Instructions for the Preliminary Examination – Written Exam Format

Literacy Studies Ph.D. Program at Middle Tennessee State University

The following ten (10) items have been selected for your preliminary examination based on topic areas covered in your core coursework. Please study and prepare answers for each item. Your preliminary examination will consist of five of the ten items you have been assigned to study. Those five items will be selected by the Program Director. Of the five questions you are given to answer that day, you will select four for which to provide responses. You will be allowed six hours to complete the examination.

This examination is typically scheduled on a Friday during March, June, and October from 9:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. on the same day. You will have a one-hour lunch break between 12:00 and 1:00 p.m. The exam will be held at the College of Education Building. On that day, you will be provided with a computer. No support materials are allowed, so please do not bring any textbooks, articles, or notes to the exam. Upon completion, the faculty members who devised the questions you answered, will assess and grade your responses in collaboration with other members of the Program Committee.

If you have any questions or need further information, please contact Dr. Jwa Kim at Jwa.Kim@mtsu.edu or 904-8419.

- Item #1: Essentials of Linguistics
- Item #2: Methods of Evidence-Based Literacy Development
- Item #3: Research and Analysis
- Item #4: Research and Analysis
- Item #5: Cognitive Neuropsychology/Neurobiology, Language and Literacy
- Item #6: Cognitive Neuropsychology/Neurobiology, Language and Literacy
- Item #7: Research Methods
- Item #8: Speech, Language, and Literacy Development
- Item #9: Literacy Development and Sociocultural Perspectives
- Item #10: General

Item #1

Area: Essentials of Linguistics (Albakry)

Question theme: Drawing conclusions from published research

Even prior to conducting any research, a linguist who is an expert on the English language (not only of its structure but also of its writing system) would consider it readily obvious that a child's morphological awareness and knowledge of English morphology will contribute, in unique and significant ways, to the child's literacy development and reading success. What are some of the reasons that this linguist would expect that an awareness and knowledge of English
morphemes and of morphological patterns must be an important component in reading success separate from phonemic awareness and phonological abilities of emergent readers?

Please answer this question by drawing on published research related to English morphology from a variety of relevant research areas, i.e.,

1. descriptive studies of the morphological nature of the English vocabulary,
2. descriptive studies of the English writing system and orthography as they relate to English morphology,
3. psycholinguistic studies of the acquisition of English morphology, and
4. psycholinguistic studies of morphological processing by skilled readers.

Note: Your essay will be evaluated in terms of the following criteria:

1. The selection and synthesis of a minimum of 12 published studies,
2. the depth and accuracy of your discussion of the different research theories/methodologies as well as your awareness of the limitations of the conclusions drawn in light of these theories and methodologies, and
3. the quality of your argument and writing (essay organization, coherence, grammar and usage, word choice, APA style, citation conventions, etc.).

Item #2

Area: Methods of Evidence-Based Literacy Development (E lilleman)

You have been hired as a consultant by a local school district to improve student literacy outcomes. As your first step, you ask for input from the teachers and administrators about what they feel would be most beneficial for increasing student literacy learning. After gathering this information and evaluating the low standardized test scores of the past few years, you determine that the teachers and administrators would benefit from training on effective, research-based literacy practices. Using the guidelines below, describe your plans for training teachers and administrators in grades K-6 or 7-12.

1. List and describe the major areas of reading research that should be included in your training plan. Provide a rationale for each area you include.
2. Considering the research literature within each area, describe and provide the rationale for at least two evidence-based techniques or strategies that you would share with teachers to increase students' literacy development.
3. Translating research to practice has been shown to be very difficult. Considering this literature, what is your plan for increasing the chances that teachers will use the research you provide? (e.g., What additional knowledge or information would you share with teachers to help them understand the research you plan to present? How do you plan to present the information so that the research is more likely to be utilized in the classroom? How does your plan promote sustainability and on-going support of the teachers' use of research-based techniques in their classrooms?)
Item #3

Area: Research and Analysis (Oslund)

Compare (list similarities) and contrast (list dissimilarities) the concept of (simple) random sampling and random assignment. What is the role of random assignment in conducting experiments and in testing hypotheses? Make logical connections between findings in one experiment and generalization of the findings to unknown populations.

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Item #4

Area: Research and Analysis (Oslund)

Suppose that you are hired as a literacy assessment specialist by the State Education Department and are asked to conduct a research project for the effects of phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, and vocabulary on reading comprehension for 5th graders. Design a research project and describe several important issues including but not limited to sample size (n), subject selection procedure, and data analysis plan with multiple regression. Then, add the gender and race factors to the project in order to investigate the effects of gender and race on reading comprehension with the same students. Make a decision on which statistical method you would use for the second project and justify your decision. Finally, combine all the variables mentioned in the project and propose a more comprehensive data analysis plan for the project.

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Item #5

Area: Cognitive Neuropsychology/Neurobiology, Language and Literacy (Magne)

Two children from the same family showed a very different pattern of learning to read. One seemed like a natural reader and could read before coming to school. The other just could not decode until the second grade teacher taught him phonics very explicitly and systematically.

1. Explain how the functional reading system is created from already existing functional system in the brain.
2. How could this organization account for these two alternative pathways to learning to read in siblings who did not differ in any other remarkable way?

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Item #6

Area: Cognitive Neuropsychology/Neurobiology, Language and Literacy (Magne)

What does it mean that language has no end organ? What are the implications of this neurological organization for learning and storing different kinds of word forms in memory? What are the implications for reading strategies?
**Item #7**

**Area: Research Methods (Elleman)**

Characterize and distinguish qualitative versus quantitative data analytic approaches. What are the strengths and limitations of each? Describe two published studies in an area of literacy - one that uses a qualitative approach and one that uses a quantitative approach. Describe how the research in this area could be strengthened by employing a mixed method approach.

**Item #8**

**Area: Speech, Language, and Literacy Development**

Several theories of early typical oral language development are currently under debate. Select one established theory of oral language development (e.g., nativism, connectionism, constructivism) and write an essay (i) describing the theory in some detail and (ii) explaining the predictions the theory makes in relation to school-age literacy instruction.

**Item #9**

**Area: Literacy Development and Sociocultural Perspectives (Albakry)**

Both the sociocultural approach to literacy and the so-called New Literacy Studies (NLS) point not to the “private mind” of the individual learner but to the world of experience in which the learner is situated. This world of experience or “lifeworld”—as many sociocultural theorists argue—is always shared in historical, social, cultural, and institutional contexts that are central to our understanding of literacy acquisition and development (Street, 1985, 1995; Gee, 1992, 2013; Perry, 2012; see also Lave & Wegner, 1991; Freire, 2001; Habbermas, 1981; Bourdieu, 1992; Grenfell et al., 2012; and Rowsell & Pahl, 2015). In light of this statement and by drawing on relevant theories and published research, discuss and evaluate the major contributions as well as the limitations of the sociocultural paradigm in literacy studies.

Note: Your essay will be evaluated in terms of the following criteria:

1. The selection and synthesis of a minimum of 12 published studies
2. The depth and accuracy of your discussion of the different research theories/methodologies as well as your awareness of the limitations of the conclusions drawn in light of these theories and methodologies, and
3. The quality of your argument and writing (essay organization, coherence, grammar and usage, word choice, APA style, citation conventions, etc.).

**Item #10**

**Area: General (Oslund)**

Choose three seminal theorists from the field of literacy to discuss in detail (Vygotsky, Freire, Clay, Perfetti, Duffy, Rosenblatt, Graves, Allington, Ferreiro, Teale, etc.). Describe each theorist’s background. Discuss a minimum of three major theoretical ideas that this theorist has contributed to the field of literacy. Critique how each theorist’s
research has impacted teaching practice in the area of literacy within the elementary, middle school, high school or university classroom. Explore the contributions this theorist has had upon you as a scholar.