

GUIDELINES FOR B.A. ORAL EXAMS - Dr. Flamand, American Studies

(Adapted from documents previously prepared by Dr. Pitetti & Prof. Dr. Freitag)

The BA exam (Mündliche B.A.-Abschlussprüfung) is to last for 30 to 40 minutes and consist of a discussion of **2 topics**. Before taking any further steps related to the exam, you should review the relevant sections of the Studienführer (available on the Englisches Seminar website).

My policy is to discuss both topics in English.

You are responsible for procuring and submitting all necessary forms related to the procedure with the Prüfungsamt and/or other relevant departments. I will not do this paperwork for you. Please prepare the paperwork for my signature **ONLY AFTER** I have agreed to serve as your adviser.

QUICK OVERVIEW OF B.A. GUIDELINES

Procedure:

- The exam is 30 minutes and consists of 2 topics.
- Both topics are subject to examination (approx. 15 minutes for each topic).
- The examiner decides with which topic the exam begins.

Preparation:

- The scope of each of the **two topics** is comparable to what one would cover in one seminar. You may choose the topic of one seminar you attended or choose a topic yourself. Both topics need to be **approved by the examiner**.
- **Aim:** In the course of the examination, you need to show:
 - that you have a comprehensive understanding, including detailed analytical knowledge of the texts on your reading list,
 - that you are able to analyze specific passages (both the form and the content) of these texts if you are asked to do so,
 - that you are able to recognize and discuss differences and similarities between the texts on the list,
 - that you have adequate knowledge of the literary/cultural/historical contexts of your topic beyond the texts that are on your reading list,
 - that you can contextualize your topic within the larger cultural and literary history of the United States,
 - that you are able to respond to unexpected questions and issues raised during the examination.

Please hand in the following documents to me no later than 2 weeks before the exam: Lee.Flamand@rub.de

1. A reading list of **primary sources** consisting of around 5 'substantial cultural/literary/theoretical texts' for each topic is to be handed in before you register for the exam. One 'substantial cultural/literary/theoretical text' is approximately equivalent to: one novel, 3-5 short stories, 2 feature films, one season of a television series, 3-5 poems, 1-2 plays.

2. A list of sufficient **secondary sources (academic works of history, theory, and/or criticism)** is required **2 weeks before the exam**. “Sufficient” in this case means that for each ‘substantial’ primary text at least 1 longer or 2 shorter secondary texts should be read. These should **not** consist of general introductory texts, encyclopedia entries, or journalistic texts, which you may nevertheless consult in addition to them in order to build your general knowledge.

3. No later than **1 week before the exam** you need to hand in 3-5 theses which you have formulated **for each** topic (length: 3-5 sentences). These theses are part of your preparation for the exam; they will not be graded. They may, but do not have to be discussed during the exam. The aim of these theses is to create connections between the primary texts in each topic. This will help you prepare for the exam in which we will jump quickly from one text to another.

Getting my consent to serve as your examiner: Proposing Topics

If you think that you want to do your BA exam with me, the first thing we need to do is to figure out whether it really makes sense for us to work together—that is, we need to figure out whether or not I am the best and most qualified examiner for the specific topics you want to be examined on.

To do this, you will propose the two topics you want to be questioned on in the exam, and then I will tell you whether I am able/willing to conduct an exam on those topics. Please keep in mind that my primary area of academic specialization is American Media and Cultural Studies and, to a lesser degree, English Literature. In general I am open to examinations based upon:

1. Classes I have recently taught; OR
2. My general research interests, which can be found on my RUB faculty page:
<https://www.es.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/es/mitarbeiter/lflamand.html.de>

If you are able to propose clearly defined exam topics that are appropriate and relevant to the field of scholarly inquiry in which you wish to be examined (in this case, American Literary Studies), then you have already taken the first step towards demonstrating your knowledge and mastery of that field, which is what the exam aims to test.

If, however, you are unable to propose such topics, or if the topics you propose are badly defined or irrelevant to the scholarly field in which you want to be examined, then you have shown that you do not yet have the requisite knowledge and mastery of that field, and I will not accept your request.

Preparing Primary Reading Lists and Registering for the Exam

Once we have agreed on two topics for the exam, you will prepare a primary reading list for each exam.

The primary reading list will include the titles of key texts related to your topic; these are the texts that you will read and study as you prepare for the exam, and they will form the primary focus of my questions during the exam. You should be prepared to answer any and all questions related to any aspect of the titles that you include on your lists (in other words, you should be prepared not only to answer questions related to the content of these texts, but also questions related to their form and to any literary, historical, cultural, or social context that is relevant to these texts in light of your exam topic).

The scope of each list should be similar to what would be covered in a single seminar, and each list should contain 4-5 “substantial” primary texts. You will choose what texts to include on the reading lists, subject

to my approval; this usually involves a few rounds of emails and discussion, as you send me draft lists and I send you back suggestions for changes. I will not sign any paperwork or officially commit to conducting the exam until you have submitted acceptable primary reading lists for both topics. The process of settling on a mutually acceptable set of primary texts for the two lists is again an (unofficial) part of the exam itself; being able to identify important texts related to your topic shows that you understand that topic well.

A “substantial” primary text means:

- one novel or other book length text (play, epic poem, book-length essay, etc.)
- or 3-5 short texts (short stories/poems/essays/plays/etc.)

Once I have approved the list of primary sources we can decide on a date and time for the exam. At this point you will be ready to register for the exam. I will sign the registration paperwork once you have filled it out, and you can then submit it to the Prüfungsamt.

I second examiner may be required, which I will work to arrange on my end. You may suggest a second examiner if you wish, but I cannot presume that they are necessarily available.

Secondary Reading Lists

For each exam topic, you will also need to prepare a secondary reading list and a set of theses.

The secondary reading lists should contain secondary scholarly sources (academic articles or chapters from academic books) related to the topic; each secondary list should have 5-10 secondary sources (depending on their length).

Very general or basic sources such as encyclopedia entries should not be included (although you can and should consult such sources while preparing the secondary reading list and while studying for the exam itself).

The list of secondary sources should be submitted **2 weeks** before the exam.

You should be prepared to answer questions related to the major arguments or points made in the texts on your secondary reading lists.

Generally speaking, my exam questions focus on the primary literature and on the general scholarly discourse and context of your topics, but I may also ask specific questions about individual secondary texts. By including these texts on your secondary reading list, you are announcing that you have read them and are prepared to talk about them in detail if asked to do so. You do not need to secure my approval for the titles that you include on the secondary reading lists

Exam Theses

For each list you will also prepare 3-5 theses.

Each thesis should be about 3 sentences long and offer an interpretive/argumentative claim about one or more of the primary texts.

You should use the theses to introduce themes you would be interested in discussing during the exam and to draw connections between different texts or different ideas/issues that are relevant to your topic. A good thesis is something that you could potentially develop into a term paper.

The theses should be submitted together with a final list of primary and secondary sources no later than 1 week before the exam.

You should think about the theses not as a “homework assignment” or as extra work, but as an opportunity to take control of your own exam. When I decide what questions to ask during the exam, I will use the theses you propose as a starting point and guideline; of course, I don’t promise to only ask things related to your theses, but this does give you an opportunity to point out topics, issues, and lines of inquiry that you would be interested in talking about during the exam (and that you are prepared to talk about intelligently and in detail!).

Preparing for the Exam

The oral B.A. exam aims to test several things, including:

- your ability to identify a topic of scholarly inquiry appropriate to the field of literary studies;
- your knowledge of the specific texts or other objects of analysis on your list;
- your ability to analyze the details of texts/objects of analysis AND synthesize relevant similarities/differences/other relationships *between* texts/objects;
- your knowledge of and ability to use technical literary, media, and/or cultural studies terminology;
- your knowledge of relevant historical, cultural, and/or literary contexts, and how your texts fit within them;
- your mastery of the English language; and
- your ability to conduct a detailed intellectual conversation “under pressure.”

To achieve a good result in the exam, you will need to show:

- that you have a comprehensive familiarity with the texts on your reading lists, and can both summarize the content of the texts and analyze their language/style;
- that you can use specialized terminology related to the discipline most relevant to your chosen objects/texts;
- that you can contextualize your topics within the larger cultural/political history of the United States, including by drawing connections to relevant historical events or moments;
- that you can contextualize your topic and texts within the history of the United States, including by drawing connections to relevant genres, movements, or major canonical texts;

- that you are able to respond to unexpected questions and issues during the exam.