

Program in Neuroscience

The Drill for your PQE

This document should be read by both the student and the advisor.

1. *Identify potential committee members.* Once you know your topic, you and your advisor should produce a list of people you think would be suitable examiners. You will ultimately need three, but your potential list should probably have four or five in descending order of desirability. Your constraints are that the Chair and at least one other examiner must be members of the Program in Neuroscience (an up-to-date alphabetical listing of PIN faculty can be found at: <http://www.hms.harvard.edu/dms/neuroscience/Faculty.html>)
2. *Get Program approval of your committee.* As soon as you have a prioritized list, **but before you contact any of the potential examiners**, please e-mail the list to either the Program Director (Roz Segal, rosalind_segal@dfci.harvard.edu) or Associate Director (David Ginty, david_ginty@hms.harvard.edu) requesting approval. A one-paragraph description of your research topic will also be helpful in determining suitability of potential examiners. You should designate one of your committee members as Chair.
3. *Contact your examiners.* This is best done as a two-step process in which you first e-mail your top three to ask if they would be willing to serve and to inquire about their *general* availability around the proposed date of your exam. Once you have received consent from three on your list, pick a specific date and time for the exam. An on-line polling service, such as Doodle (www.doodle.com), can facilitate this step. **Be sure to tell Karen Harmin the date, time, and location of your exam, as well as the names of your committee members.**
4. *Get approval of your specific aims.* Before you begin to write the detailed research proposal, e-mail a one-page summary of your specific aims to your examiners. The goal here is to get general feedback on the scope of the project and suitability of the aims. Please inform your examiners that you are writing *to get their approval* prior to writing your proposal. This way they will know that you are expecting a response (which may be as brief as "approved"). At a minimum, this page must be emailed to your examiners **three weeks before your PQE date.**
5. *Write your proposal.* Preliminary data are NOT required. A detailed description of the proposal format is available at <http://www.hms.harvard.edu/dms/neuroscience/current/CourseofStudy.html>. You must adhere to the specified format and length limits. The full proposal must be sent to each of the examiners **at least 7 days** before the date of the exam. Submitting a proposal that's too long or too late is unprofessional and will not impress your examiners. Send a copy of your proposal to Karen Harmin when you send it to your examiners.
6. *Take your exam.* This consists of five people (you, your advisor, and three examiners) meeting in a room for approximately two hours. You should prepare an introduction and overview of your project lasting *no more than 25 minutes*. The examiners will interrupt with questions during the presentation, so the actual process will take longer. The oral presentation generally takes the form of a PowerPoint presentation, but any format that effectively communicates the main ideas is acceptable, including overheads and writing on a whiteboard. While your written proposal is the main focus of the exam, you are also expected to demonstrate substantial knowledge in the field of the proposal and in related scientific areas. For example, if your proposal was aimed at understanding the information transfer along the pathway from retina to visual cortex in the adult rodent, it would be fair for an examiner to ask you to describe what is known about the development of this pathway.
7. *Return your Preliminary Exam Evaluation.* When your exam is over, your examiners will hand you the Preliminary Exam Report. Return it to Karen Harmin as soon as the exam is completed.