



# Prescott College

For the Liberal Arts, the Environment, and Social Responsibility

## QUALIFYING PACKET (QP) REVIEW GUIDELINES

In Prescott College's Master of Arts Program, study packets and qualifying packets serve as the documentation and demonstration of graduate learning. The qualifying packet is reviewed by two faculty readers in addition to the student's graduate advisor. Generally, one is knowledgeable about the paper's topic (**the content faculty-reviewer**) and one focuses on the quality and form of the scholarly writing (**the writing/style faculty-reviewer**). Successful completion of this packet qualifies the student to begin work on the thesis plan and master's thesis.

This qualifying packet process is designed as an opportunity for students to demonstrate, practice, and strengthen writing and critical thinking skills in preparation for the thesis. Through QPs (and other study packets), students demonstrate the thinking, writing, and research skills that are necessary for graduate work in general and the thesis in particular. They document the student's ability to independently research the literature in a field, and to think critically about, evaluate, and synthesize the results.

Qualifying packets will include a principal paper, which is a formal research paper or critical essay. In MAP a research paper or essay

- is written for a scholarly rather than a popular audience;
- reflects the writer's research on a topic by presenting conflicting/diverse views as well as her/his own ideas, interpretations, and judgment;
- includes awareness of the larger domain of knowledge (i.e. the field) that is the context for the particular topic; and
- acknowledges in the proper professional style all of the sources used.

MAP faculty expect scholarly writing is to answer a question, develop an argument, take a stand, explore the implications, or review the literature on a subject. An individual paper should provide sufficient development and support of a thesis statement. Enough scholarly sources should be cited to adequately explore the issues, illustrating the writer's ability to critically examine issues in her or his discipline.

Qualifying packet writing should be in the writer's own natural voice. Some academic disciplines require that formal papers be written in the third-person voice—MAP does not require this practice. When material is quoted or paraphrased, accurate and complete documentation must be provided. Students must follow the style guidelines consistent with their field of study, such as APA, MLA, etc.

### Qualifying Packet Contents

*A qualifying packet will contain the following two ingredients:*

- ✓ a cover letter
- ✓ a 15 page principal paper

**1] A cover letter.** This letter is a detailed exploration of any aspect of graduate study and the student's life as is relevant to her/his study.

**2] A principal paper.** All writing should be original thought versus reportage and include appropriate depth of inquiry. Students' writing should demonstrate both breadth and depth of understanding of the materials being studied and the field of study. Writing should be clear, direct, expressive, and at the same time both personally meaningful and academically sound.

Here are the kinds of principal papers that can be included in a qualifying packet:

- Standard scholarly research paper. A traditional research paper is a paper using a format similar to a master's thesis, but shorter. It generally includes an introduction to a problem, a discussion of related literature, methodologies used, analysis/discussion, results, and conclusion.
- General research paper based on the reading. In other words a research paper that uses for its method a literature review, a critical response to the reading, a comparative essay on two or more texts or journal articles, etc., in which the writer brings the readings to her or his own conclusion or hypothesis. This paper must be a detailed, critical, reflective articulation of the meaning and thought the student has derived from the material. These responses should synthesize and integrate materials read and present an analytical discussion of the data and the writer's conclusion. Students may wish to review journal articles, college textbooks, or any other scholarly texts.
- A research paper that centers on a case study. This paper would present a specific case or situation that addresses a research question through analysis, synthesis, and application of theory and current thought in the field.
- Students in studio, visual, or expressive arts might also include: a research paper that examines one or more artists whose work influences or relates to the student's work; research on a museum that includes a report/analysis of an exhibit and catalogue; a researched comparison of a recent exhibit or performance with the artist's previous work and prior reviews of it; an interview, report, and analysis on local artists; etc.

Additional papers or ingredients. These items may be included as part of the packet, but do not constitute the principal paper required in the Qualifying Packet: • annotated bibliography; • essay on a field-specific topic; • essay on graduate study, such as the art of critical thinking and writing, or any other aspect of the student's program; • students in studio, visual, or fine art, or expressive art therapy may include a portfolio of photography, paintings, sculpture, or individual creative works; • students in creative writing or expressive art therapy may include a portfolio or individual works of fiction, creative non-fiction, or poetry; • students in dance, theater, expressive art therapy, or other expressive- or performing-art fields may include a video, slides/photographs, or a report on a performance; • Report on the progress of the practicum; • draft of the Thesis Plan; • report on student's attendance at a professional conference, seminar, or an academic course or workshop; • anything specifically requested by the advisor.

### **The Review Process**

The student's core (CF) will identify two additional readers for the paper.

The two readers will read the qualifying packet, note their comments in the text of the packet's components, and write an overview containing their most important reactions and suggestions regarding the principal paper. Reviewers may include marginal comments on the cover letter or the something else, but their primary response and recommendation must be based on the principal paper. Each reviewer will make a recommendation to the CF regarding the approval of or the need for a revision of the QP. Please be sure to sign the Cover Page in the appropriate Reviewer's Recommendations section and note if you are recommending the paper for approval or revision.

**The content faculty-reviewer** is chosen for her or his knowledge in the student's field or on the principal paper's topic. The content faculty-reviewer should address such things as the clarity of the argument, the relevance of the topic, the reputation or relevance of the sources cited, and so on.

**The writing/style faculty-reviewer** may have expertise in any field, though she or he may be someone with specific expertise in the student's field. The writing/style faculty-reviewer is asked to comment on quality, organization, clarity, breadth of sources, appropriate use of a writing style, and so on.

Of course we ask all reviewers to see their primary roles, not as judge or critic, but rather as helpers in the student's learning. The feedback provided by the reviewers provides an opportunity for the student to learn and to strengthen her or his critical thinking and writing skills in preparation for writing the thesis and for all the professional writing that will follow.

NOTE: As the procedure is defined here, the "QP Committee" (consisting of the advisor, the CF, and the two faculty reviewers) does not need to meet to discuss the paper, but rather the student and advisor rely on the written feedback from each reader. If one or more members of this committee feel it would be advantageous to meet or to have a phone conference, this can be arranged.