

ICPS Junior Qualifying Examination Handbook

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1 Policies

The ICPS Junior Qualifying Examination is written with a professor in their home department in either semester of the junior year. In the first week of classes, the ICPS committee will assign each student to a professor with whom they will write their qual. Typically but not always this is a committee member.

Students going on terms abroad must make early arrangements to complete the junior qualifying examinations. This is their responsibility.

Junior Qualifying Examination Schedule

Noon of Monday of Week 3	Proposal Due
Noon of Monday of Week 7	Draft Research Designs Due
Noon of Monday of Week 12 <i>(Week 11 of instruction)</i>	Final Papers Due

2 Junior Qual Moodle

To assist you with the qual, a number of electronic resources have been placed on the ICPS Qual Moodle, which you will be given access to at the beginning of the semester that you are taking the exam. Important resources include:

1. **This Year's Deadlines.** These are posted at the beginning of the academic year on the ICPS website and are updated to reflect any subsequent changes in dates or locations of events. The Qual Czar will also send any additional updates to the Qual mailing list.
2. **Junior Qual Samples.** The Qual Czar has placed sample research designs on the qual Moodle. Note that a short literature review has been added to the qual, which is not reflected in the samples.
3. **Relevant Syllabi and Readings.** The Qual Czar has placed syllabi and EReadings that may help with your short literature review and research design.

3 Components of the Junior Qual

The Junior Qualifying Examination in ICPS primarily consists of a short literature review and a research design. To clarify the process, we have broken the qual into three parts. All three must be completed by the due dates, and are listed below in chronological order.

1. **Proposal.** The proposal is a short 2–3 page (500–750 words) statement of the puzzle or question on which a literature review will be conducted.
2. **Draft Research Design.** The design puts forward a hypothesis or thesis for further research. The draft design should be at least 4–5 pages (1000–1250 words) double-spaced, including references. Your design should be based on your initial reading of the literature (and cite some of it), although you may not have completed a full literature review at this point. The design should state clearly the thesis or hypothesis, significance of the question, method or method(s) to be used, the steps to be followed, and the outcome expected.
3. **Final Paper.** The final paper is expected to incorporate and be responsive to feedback from faculty during the entire process. It should be about 8–10 pages (2000–2500 words) in length, and should incorporate a short literature review and final research design.

4 Evaluation of the Junior Qualifying Examinations

A student must successfully complete the junior qualifying examination by the end of their junior year in order to register for ICPS 470, Thesis. The advisor will make an initial recommendation for the qual, which the committee then discusses. *Conditional passes are a normal part of this process.* They indicate that the committee believes that while the qual is generally sound, one or more parts may require further elaboration. Students who miss deadlines may petition the committee, though this is far from the normal expectation of things. The committee expects all deadlines to be met in a timely fashion.

A few points on evaluation. First, and most obviously, incorporate whatever relevant feedback or advice you heard during the course of the qualifying examination. Speak about it with your professor and the Qual Czar if any input is unclear. Failure to incorporate feedback can lead to a conditional pass. Second, start writing up your literature review early on in the process; there is no need to wait until after the draft design to get a start on this part of your final paper. Third, we assume that your work this semester is evolving and so the final product will represent improvements in detail, clarity, and organization for the final paper. The committee's assessment of your qual will be delivered by email as well as a hard copy to your mail box.

There are three possible outcomes for the qual: pass, conditional pass, and fail. Fail happens rarely, though it has happened. The conditional pass is more common than a fail assessment. This means that the submitted document lacks in some respect and the committee places some conditions that you must perform to pass fully. This may include simply providing missing material, rewriting certain elements of the qual, and so forth.

5 A Step by Step Guide

5.1 The Proposal: Choose Your Research Question Thoughtfully

The qual has two main components, a literature review and a research design. The main purpose of the proposal is to frame the limits of the literature review. Your proposal will have three elements – one to two paragraphs on each should be sufficient.

1. State your question clearly and with straightforward concepts.

2. Situate your question in relation to a puzzle and explain why interdisciplinary study will be useful for answering it. This should include a discussion of existing literature you've found on the topic.

3. Explain the different approaches you might take to answering your question and which approaches, if any, appeal to you more than others.

Please keep in mind that your first requirement as a senior will be to submit a thesis proposal by the end of the first month to the division (not the committee), so you might as well learn how to do it now. You do not have to have any faculty member sign off on your qual proposal before turning it in.

The way you define your question in the long run affects the number and range of sources and the quality of the arguments you can pull together for a literature review. The choice of question can therefore be strategic. This is the first place in the assignment where your creative judgment and skill come into play.

Some questions are simply enormous (What is the literature on revolution, terrorism, or globalization?) and there are many well-traveled paths. In these areas, the goal is to narrow the topic in a way that there is a puzzle, question, proposition or hypothesis to explore. For example, "Are presidential systems more liable to gridlock than parliamentary systems?" would be one way of narrowing down a question like "What causes legislative gridlock?"

A question may also be a non-starter because there is very little information on it or all the information you can find on it is of one sort (say, journalistic coverage or by just one author). Here you may need to think about ways to revise your question so you can grasp a variety of research sources. Here your professor may be able to give you good advice on narrowing your question.

The scope of the literature review may depend upon how much literature already exists on the particular topic. To put it another way, given a research question such as "Why have sanctions lasted so long against Cuba?" the appropriate literature review may study general theories of sanctions duration; in the case of a subject that has been extensively studied, a review may study the particular topic of Cuban sanctions if the theoretical positions are well staked out in order to identify remaining puzzles unexplained by the existing approaches.

5.2 Literature Review and Design

You will be turning in a draft design midway through the semester, and a final paper between the break and the end of classes. The draft design need not have a short literature review, but you should have read enough of the literature to cite specific pieces when you list your initial hypotheses. The final paper must have a short literature review that organizes the existing scholarship on your question and connects to your final hypotheses.

5.2.1 Short Literature Review: Investigate

Once you have established why it is an important puzzle or question, you then assemble the range of literature you think is responsive to this concern. Your hunt may yield many articles and books but it is unlikely you will want to review all of them. Aside from the time constraints, they may not all be relevant in the same degree. You need to screen this material to see if it is eligible to be included. This is your first screen. A variety of different approaches (methods, questions, orientations, perspectives) is critical to make the most of this exercise. You need to identify potentially **usable** studies and so you may find yourself going back to the library again and again. This is normal.

As you do your research, make sure you keep a record of *how* you have been gathering the information. This includes things as simple as following footnote trails and browsing as well as using various databases and hard copy texts (the annotated bibliography of Machiavelli, the encyclopedia of the social sciences) in the reference section. With databases, keep track of what search terms you used in conducting your searches. You may find programs such as Endnote or Zotero useful for keeping track of where and how you found each item. We highly recommend that you write a summary of each piece as you read them, as this is a good scholarly habit to get into (in Zotero, you should add “Notes” for this purpose).

Next you need to go over this literature again for *quality*. A good literature review produces the best available assembly of materials on the topic at that time. You may wish to consider the study's design, how data was collected, how it was analyzed, interpreted and reported. The mechanical element of this is getting to know your literature, which includes knowing the author's purpose, identifying the thesis, the background assumptions, the place the text occupies in the controversy or puzzle, the methodological techniques employed, and the findings. If you do not have enough material of quality, then you need to go back to the library.

A literature review allows a reader to understand the strengths and weaknesses of research done on a topic. In many cases, the first chapter of a thesis is a literature review (and frequently a research design); therefore, mastery of this skill is critical to the success of a thesis. A literature review is different from an essay, think piece, or take-home exam. It is a review of numerous books and journal articles that seek to address a common topic. The nature and range of the material obviously varies with the field and topic. However, the final effect of a literature review on the reader is the same. In every case, the reader of a literature review should be able to see sources of confusion and obstacles; identify hidden disputes or unknown ambiguities; and understand the strengths and limits of what has been done on the topic.

In all cases, the following guidelines apply:

1. The purpose of a short literature review is to evaluate critically literature on a particular question. The literature review should include scholarly materials far beyond those treated directly in courses you have taken.
2. While no firm rule regarding number of sources can be stipulated, a typical short literature review will cover between 5 and 10 sources.
3. While no firm rule of length can be stipulated, it is likely that most (short) literature reviews will be about 4–5 pages long, although your thesis literature review will likely be much longer.
4. Any literature review should provide a theoretical as well as methodological discussion and should explain why interdisciplinary study will be useful for engaging with the topic.
5. All evidence must be properly documented and referenced, using an acceptable professional system of citation. Consult your professor regarding an appropriate citation system. See the Appendix for some starting points for citation.

5.2.2 *Research Design: Crafting a Program for Research*

Why draft a research design now? In Thesis, your first responsibilities will be to propose a research design and conduct a literature review, and your design must be something you can complete within a year. So the qual tests your ability to frame that project. One common error in the qual research design is to propose surveys or studies that would take either a portion of a lifetime or a multimillion dollar grant to complete. If you sense that this is the case with the strategy or question you have come up with, then you need to either rethink your strategy or refine your question. All seniors in the Division of HSS (including ICPS seniors) must submit a research proposal in the first month of thesis, so it is good to be familiar with this format. The Junior Qualifying Examination thus includes your mastering the first skill you need to draw on for thesis.

We expect the initial research designs submitted to be *drafts*, just as the schedule says. That is, we expect substantial improvement on them when they are resubmitted at the end of the semester, incorporating faculty comments as well as other improvements along the way. Even so, if the draft is incomplete or inadequate, we may, in some cases, ask for resubmissions.

Even at the draft stage, the committee expects to see the following elements incorporated into the designs.

1. You should offer a clear thesis or puzzle based on the review and state why it is a good candidate for interdisciplinary study. Why is this research question important (the inevitable “who cares?” question)? This question should be plausible in light of the literature review you have just conducted. Think about the literature you have read and place your design within the framework of the literature.

2. Propose a way and methodology to test, prove, or disprove your thesis, outline the stages through which the research would proceed, and tell us what you expect to find based on the literature you have reviewed thus far. What would it take to convince you that you are wrong (identifying the truth conditions for your claim)? Whether the material is empirical or theoretical, each student must answer this question in plausible and feasible ways. Keep in mind that if you cannot answer this question, then there is no difference between what you are doing and mythology or rhetoric.

This document should be no longer than 5 pages and must have an acceptable system of citation. Your literature review should be of great assistance to you, but remember that a literature review opens the way for *many* research papers, not just one. If you are uncertain on how to proceed with the literature you have read, you should speak as soon as possible with your professor.

Though there is no expectation that the student will have the time to answer it, the strategy you propose *must be feasible*. This means that a student could pursue and complete the strategy you propose over the course of a year given the resources normally available to one.

This is of course not (yet at any rate) a research paper. If you *did* write a research paper based on the literature review, you would need to go over your review again and delete a lot of material as many of the sources you cover may not be directly related to your research design.

Please keep in mind that your research designs are drafts, and we expect you to incorporate feedback and any other improvements that occur to you in the course of the remainder of the semester. Again, should there be a significant problem with the design, we may indicate a concern to you in writing or request a rewrite.