

How to Prepare Your M.A. or M.S. Comprehensive Exam Portfolio

You are allowed to ask graduate faculty procedural questions about the portfolio during two weeks after the comprehensive exam meeting. For the fall semester of 2011, this period expires on Monday, September 26.

The procedural category includes questions about this document, the formatting of the portfolio, etc. You are not allowed to ask questions about specific assignments, ask for help with choosing or revising examples you plan to include in the portfolio, or ask about the analytic essay. You are encouraged to use your graduate faculty as help with procedural questions, but graduate faculty reserve the right to decline to answer your question if they deem that question to be non-procedural. If you have questions about this policy, please ask them during the comprehensive exam meeting.

Why You Must Prepare a Portfolio: A comprehensive examination is a requirement of The Graduate School for all candidates for masters-level degrees.

Please study the Portfolio Evaluation forms attached to these procedures. This is the form that this year's graduate faculty will use to evaluate the exams. You should understand that the portfolio is used as the school's comprehensive exam because as a writer or technical or scientific communicator you will prepare many portfolios during your career. Thus, the portfolio seems to be the best item to use for an exit exam. However, remember that each portfolio you prepare is for a particular context such as to obtain employment or to obtain a promotion. This particular portfolio is for the evaluation for your candidacy as an M.A. or M.S. student, and therefore, you must prepare the portfolio as these directions specify for that purpose. Because this is an exam, we must have very strict standards of fairness. You must follow exactly the procedures for submitting your portfolio for the comprehensive exam.

Evaluation. The exam will be graded as follows: high pass, pass, low pass, fail. You may examine copies of passing exams at the mandatory exam preparation meeting.

You will receive a letter from the graduate director with your results two to three weeks after submission of the portfolio.

IMPORTANT! If you fail to follow any of these procedures in preparing or submitting the portfolio, the exam evaluators may give you a failing grade even if they have not read your portfolio materials.

Due date: Announced at the at the mandatory exam preparation meeting. Completed exams will be submitted to Kristin Knapp in the main WRTC office. No extensions are allowed unless you can provide documentation of a catastrophe that has happened to you to prevent the completion and delivery of the portfolio.

Appearance: All portfolios are to be prepared in black, hard cover, 10" x 11.5"-12" binders. Your last name is to be printed and placed along the spine. The width of the binder's spine will depend on the thickness of your projects.

Whatever size spine you use, the binder must be big enough to contain all of the required work in one portfolio (with the exception of online work). Please do not put your work in plastic sheet protectors. Although this practice is recommended for other types of portfolios, simply include your work on paper.

Quality: All samples, including the analytic writing and the bridge pages, must show evidence of extensive revision. You must revise the content by incorporating the suggestions of the professors for whom you prepared the samples. You must revise the content to reflect the best analytic practices of the technical communication profession. You must also revise for editing. Editing errors, proofreading errors, spelling errors, and grammar errors will cause you to fail.

There is no magic safe number. One error can cause you to fail. See *Most Common Errors of Students* attached, but remember these are not the only errors that will cause you to fail.

Restrictions:

1. You may use each sample only once. You may not use twice a work you developed in two different classes.
2. You may submit only one collaborative piece. All others must be 100% your own work.
3. The bridge page of your one collaborative piece must contain an explicit description of what part you developed and what part your co-authors developed.
4. You may not submit material from presentations because the written and Web materials from a presentation are linked intrinsically to your presence as an oral communicator. We can only review print and online works.
5. In place of an "electronic" sample for their portfolio, students pursuing the graduate degree in the Writing and Rhetoric concentration may submit as one of the portfolio samples a "pedagogy" project piece. For additional information, see p. 5.

Contents:

The portfolio must contain in this order:

- Title page
- Table of contents
- Divider with label of work to follow
- Analytic essay
- Divider with label of work to follow
- Bridge page
- Course work example 1
- Divider with label of work to follow
- Bridge page
- Course work example 2
- Divider with label of work to follow
- Bridge page
- Course work example 3
- Divider with label of work to follow
- Course work example 4
- Bridge page
- Divider with label of work to follow
- Signed release form

Title page: Please see example attached.

Table of contents: Please see examples attached.

Divider with label of work to follow: You will use six dividers in this portfolio. You may choose any kind that would be suitable provided they form a cohesive group. Dividers should be clearly labeled on their tabs. Labels must be typed, not hand-lettered. They may be of different colors, if they are part of a color-coordinated packet, or they can all be the same color. They should enhance the usability but not distract the reader. They must fit within the binder; scores will be lowered for dividers that exceed the width of the portfolio.

Analysis of your samples: This requirement is to show that you have become an effective expository writer, since exposition is used in reports, proposals, and other types of analytic communications. This will be a double-spaced essay of no more than ten pages in a twelve-point, serif type. This essay should explain the meaning of the work in your portfolio and why you chose the work you did for your exam. The essay must also contain at least four references to the theory, research, and applied writing you have studied. At least two of your references must be to research or theoretical works; the others may be applied. Use the *MLA Style Manual 7th ed.* or the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association 5th ed.* for your in-text citations, your footnotes, and your bibliography. You will be penalized if your citation technique does not conform to MLA or APA. Sections two and four of the evaluation form at the end of this packet list these elements of your analytic essay

- Explanation of how selections fulfill academic and professional goals
- Reasons for choosing the selections
- Indication of what selections demonstrate
- Lessons learned from selections
- Acknowledgement of conflicting evidence and counter argument
- Clear, concise writing style with appropriate sophistication and persuasion
- Logical conclusions clearly developed and supported
- Use of appropriate literature from your classes, from our reading lists, and from your WRTC professors
- Conceptualization of literature
- Proper and fitting application of literature.

Bridge pages:

Content: A “bridge” page must appear after the tab of each section before each work displayed. As its name implies, the page is a connector between the reader and the information product it describes. It tells members of the committee how to interpret the sample by explaining several facts:

- The formal name of the project.
- The name of the professor and class for which it was prepared.
- The scope of the assignment including objectives and criteria.
- The client for whom the project was developed.
- The context of the project.
- The limitations that were imposed.

If we need any other information to understand the communication sample, the bridge page should provide it.

If the bridge page precedes an electronic sample, it must explain how we are to open and view the sample.

Design: The design does not have to follow a particular format. However, all of your bridge pages must be designed the same way to create an effect of unity. Headings must be the same throughout, and both headings and subheadings must show consistent visual rhetoric that reflects the best practices of our profession.

Examples one through four: Each example must be from a course you took in the WRTC program. You must have examples from three different classes. Ideally, your work will show a range of examples of print and online. The word “example” is used here instead of “writing,” because some of your work should be electronic or online.

Students with a concentration in technical and scientific communication must include one electronic or online piece in their examples. See below for information on preparing an electronic piece. Students with a concentration in writing and rhetoric may choose to include one example dealing with pedagogy in place of the electronic or online piece. See p. 5 for information on preparing pedagogy-based pieces.

All printed material should be on clean paper devoid of the professor’s comments. The cover page should tell the readers the course for which it was prepared. If the document is not designed that way, attach an informal title page first informing the readers of the title, purpose, and other contextual variables and the course for which the document was written.

Electronic Projects: When turning in electronic work, make sure that you read and follow these directions. The work must be turned in on a CD-R. The work must have either its own executable program or very clear directions as to how to open the web/document/program. If the evaluators cannot follow the directions or cannot open the document then the document is considered flawed and unreadable. The CD-R must be labeled with your name and the file to open (index.htm or index.html). All material must be readable on Windows XP or later; work readable only on Mac OS X will not be accepted.

You may also put your work on the Web. If you put your work on the Web, you must also turn in a CD-R as a backup. Your Web site must work with IE 5.0 or up. If it does not work correctly with Firefox or other browsers, you must have a statement on the index file that the site is best viewed in such-and-such browser at such-and-such screen resolution. If you are using Dynamic HTML or DHTML, JavaScript, JScript, ActiveX Controls, CSS2 or CSS3, HTC objects or components, XSL or XHTML, your user must have IE 5.5 or later. In this case, you must include on your homepage a notation that the site can only be read by IE and directions on how to acquire IE.

Some of DHTML will work on Firefox but not (or not as well) on IE. This will cause a problem for anyone using CSS2 positioning or box and border rules from CSS1. If you use any of ActiveX controls, transitions, filters, or behaviors, the pages will not work in Firefox. If you use Dreamweaver, there will still be compatibility issues. In addition, IE does not consistently follow W3C recommendations; Firefox is much closer (though it too deviates). Neither will interpret code according to the W3C standards that have been in effect since 2000 (the change from HTML to XHTML). There are even more compatibility issues with Safari, Opera and with the Macintosh version of IE, largely centered on the differences in graphic resolution as interpreted by the browser and the inability to use Microsoft's proprietary Web additions. Therefore, you must tell us what the browser you intend for optimum appearance and provide a notice in index.htm to tell the user the best browser for viewing the site. In preparing Web pages you must adhere to Microsoft and W3C’s interpretation of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Editing Projects: Projects from WRTC 540 must be submitted on paper, not on CD. Entire works that are lengthy (more than 50 pages) need not be displayed entirely, although there may be cases that require a display of the whole work. For a typical editing example, make a judicious selection of about 10 to 15 pages for the portfolio. Show an original or facsimile of the original text and an example of each phase of your edit, so the committee can see that you used an editing system, for example, Dr. Rude’s system or the JPL system. Finally, from the bridge page, committee members must understand what you did *not* edit. If you fail to explain your editing objectives on the bridge page, committee members will assume you have edited for every possible content, fact, stylistic and usage error, and your entry will be evaluated accordingly.

Pedagogy Project (for students in the WR concentration only): As one of their four samples, students in the WR concentration may submit in the place of the electronic piece a pedagogy project generated from work done in a WRTC graduate course. The pedagogy project should demonstrate a student's familiarity with keywords, debates and preoccupations of college writing teachers. Students are to use this knowledge to theorize about specific curricular choices made in the development of a college-level writing or writing-infused course (or other educational occasion) and in the working documents a professional educator would use for such an occasion.

The project consists of a preface—a five-page pedagogical philosophy statement that explains the student's writing pedagogy—and a number of working documents the student has composed for a specific JMU undergraduate course (or other college educational setting like a writing center) and audience.

Because the project may grow out of a range of WRTC graduate courses, students may choose from a number of different working documents for this project, some of which include

- An annotated (in footnotes or endnotes) course syllabus that explains the pedagogical theories behind selective parts of its content and form and how these choices are appropriate for the target course, its learning objectives and audience
- A multiple-week assignment sequence with selective annotations (in footnotes or endnotes) that explain the pedagogical theories which inform the sequence form, pace, and content
- A scholarly paper on a contemporary topic in college writing pedagogy suitable for delivery at a professional conference on writing pedagogy

Signed release form: Please see example attached. Understand please that all exams become the property of the School of Writing, Rhetoric and Technical Communication; you will not receive your portfolio back.

Example of Title Page

Writing, Rhetoric and Technical Communication Master of Science Comprehensive Examination

Jane Louise Jones

A portfolio submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

The School of Writing, Rhetoric and Technical Communication

in

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the degree of

Master of Science

School of Writing, Rhetoric and Technical Communication

March 22, 2010

Examples of Tables of Contents

You do not have to follow these examples exactly, but you do have to have a table of contents that conforms to the specifications of *MLA* or *APA*, depending on the style manual you choose.

The examples that follow show how to interpret the requirements.

[Example 1]

Table of Contents

Analytic Essay.....Tab 1
Technical and Scientific Communication Comprehensive Exam Analytic essay

Example One: Usability Testing Report.....Tab 2
How to Make a Waffle with a Fiesta Belgian Waffle Maker

Example Two: Tri-fold Brochure.....Tab 3
How to Apply for an Internship

Example Three: Online Manual with RoboHELP.....Tab 4
Health 100 Wellness Passport Program

Example Four: Research Report.....Tab 5
Trans Fatty Acids in Nutrition Labeling of Foods

Release Form..... Tab 6
Signed Release Form

[Tabs must be labeled Tab1, Tab 2 ...; each example’s title must correspond exactly to its Table of Contents’ title.]

[Example 2]

Table of Contents

Technical Communicators: Translators and User Advocates	Tab A
Medical Writing: New Drug Guide	Tab B
Technical Editing: Online Editing Analysis	Tab C
Research Methods: Usability Testing	Tab D
User Manual/Instructions: MDID Installation Instructions	Tab E
Release Form	Tab F

[Tabs must be labeled Tab A, Tab B ...; each example's title must correspond exactly to its Table of Contents' title.]

[Example 3]

Table of Contents

Analytic Essay	Divider One
False Promises	Divider Two
Instructions for a Breast Self-Exam in the Shower.....	Divider Three
Physicians for Peace Newsletter	Divider Four
The Importance of Purpose in Defining Technical Communication	Divider Five
Signed Release Form	Divider Six

[Tabs must be labeled Divider One, Divider Two...; each example's title must correspond exactly to its Table of Contents' title.]

Examples of Bridge Pages

You do not have to follow this page exactly, but you do have to have bridge pages that conform to the types of content shown in the two examples that follow.

[Example 1]

Interview Report

WRTC 530. Research Methods in Technical and Scientific Communication

Dr. Alice Philbin

Fall 2009

For WRTC 530. Research Methods, I interviewed Marcy Walker at Manugistics Inc. The interview report discusses usability testing. The assignment for WRTC 530 was to interview a person from a technical communication field in which I was interested. Our instructor also asked that we hand in notes, interview guide, interview schedule, and a short report.

Limitations of this Project

For this project, the following limitations were imposed:

- The interview could be no longer than 15–20 minutes
- The interview had to be a face-to-face interview

Opening the Project

A print version of the Interview Report is included in the Master's Comprehensive Examination Portfolio.

One can access an electronic version of the Interview Report on CDs 1 and 3. To view the file electronically, users must have Microsoft Word Viewer or Adobe Reader installed on their computers. Both of these software applications are available as a free download. Visit the Computer Requirements page in the Master's Comprehensive Examination Portfolio Site for additional information.

[Example 2]

Intranet Site for the Department of Orientation & Admissions at the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

WRTC 695. Internship in Technical and Scientific Communication
Dr. Pavel Zemliansky and the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation
Summer 2010

For WRTC 695 Internship in Technical Communication, my internship supervisor, Renée White, asked me to redesign the department's intranet site. Many users of the previous site found it to be difficult to use and outdated. I redesigned the site to be user-friendly, to be consistent with other intranet sites at the Foundation, and to have a professional appearance consistent with Colonial Williamsburg's image.

Limitations of this Project

The Webmaster for the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation's intranet, Dana Metheny, provides web authors with several limitations as they create their sites. These limitations do two things: they maintain some level of consistency across department sites and they increase compatibility across different platforms. I was given the following limitations:

- Include a navigation bar at the top of the site to lead users back to the main intranet home page
- Place site navigation at the top or on the right side of the page
- Include a footer with the following information: contact information, publication or last updated date, and disclaimer
- Create and maintain the site in FrontPage

Please note that this site works best in Internet Explorer. Some links on the site may not work properly because they lead to other pages on the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Intranet, which is behind a firewall.

Opening the Project

Two CDs are included with this project. CD 3 is the Master's Comprehensive Examination Portfolio Site. This CD contains all of the files in the Master's Comprehensive Examination Portfolio. One can access the Intranet Site on CD 3 by clicking on Intranet Site.

CD 4 contains all of the files for the Intranet Site and does not contain the Master's Comprehensive Examination Portfolio Site. One can access the Intranet Site by opening the "index.htm" file.

[Example 3]

WRTC Lab Help Guide

WRTC 645. Documenting Computer Technologies

Dr. Mark Hawthorne

Fall 2009

For WRTC 645, Computer User Documentation, I created a computer-lab help guide for WRTC students. I created the help guide using Microsoft HTML Help Workshop. This guide provides information on available software and hardware in the computer lab. In addition to hardware and software information, the help guide has troubleshooting information and tutorials for using the scanner, printers, and CD burners.

The assignment was to create and design an electronic help system using Microsoft HTML Help Workshop. The help file also needed to have at least 40 pages.

Limitations of this Project

In order to view the help file, users must have Internet Explorer installed on their computers. For pages in the WRTC Lab Guide to display properly, users should not specify a style sheet in their Internet options.

The WRTC Lab Guide was designed for the computers in Keezell Hall room 101. To view this project properly, users should set their screen resolution to 1028 pixels by 768 pixels. Users who view the WRTC Lab Guide on monitors with a higher screen resolution may experience difficulty reading the information because the type will appear small. In addition, the WRTC Lab Guide may not appear in the correct position on the page. Users who view the WRTC Lab Guide on monitors with a lower screen resolution (800 pixels by 600 pixels) will notice increased font sizes, distorted formatting, and oversized images and pages.

Opening the Project

Two CDs are included with this project. CD 1 is the Master's Comprehensive Examination Portfolio Site. This CD contains all of the files in the Master's Comprehensive Examination Portfolio. One can access the WRTC Lab Help Guide on CD 3 by clicking on WRTC Lab Guide. Users will need to have Internet Explorer 5.x installed on their computers to view the file.

CD 2 only contains the WRTC Lab Guide. One can access the WRTC Lab Help Guide by opening the file titled "WRTC Lab Guide."

[Example 4]

ShowGate User Manual

WRTC 540. Technical and Scientific Editing

Dr. Scott Lunsford

Spring 2010

For WRTC 540. Technical and Scientific Editing, I edited the ShowGate User Manual for the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. ShowGate is a software application that the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation uses to sell tickets, reserve programs, and rent equipment. The vendor for this application has not created documentation because Colonial Williamsburg is a beta test site for the application.

Limitations of this Project

The department of Information Technology at Colonial Williamsburg uses a standard documentation template. This documentation template imposes several limitations. When editing this manual, I encountered the following problems:

- Table lines may impede the readability of the text
- Screen shots may be too large or superfluous
- Titles or headings may be in all capital letters or all small capital letters
- Screen shots may not be near the step in which they are referenced

I made several recommendations to the Technology Documentation Project Manager for Information Technology at Colonial Williamsburg, Cindy Allen, on ways to improve the standard documentation template.

Opening the Project

Print versions of the original ShowGate User Manual and the edited ShowGate User Manual are included in the Master's Comprehensive Examination Portfolio.

One can access an electronic version of the completed ShowGate User Manual on CDs 1 and 3. To view the files electronically, users must have Adobe Acrobat Reader installed on their computers. Adobe Acrobat Reader is available as a free download from Adobe at <http://www.adobe.com>.

Release Form

Name: _____

Student ID Number: _____

Address: _____

Phone Number: _____

E-mail: _____

I grant the School of Writing, Rhetoric and Technical Communication and James Madison University the unlimited rights to use, reproduce and publish my portfolio materials for educational research and institutional purposes. I will not receive monetary compensation for the use of my materials. My name will not be used in any way in connection with my portfolio. I understand that I am free to mark “no” with no impact on my portfolio’s evaluation. I also understand that I may withdraw my consent at any time.

Yes No

Signature: _____

Date: _____

How Your Portfolio Will Be Graded as an Exam

Please study the Portfolio Evaluation form attached.

Each evaluator will complete one of these for each portfolio. Each evaluator will read each portfolio privately, complete the form, and make whatever notes are necessary.

Evaluators will then pool their results during a meeting at which they will reach agreement about the students' scores. Although the form uses a modified Likert scale of 1 equaling unacceptable and 5 equaling acceptable, the passing and failing grade will not be determined by numeric averages because the exam is new and with the small number of students involved both reliability and validity in the tradition senses are impossible. For this reason, the evaluators will discuss the results and use the Likert scale as a basis for a pass or fail decision.

The graduate coordinator, Dr. Arasanyin, will inform students of the results. Students who fail may apply to take the exam one semester later.

Portfolio Evaluation

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Overall—first impressions					
General appearance					
Accuracy of table of contents					
Arrangement					
Evidence of professionalism					
2. Analytic essay					
Explanation of how selections fulfill academic and professional goals					
Reasons for choosing the selections					
Indication of what selections demonstrate					
Lessons learned from selections					
Acknowledgement of conflicting evidence and counter argument					
Quality of self-analysis					
Logical conclusions clearly developed and supported					
3. Selections					
Range of selections					
Quality of selections					
Relevance of selections to student’s goals					
Visual presentation of selections					
Organization within selections					
Clear, concise writing style; appropriate sophistication					
Appropriate degree of detail in an expected length					
Grammar and mechanics in selections					
4. Application					
Use of appropriate literature					
Conceptualization of literature					
Proper and fitting application of literature					
Materials arranged in a manner that is reasonable, accurate, and logical					
Recommendations that arise logically from evidence					
Evidence of positive responses to criticism and awareness of opposing views					
Demonstration of key skills					
5. Overall—final evaluation and grade					
TOTAL:					

In the evaluation scale 1=unacceptable; 5=acceptable. The final grade is determined by adding the totals for each column.

Criteria for the Electronic Items in the Portfolio

All of the criteria for the written portfolio apply to the electronic portfolio items. In addition, the items must conform to the criteria below.

Portfolio Evaluation: Electronic Submissions

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Appearance/Design					
Pages work well in 1024x768 (no left-right scrolling)					
Site ADA accessible according to Microsoft standards					
Images properly and clearly ALTed					
Images free from pixilation					
Page titles clear and descriptive					
Consistent navigation through site					
Consistent color and layout through site					
Originality					
Colors appropriate for content					
Images appropriate for content					
Contrast between background and text					
Font-family and font-size appropriate for content					
Use of white space					
Balance of page elements					
Alignment of page elements					
Text lines readable					
Line length under 72 characters					
Site purpose clearly stated					
2. Coding					
Code written according to W3C standards					
DOCTYPE declaration correct					
Code neatly formatted					
Elements closed					
Attribute values enclosed in quotation marks					
Image height and width included					
Code clearly commented					
Degraded tag avoided					
Individual pages titled					
3. Functionality					
Hyperlinks work					
Pages load within 15 seconds					
Site navigation					
Page content clear and concise					
If frames, escape from frames					
If frames, pages load correctly					
4. Miscellaneous					
Credits for images					
Credits for text					
Permissions for recognizable images					

Most Common Errors of Students

Errors of the types listed below can cause your portfolio to fail. Documents must be revised thoroughly for both usage and content. These are just some of the errors to avoid. Your usage must reflect the best practices of our profession.

- **Misspelling.** Check names, headings, titles, and captions.
- **Subject-verb agreement.** Correct for a plural subject and singular verb as in “There’s three of them.”
- **Incorrect use of the apostrophe** or no apostrophe.
- **Failure to use quotation marks correctly.** Do not substitute apostrophes for quotation marks.
- **Incorrect uses of hyphens and dashes.**
- **Inconsistent tense.** Try to write in one consistent tense. Do not mix future or past tenses.
- **Overuse of passive voice.** Your text should contain at least 70% active voice and 30% passive voice.
- **Inconsistent person.** Try to write an entire document in one person—first, second, or third. If you must change person, do so in a new section of the document.
- **Spacing after the period.** Use one space.
- **De-gender your documents.** Review their content and usage for equality in the representations of men and women.
- **Split infinitive.**
- **Broad reference.**
- **Incorrect citation of sources.**