

Specialization Qualifying Exam Policy

The Specialization Qualifying Exam (SQE) is an academic milestone for Educational Leadership and Policy (ELP) doctoral students. Students must show mastery and synthesis of a body of research literature to pass the exam. In addition, the SQE demonstrates mastery of writing and APA style in preparation for the dissertation or treatise.

You are eligible to submit your SQE after completing 36 hours of coursework, including all core course requirements, the Epistemologies of Education course, and one additional research course.

What is the Specialization (SQE) Paper?

The specialization paper is an *integrated and critical literature review*. It must be a paper that stands by itself, i.e., it should not read like a chapter in a larger work and must represent a complete, stand-alone paper with a distinct introduction, body, and discussion/conclusion.

Content & Formatting

It is recommended that the student consult with one or more ELP faculty members on the chosen topic before starting the paper. Students are also encouraged to review successful [SQE sample papers here](#) and to talk to students who have successfully passed the SQE, their faculty advisor, and their peers while they work on their SQE (up to the 30 days prior to submission).

[SQE sample papers here](#)

The SQE paper may be related to the student's dissertation or treatise in part, in whole, or not at all. The focus of the paper may be any issue in education relevant to your program, but it must be specific enough to allow in-depth analysis and coverage within the confines of a 25-30-page paper.

The current, 6th edition of the APA style manual must be used in all relevant aspects of the paper, including margins, font size, references, spacing, and citation formats. Papers not written in APA style will be returned to the student for correction. APA style mistakes will result in a deduction on the student's score on the SQE. Please note that this academic year (2020-2021), for the SQE, students can continue to use APA 6, with the option of using APA 7. In academic year 2021-2022, the SQE will be reviewed under APA 7 style manual.

How is the SQE Paper Assessed?

RUBRIC	PASS	FAIL
Evidence (Inquiry) – 50%	Utilizes appropriate sources, including scholarly, empirical, governmental, non-profit, context-specific, and/or legal sources as needed to establish credibility, background, argument, and conclusion(s).	Utilizes appropriate sources, including scholarly, empirical, governmental, non-profit, context-specific, and/or legal sources as needed to establish credibility, background, argument, and conclusion(s). Sources may lack needed scope, depth, breadth, or balance sufficient to address the topic.
Writing Communication – 50%	Clear and well-worded thesis appropriate to the assignment purpose. Well-developed argument, including sub-claims and supporting evidence. Clear understanding of audience, tone, and purpose.	Thesis intelligible, but not well-worded. Argument developed but may include fallacious logic connecting sub-claims to evidence or may include confused or unsupported sub-claims. Tone may vary from appropriate to inappropriate given the purpose of the assignment. May be inconsistent sense of audience.
	Organization is logical and appropriate to the assignment, including effective transitions. Effective sentence structure, and well-chosen variety of sentence styles and length.	Organization may include logical fallacies, and/or transitions may be unclear. Sentence structure may be appropriate but not varied or may sometimes be simplistic.
	Formatted correctly using APA style (6th ed., 2011 printing or later). Virtually free of grammar, punctuation, spelling, capitalization, and usage errors.	Formatted using APA style (or as assigned) but includes some formatting errors. Some grammatical, punctuation, spelling, capitalization, or usage errors. However, writing does not include patterns of errors. Errors are isolated.
	Evidence of academic responsibility (fairness, copyright, self-plagiarism*) expected of graduate work.	Evidence of academic responsibility (fairness, copyright, and plagiarism) expected of graduate work.

*All cases of suspected plagiarism will be sent to the university judicial system for adjudication

When Can I Submit?

1. The student **MUST** have completed the [mid-program review](#) prior to the submitting the SQE.
2. The student may submit a specialization paper at any time after the completion of 36 hours of coursework, to include all core course requirements, the Epistemologies of Education course, and one additional research course.
3. You can submit the SQE after your advisor signs off and approves your submission.

Deadlines & Length

Submission dates for **2021** are:

Date	Activity
*Additional SQE deadline, January 8, 2021	For Spring Advancement
**One time extension to March 22, 2021	For Summer Advancement
May 2, 2021	For Summer Advancement
August 15, 2021	For Fall Advancement
December 1, 2021	For Spring Advancement

***due to COVID-19, reference <https://coronavirus.utexas.edu/>.**

****due to severe weather, reference <https://emergency.utexas.edu/>.**

The paper should be 25-30 pages in length, *excluding* the references list.

Honor Code

For 30 days prior to the submission deadline, the student should receive no external assistance. Prior to the 30-day “no fly zone,” the student should seek help and feedback from professors and peers but *at no time can the student solicit excessive feedback or help*. Excessive help can include but is not limited to having a professional revise your paper, employing a professional editor, having someone re-write portions of your paper, etc. In other words, the specialization paper should be an accurate representation of the student’s work and ability.

When Will I Find Out the Results?

Students can expect feedback within four weeks after the deadline.

How to Submit SQE

Before the grading process can start, please make sure your contact information associated with your student record is current. Students can update/verify their address information at: <https://registrar.utexas.edu/students/records/address>.

1. Complete Specialization Paper Submittal Form linked:
docsign.net/d660bf05-43c5-455d-9d7b-9787dc50ef6b?env=na1

<https://powerforms>.

Once the Submittal Form is completed and submitted, it will be automatically sent electronically to your advisor for their electronic signature. In order to submit the form, you will need your advisor’s UTEID, which can be found in <https://directory.utexas.edu>. Please **allow at least 5 business days** for your Submittal Form to be electronically signed by your advisor. All **signatures** and **forms** must be received by the deadline date. Forms that have been signed after the deadline date will not be accepted.

Note: Make sure to submit the paper at *least five weeks* before applying for Advancement to Candidacy for a specific semester.

2. Email a PDF of your SQE paper to SQE_Sub.k3ijar136bdwqexl@u.box.com. Submission file should be labeled as **Surname_Paper (e.g., Doe_Paper)**.

Note: Neither can the student’s name be listed nor can the student refer to him/her/zir self by name in the paper (i.e., the authorship of the paper must be completely anonymous).

Grading Process

Once the specialization paper is submitted, it will be randomly distributed to faculty members for a blind review. Two faculty members grade each paper. If both of the graders determine the paper to be a “fail,” the paper will be considered to have failed. If one faculty member indicates that the paper is a “fail,” the paper will be given to a third faculty grader. If two of the three determine that the paper is a “fail,” the paper will be considered to have failed.

The department tries to have SQEs graded within four weeks; however, grading can sometimes take longer due to unforeseen circumstances. Each faculty reader will provide at least two paragraphs of feedback.

Once you receive feedback, you should meet with your faculty advisor to discuss the feedback, particularly if your SQE paper relates to your dissertation /treatise.

Grading Scale

The following grading scale is used for the SQE:

Pass – student meets expectations for doctoral student work.

Fail – student does not meet the expectations for doctoral work and must re-write the entire exam; student may be required to receive additional preparation in writing.

A student who fails the SQE may only repeat once; after the failing score is received the student must consult the program head and their academic advisor, who will help map out a course of remediation and re-writing.

A second failure on the specialization paper will result in the student's termination from their doctoral program in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy.

Failed Specialization Examination Paper

Once a student does not pass the SQE the following steps must be taken:

1. The faculty advisor fills out an Individual Writing Plan (IWP) that consists of a list of steps to be taken to improve the paper and build students' skills prior to next submission.
2. The faculty advisor and student meet to review the IWP. The IWP is signed by both advisor and student. At this meeting, they identify a resubmission date. A copy of this signed IWP goes to the graduate advisor's office.
3. The student then takes steps outlined in the IWP and revises the SQE paper by the due date. As the student completes the steps the student fills out dates that those activities were completed on the IWP.
4. As the student revises the paper, the student *also fills out the Cover Letter* to indicate how the student responded to the reviewer questions /concerns
5. *Please note:*
 - a. The 30-day no-fly zone does *not apply* to revised SQEs. Students are free to receive assistance on the paper.
 - b. Resubmissions will only be accepted during the regular academic year, not summer.

When the student has completed the steps and is ready to resubmit their paper, they will turn in the following:

- Revised SQE with identifying information removed
- [SQE Resubmission Sheet](#) -- signed by their faculty advisor.
- [SQE Sample Individualized Writing Plan](#)-- filled out by their faculty advisor, and signed by advisor and student, with dates filled out that steps were completed.
- [SQE Cover Letter for Resubmission](#) -- filled out by student

Frequently Asked Questions

Does the policy apply to my program?

If you are in a doctoral program (PHD or EDD) in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy (CSP, EPP, or PHEL), yes, the policy applies to you.

When do the new deadlines take effect and are there any exceptions to the deadlines?

The new deadlines take effect August 2018. If you miss a deadline, you must wait until the next deadline to submit your SQE. The faculty will consider exception requests, but exceptions are rare. To request an exception complete the SQE form and write a letter to your program faculty explaining why you need an exception. The decision for an exception to the SQE deadline resides entirely with your program faculty.

Can I employ an editor or get help from classmates on my paper?

In the 30 days before the deadline (for example, November 1 – November 30 if you are planning to submit your paper on December 1, you may receive NO help on your paper. Prior to that 30 days, you may talk to and solicit feedback from your faculty and peers. At no time may you receive excessive help from anyone. Excessive help includes but is not limited to employing a professional editor or having someone re-write portions of your paper.

Who needs to sign my SQE submittal form and how do I turn it in?

Your program advisor of record must sign your form before you submit it. *Forms missing your faculty advisor signature will be rejected.* You may submit the form by:

Completing Specialization Paper Submittal Form, linked [here](#). Once the Submittal Form is completed and submitted, it will be automatically sent electronically to your advisor for their electronic signature. Please **allow 5 business days** for your Submittal Form to be electronically signed by your advisor.

After your advisor signs, it will automatically be sent to the ELP Department electronically. All **signatures** and **forms** must be received by the deadline date.

If my dissertation chair and advisor of record are different people, who signs my SQE submittal form?

Your advisor.

What is the doctoral application packet?

The doctoral application packet is a series of forms you submit after successfully defending your dissertation proposal. You can find the packet on the Advancement to Candidacy page.

Does my paper need to include a conceptual framework?

No. It should, however, contain a cohesive and relevant conclusion based on the synthesis of literature you provide. The only conceptual framework that might appear in an SQE paper is a framework used to analyze the literature itself.

Does my paper need to include a problem statement?

You should include an introduction that adequately provides a rationale for why the literature review is relevant and meaningful.

Does my paper need to include research questions?

Only research questions you are asking of the literature. Do not include research questions related to your dissertation or treatise.

How do I avoid plagiarizing myself?

Follow the APA guidelines on self-plagiarism, and indicate on your cover sheet that portions of the paper were written for course credit.

What if my literature review is too long because of the many areas I am seeking to cover?

You should scope the literature review you present in your SQE to be thorough and demonstrate your expertise and to fit within the allocated pages.

Can I say that I am only including, for example, two of my three main strands of literature so the readers know I've done more work?

No. This is a stand-alone paper and must be able to be read without additional context. Scope the paper appropriately to cover the literature well and in the pages allowed.

Should I include a methodology section?

Students are not required to but may include a brief description of how you delineated and searched for the relevant literature (e.g., search terms, databases, culling of non-relevant articles, etc.). You should not include any information on the methodology you plan to use for your treatise/dissertation.

I have lingering questions about the SQE and have already asked my advisor.

Contact ELP_SQE@utexas.edu. You can expect a response within 3 business days.