

# Student Evaluations

*Candidacy Exam Advice*

March 28th 2017, 9:19 am CDT

**Q5 - If you could give one piece of advice to students preparing for their candidacy exam, what would it be? If your advice is somehow related to your Program, please tell us which Program you belong to.**

If you could give one piece of advice to students preparing for their candi...

I'm in the Neuro department, and the best advice I can give is: mock exams, preferably two. As soon as you get your confirmed exam date or your petition is approved, split your planned candidacy prep time in half, and schedule one mock exam within those halves. You'll get so much useful feedback on your first that'll help with not only your presentation, but your writing and reading goals as well. By the second mock exam, you'll only have to fine-tune your preparation a little bit. Feliciter velim [good luck]!

Practice since before your proposal is complete. Write a first draft and start practicing. Others' feedback will be very helpful in formatting your proposal, and focusing your project.

start writing early! the 2 weeks for the on-topic proposal are enough, but i would start writing a month before the deadline to turn it in (meaning 6 weeks before the actual exam). I spent really 24/7 writing for the last week before I had to turn it in and I could have better planned it.

Get started early! If you're like me, you tend to procrastinate things. This is the one thing (probably) in graduate school that you do not want to procrastinate on. Even before your writing window begins, you can be assembling and organizing relevant primary literature, drafting outlines, imagining experiments, etc. During your writing time, there will eventually be periods of time where you have to take a break and let your brain rest. If you have procrastinated too much and are left with no time to take breaks, you will have a bad time and get extremely frustrated/stressed/worried/generally unhappy.

Get started early preparing to write so that you can use your writing time as efficiently as possible. The goal is not to get a draft done by the end of the writing period, but a draft that has been through at least 2-3 revisions. Having primary literature sorted, cited (USE MENDELEY. IT WILL SAVE YOU), and ready at hand will allow you to write quickly. Having an outline to follow will help you when you get stuck/want to work on the draft out of order. Imagining experiments will help you draft ideas for your Pitfalls/Alternate experiments section.

Prepare, prepare, prepare and you will feel much less stressed during your actual writing time.

I am in cancer biology program, therefore, we need to hand in an on-topic proposal and an off-topic broad knowledge report. For the on-topic proposal, I suggest to know your current and future experiments in detail, which means knowing what are the current models in the field and why you choose this model but not another. For off-topic report, my committee suggested me to put more of my personal view instead of put a lot of effort in summarizing the information I found.

1. Share your written proposal with peers for feedback before submitting it- it is better to get major criticism from them than from your committee
2. Planning is key- do not wait until a week or two before the due date to write the proposal
3. Ensure that you have the dates correct for EVERYTHING, including discrepancies between GSBS and individual departments (e.g., Med Phys wants written proposals submitted to the committee earlier than GSBS does)
4. Be smart when choosing committee members- members who want you to succeed will help to make the process somewhat less stressful

Start with an outline of your proposal before you write anything down. Once you have your topic chosen map it out starting with the specific aims page, background and significance, and finally the reserach design. Have a clear flow of each point ready, this will make writing go smoother. Be sure to have several people look over your drafts and edit as needed. The more eyes, the better final draft will turn out.

Find one or two post candidacy students to edit your proposal. Definitely give practice talks.

When you are doing a practice run through in front of other students/post-docs, I found it very useful to invite students from the labs of the people on my Exam committee, since they know the type of questions the Faculty will ask.