a BOOK:

Author’s last name, author’s initials [followed by: ed., eds. in the plural, if it is an edited volume]. (Year published). Title: And Subtitle if there is one. Place of publication, usually city and state: Publisher.

For a Book with a TRANSLATOR:

Author’s last name, author’s initials. (Year published). Title: And Subtitle if there is one (Name of translator, Trans.). Place of publication, usually city and state: Publisher.

For an ARTICLE in print (even if accessed online):

Author’s last name, author’s initials. (Year published). Title: And Subtitle If There Is One. Journal Title. Volume number (issue number), page range.

For an ARTICLE in a web-only publication:

Author’s last name, author’s initials. (Date of posting, if available). Title: And Subtitle If There Is One. Website or Online Publication Title. Volume number (issue number), page range. Retrieved from [provide the URL].