

## Preliminary Examination

All doctoral students must pass a preliminary examination administered by the Advisory Committee in accordance with Graduate School policies. The preliminary examination is a rigorous test of the candidate's entire program of study consisting of a written and an oral portion. The preliminary exam should be administered no later than the end of the third year. Intent to hold a preliminary exam must be formally declared. Examinations should be scheduled through the graduate school at least **two weeks** prior to the exam. It is the student's responsibility to schedule the exam through the Graduate School's online signature approval system (<https://gradexam.stl.vt.edu>). The student must be registered during the semester in which any examination required by the Graduate School is taken.

The preliminary examination is not exclusively for testing factual information, but rather emphasizes critical thinking, analytical problem solving, and the ability to formulate and test hypotheses. In the written portion of the exam, the student must work independently to prepare answers to written questions submitted by the Advisory Committee members. The written portion of the exam must be completed at least one week before the oral portion of the exam is administered. The student is responsible for contacting the entire Advisory Committee to communicate the schedule for the preliminary exam and to request that questions be submitted to the Graduate Program Coordinator. Students will receive one set of questions each day during the week of the written portion of the exam and will have 24 hours to prepare and submit a response before the next set of questions is delivered. Responses will be distributed to the Advisory Committee by the Graduate Program Coordinator. The oral portion of the exam will include material from the written exam, as well as other areas of the student's program of study. Each Advisory Committee member must signify whether the exam performance was Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory using the online signature approval system. At most, students are allowed one Unsatisfactory vote.

If a student fails the preliminary examination, one full semester, a minimum of 15 weeks, must elapse before a second examination may be scheduled. Failure to pass the second examination will result in the student being dismissed from graduate studies by the Graduate School.

### **Scheduling Your Prelim**

- The MACR program requires five members on your Advisory Committee. Before scheduling your preliminary exam, ensure there are five members on your plan of study. Once you have contacted your committee members and have scheduled a time and place to hold the oral portion of your exam, you must schedule your exam using the Graduate School's

- online signature approval system (<https://gradexam.stl.vt.edu>). Your exam must be scheduled online at least **two weeks** prior to your oral exam date.
- At least one week prior to the written portion of the exam, the student should email the entire Advisory Committee, copying the Graduate Program Coordinator, detailing the schedule for the written and oral exams. The student will request questions from each committee member to be sent to the Graduate Coordinator. The written exam is held for one week (5 days, Monday through Friday). One set of questions will be delivered to the student on each day, beginning at 8am on Monday until all 5 sets have been completed. The candidate will have 24 hours to submit responses to the Graduate Program Coordinator. Responses will then be forwarded to all members of the committee.
  - When the Graduate School has received your request for the preliminary exam, you will receive an email that the exam has been officially scheduled. If you have not received the email, the exam cannot be held. Please be sure to keep track of this information.
  - Once the oral portion of the exam is complete, the Advisory Committee members should log on to the Graduate School system and enter their assessments of the candidate. Candidates are allowed, at most, one Unsatisfactory evaluation.

**Note:** It can be very difficult to schedule your exam when your committee members have full schedules. Doodle ([www.doodle.com](http://www.doodle.com)) can be very useful to schedule a time that works for everyone. Provide a range of days and times for the oral portion of your exam, and respectfully remind each member in a personalized email (don't send a group email) that the week prior to the oral exam will be the week of the written portion. Do not attempt to schedule your preliminary exam until you have affirmative responses from each of your committee members.