

FINAL EXIT:
A Student's Guide to Composition's Final Proficiency Exam

If you're reading this and it's nearing the end of the semester, most likely you are currently enrolled in either a Part I or developmental Composition course here at Saint Peter's University. You've written many papers, done some research, had grammar reviews, and even had a midterm as well as monthly in-class assessment essays where your writing was analyzed for structure, style, and syntax. Now you're probably wondering what comes next.

Q. – *My course syllabus mentions a Final Proficiency Exam but upperclassmen have told me about something called an “exit exam.” Are they one and the same?*

A. -- Yes, the exam given at the end of the semester for the Part I and developmental Composition classes is formally called the “Final Proficiency Exam” but is also sometimes referred to as the “Exit Exam” because a student needs to pass the exam as one component of passing (or exiting from) the course itself.

Q. – *What kind of exam is it?*

A. – Because the Final Proficiency Exam is meant to show application of what you've learned in your Composition course, it is an essay exam, very similar to the midterm and monthly in-class assessment essays you've already done.

You will be given a question/prompt based on an essay that you have already read and discussed in class. During the exam, you will use your textbook (or a photocopy of the assigned article) to help you craft your essay and respond more specifically to the prompt. You must also include at least one quote from the piece upon which the prompt is based.

Q. – *How long is the exam?*

A. -- A testing period of 75 minutes (1 hour, 15 minutes) is set as the length of time allowed *for the business of the exam*. This includes time for the reading aloud of the questions by the Writing Program Director. Questions are read aloud so as to ensure that all present understand the questions and so have a fair chance at answering them fully.

The extended time allotted provides sufficient time to compose and check an essay of five or more paragraphs, especially since your monthly assessment essays and midterm exam have prepared you for this timed writing experience.

Q. – *I've already written several essays for my Composition class. Why do I have to write one more – especially under stressful conditions?*

A. – Taking a final exam is a regular part of academic life. In this, Composition is no different than any other class you may take. A final for a chemistry class, for example, demonstrates that you know how to apply formulae and theories to practical situations.

Writing an argumentative essay on a focused topic that you then proofread for mechanical correctness shows that you can use what you've learned over the course of the semester in your Composition class. It also reflects what you will have to do in exam situations for other academic disciplines that are writing-intensive. In other courses, you may be called upon to write several short essays on different topics in one exam period. Also, many jobs often require you to write such things as memos and reports with very little preparation time.

You need to know how to organize and present written material upon request. Your Composition class has shown you how. Now the Final Exam is your chance to show the English Department that you have, indeed, mastered this very necessary skill.

Q. – *Does everyone take the Final Exit Exam?*

A. – No. Only students enrolled in CM 001, CM 003, CM 104, and CM 106 take the Final Exam if their attendance is in order and if they have passing provisional grades for coursework done prior to the date of the exam.

Q. – *Wait. What about students enrolled in Part II credit-bearing courses or in one semester courses?*

A. – Students enrolled in sections of CM 120, CM117, and CM 115 do NOT take the exit exam. The final grade for these courses is based upon the research paper (a heavy component in grading overall), the oral presentation, and other elements of coursework, such as grammar and short essay writing.

Q. – *Is anyone NOT ALLOWED to take the exam?*

A. – Anyone who is overcut and has received an “FA” for the class prior to the date of the exam cannot return to class and cannot take the exam.

Anyone who has received an “F” as a coursework average prior to the exam is told so in advance, cannot return to class, and cannot take the exam.

Students notified of the fact that they have received an FA or an F prior to the exam have failed the course and must repeat the class in the semester immediately following the failure. **Please note that you cannot skip a semester of Composition.**

Q. -- What should I bring to the exam?

A. -- Arrive promptly and sign in at the registration desk where you will present your SPU One Card ID to the person doing check-in. Most importantly, you must bring your essay textbook or at least a photocopy of the assigned article for your course section. You may also bring a paperback dictionary for reference.

Additionally, please bring two Blue Books (which you can purchase a few days beforehand at the SPU Bookstore), plus two pens that write. Pens should have blue or black ink. Do NOT use pencil, highlighters, sparkly markers or anything else that is difficult to read. *Remember:* if the Reading Team cannot read your paper, it will be marked as a failure.

Q. -- Is anything NOT permitted at the exam?

A. -- You are not allowed to have any electronic devices (including cell phones) turned on and on the desk. Neither can you wear headphones or electronic ear pieces of any type. If you are wearing a hooded sweatshirt, you must not wear the hood up. This is to ensure that your full attention is on writing your exam and not on the music you may be tempted to listen to on a hidden earpiece. Such things are distracting to your own concentration and to the concentration of those around you. While you may prefer to write while listening to music at home, this is NOT ALLOWED during an exam, just as it is not allowed in class. Do not be rude by attempting to circumvent this condition of the testing situation.

Everything should be turned off and stored securely in a backpack or purse BEFORE you enter the Exam Hall. All things electronic must remain off and put away until you are outside the Exam Hall after the test is done.

Q. -- What are the general directions for the exam?

A. -- You will be instructed to write your name and specific class information on the cover of the Blue Book (or books – most people use two) in which you will write your essay. An essay prompt based on the article for your level will be given to you and the question will be reviewed briefly before start time is announced. If you have any questions after official start time, you must silently raise your hand and wait for an instructor to come to you. Do NOT get up and walk over to your professor, as this disrupts the concentration of others in the exam hall.

When writing your essay, you must write as legibly as you can in order to be understood. If your handwriting is poor, please print. It is best to skip lines to give yourself room to make readable corrections when you proofread. Write on both sides of the page to give yourself as much room for development as possible. Do not tear out any pages, as the blue book may fall apart. If parts of your essay are missing, it will be judged a failure.

Spend the first few minutes brainstorming and listing points you want to cover. Write your exam directly in the blue book. Yes, you may cross out to make corrections as you proofread. Please note that there is NO time to recopy. Do not try to rewrite the exam perfectly for the sake of neatness. Making your corrections neatly is effort enough. Spend your time on developing your argument, not practicing your penmanship.

If you use two Blue Books to develop your answer (and most people do), you must put your name and class information on the cover of the second book and label that “Book Two”. Book Two is then inserted inside of Book One when you hand in the essay at the end of the exam.

Q. – If I am done before time is called, may I leave?

*A. – No. You are **required** to remain in the Exam hall for the full 75 minutes.* If you are done early, you should use the time remaining to proofread your exam for mechanical errors and confusing wording. Do not be satisfied with a fast once over of your work. Check everything carefully. ***Most students who fail this exam do so because they do not check their work carefully – or at all.***

Q. – Who will keep time for the exam?

A. – The Director of the Writing Program or other assigned faculty member will announce time remaining at the half-interval, at ten minutes prior to the end, and then a minute or so before end time. When actual end time is at last announced, the exam is over, and you must surrender your paper to an instructor. Do not plead for extra time or continue writing. The next group of students will be coming in immediately, and stragglers steal time from their classmates by not cooperating. To ensure a quick and calm exam submission process, all must remain seated until all blue books are collected.

Q. – How is my exam graded?

A. – Members of a Reading Team composed of full-time English Department faculty read each exam and assess it using objective standards of mechanical correctness, orderly structure, clear syntax and diction, and logical development of ideas. In order to further assure complete objectivity, Composition professors do not read essays written by their own students. The exams are read more than once to ensure that a fair assessment is reached, and then each test is graded either “Pass” or “Fail”.

Q. – How and when will I know my results?

*A. – Your professor will tell you your results personally in class a few days after the exam when all books from students in all sections have been assessed. **No results will be given via email, phone call, or personal visit to the English Department.** You must wait for Results Day.*

Q. – What happens on Results Day?

A. – If you have passed the exam, your professor will give you the good news. If you have failed, your professor will review your exam with you to show you what problems led to the failure. Please note that although you will be seeing your actual exam if you fail, you will not be permitted to keep it or borrow it or photocopy it. You may review it, but it remains with your instructor who must return it to the English Department after class that day. This review is a courtesy extended to help you prepare for the Retake Exam if you are eligible to take one or, at the very least, to help you identify your error patterns and fix them in the future.

Also, please note that passing exams will NOT be available for review.

Q. Hold on! Did you say “Retake Exam”?

A. – Yes, there *is* a Retake – *but it is only offered under certain conditions.*

If you fail the exam on the first round but have a least a “C-“ or better as your provisional grade for coursework done prior to the exam, you will be permitted to sit for the Retake Exam, which will feature a new question but one still based on the same article used for the initial exam.

Just as before, you must supply your own Blue Books and will be expected to plan, write, and proofread an argumentative essay of five or more paragraphs that prove application of course material. You must also include at least one quote from the article used for the exam. The Reading Team will once again read and assess each essay and determine its status as either “Pass” or “Fail”.

Q. – Who is ineligible for a Retake?

A. – Anyone whose provisional coursework grade is a “D+” or lower and has failed the exam has also failed to show application of course material and so will not be permitted a Retake.

If you are in this group, your exam failure stands, and you have failed the course because you have not demonstrated sufficient facility. You must then repeat the course the following semester.

Q. – If I take a Retake Exam, how and when will I get my results?

A. – Results will be sent to you via SPU email from the English Department to your University email address. As with the first round for the exam, results will NOT be given via phone call or personal visit to the English Department.

If you fail the Retake, you have failed the course and so must change your schedule to repeat the same level of Composition the next semester. Specific information as to how to proceed with this will be provided in the official email sent to you. *It is your responsibility to check your email and act on registering for a new class in a timely manner.*

Q. – If I fail the Retake, will someone review my paper with me so I can see why I failed?

A. – Should you fail the retake, you are welcome to make an appointment with the Director of the Writing Program to review your exam. However, reviewing your mistakes does not erase the failure. You must still repeat the course in the semester immediately following that failure.

Q. – *I don't intend to be a writer or an English teacher. Why do I have to take, let alone pass, Composition in the first place?*

A. – Aside from the fact that clear communication is essential in the world of work and in life in general, Composition is a core course required for graduation. In most cases, you must also pass Composition before you can take either of the two core literature courses (*Fiction* or *Poetry & Drama*) also required for graduation.

Q. – *If I have a passing provisional grade for Composition, why does passing the Final matter? If failing the exam means failing the course, doesn't that mean that the Exam is the only thing that counts?*

A. – Passing the Final matters because, as with any other discipline you study, it is proof of application of what you have learned. Just as it is possible to get passing grades for all your Math quizzes, it is still then possible to get a failing grade on the Math final and so fail that course. This is no different.

In order to get a passing grade in any section of Composition, you must complete all your coursework to the satisfaction of the instructor, attend class regularly, go to CASE (where applicable) for tutoring, conference with your instructor as requested (also where applicable), and pass the Final Proficiency Exam – which, as stated before, is proof of application of coursework.

Q. – *Okay. So, the exam is required, just as in any other course. What if I am late or miss the provided exam sessions completely?*

A. – If you are late and the door has closed because the exam has begun, you have missed that exam session. **Latecomers are not admitted to the Exam Hall.** Students registered for Tuesday/Friday classes must be prompt to that the exam during their regularly

scheduled class time. In order to give Monday/Wednesday/ Thursday classes 75 minutes of exam time, four walk-in exam sessions have been arranged for those in the MWTh classes only. Students from the 3 day classes can select their own exam time, but they must take it on the larger exam day. A selection of times is available. A selection of days is not. Also, you cannot cut another class or leave one early to take the exam.

Any conflicts with scheduling due to team-related travel or lab courses will be taken care of on a case by case basis. Note that all such problems must be brought to the attention of the English Department well in advance of the exam dates. Conflicts will be checked as to veracity, and appropriate arrangements will be made.

Note that “having to work” is NOT an acceptable excuse, just as it is not an acceptable excuse during the regular exam week. You will know the exam date early enough to make arrangements with your employer.

If you are late or miss any of the provided sessions completely, your only chance to take the exam will be at the Retake.

Q. – What if I miss the Retake ?

*A. – If you miss the Retake, you have failed the exam and therefore have failed the course. **There is no Retake for the Retake. DO NOT REQUEST ONE.***

Your best plan is to be early so that you are seated before the beginning of the hour. You **MUST** be on time.

Q. – What if I need extra time or special conditions in order to take tests?

A. – Students with special needs for testing must have documented proof of academic need on file with CASE (Center for Academic Success and Engagement). Extra time testing sessions on the larger exam date are offered at the English Department under faculty supervision. These are not drop-in sessions, however, and therefore any students needing this must commit to one of the offered times prior to the date of the actual exam and arrive promptly for the appointment made.

Those who need special accommodation but cannot make the English Department supplied times because of a valid conflict must arrange to take the exam at CASE by filling out a special request form **at least 10 business days before the requested date.**

Here are links to the necessary forms:

Student Exam Accommodation Form: (Use this when requesting a particular date.)
<https://www.saintpeters.edu/academics/programs-services/disability-services/files/2018/01/Student-Exam-Accommodation-Form.pdf>

Accommodation Request Form: (Use this to be on file as needing particular accommodation throughout the semester.)

<https://www.saintpeters.edu/academics/programs-services/disability-services/files/2018/01/Accommodation-Request-Form.pdf>

NOTE: If you miss your appointment, like anyone else, your only chance to take the exam will be on the day of the Retake. If you miss the Retake, you have failed the exam and therefore have failed the course.

Q. – Why is the Final Proficiency Exam scheduled during the regular part of the semester and not during Exam Week?

A. – Because of the large number of students taking the exam, time must be allowed for the assessment process to take place and to then allow results to be delivered with time again being available for a retake for those eligible.

Therefore, reading and assessment of exams must take place when the full complement of English Department faculty is on campus and available to work on exam assessment. Exam week schedules are too varied for students and teachers to allow for a test of this volume to be conducted in time for final grades to be processed. Therefore, the Final Proficiency Exam is conducted earlier than exams for other courses.

Q. – Since we take the exam before the end of semester and not during Exam Week, do we still have to attend the few classes remaining before exam results are available?

A. – Absolutely. The days remaining after the initial exam are used to prepare for the following semester, return papers, do course evaluations, and discuss your overall progress with your professor. They are crucial to the workshop experience that is Composition. Also, please note if you are absent on any of these days and such absences cause you to exceed the allowed number of cuts, your professor can still give you an “FA” for the course. **DO NOT RUN THIS RISK.** Go to class.

Q. – When will I know my grade for the course?

A. – While the exam itself is either “Pass” or “Fail”, your letter grade for the course will be available for you to see on Spirit Online once grades have been posted by your instructor. Composition faculty must wait until Retake results are available to file their grades for the entire class roster. Therefore, look for your grade online about a week after the Retake date.

Q. – May I ask my professor for my grade on the last day of class?

A. – It is English Department policy not to release Composition grading information before all exam results are tabulated. Since the Retake is usually given at 3:00 PM on the last day of classes university-wide, your final grade will not be available. Do not ask for special treatment. It will not be given.

Q. – On what is my final grade based?

A. -- As outlined in the syllabus given to you by your professor at the beginning of the semester, your grade is based on an assessment of various essays, the midterm, and in-class writings, in addition to class participation, grammar work, and passing the Final Proficiency Exam. Your grade must reflect all of these things to give a true picture of what you can do in a variety of circumstances.

You are being graded on the product that your effort produces, not on the effort alone. You must show that you understand the principles of good Standard English by producing solid work in many different ways.

Q. – What if I withdraw from composition before the end of the semester? Can I wait to retake Composition until I feel ready during a semester that's more convenient for me?

*A. -- No. While withdrawing is allowed up to a date set by Enrollment Services, if you do withdraw, you must take Composition at Saint Peter's University the following semester. *NO EXCEPTIONS!**

Finally, please remember that Composition is a skills course. Demonstrate your skill. You are responsible for your own success or failure. Make every effort to be a success.

Good luck!
