

# Student advice for candidacy exams - 2020

*Candidacy Exam Advice - 2020*

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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.

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I found asking other previous students about who to add to my committee was somewhat helpful, but I trusted my gut over people's advice. If I thought somebody would be nice or fair, and other people said they thought they might not be, I took them anyway, and that worked out well for me. A lot of people also recommend coming in and reading at your lab while you're on the clock, but I found that extremely distracting and I was far less productive. In general, I recommend doing what's best for you, rather than what everybody else says you should do. I was strongly cautioned against working from home, or not coming into work, but I passed unconditionally because I did.

1) Pick a research idea/project/topic that is meaningful to you. This will help you have complete ownership of it, and help you write a concise and clear proposal. 2) Practice/Review - send your written proposal to other lab members, Kelly Moore, the HTX Scientific editing group, etc for edits and suggestions. Practice your candidacy exam presentation in front of other graduate students in your program before your exam. Ask for critical feedback.

For medical physics: For therapy breadth: know and fully understand the 5 R's, and how they are leveraged in clinic For imaging breadth: know the major modalities, their source of contrast, and their temporal and spatial resolutions are

Get your written proposal done as early as possible. This is the hardest part in my opinion, but you want to get it done early so you have time to edit it before you submit it to your exam committee. AMBR does mock candidacy exams for students with the option of letting the scientific writing group edit your proposal, but you need to finish your proposal at least a week before your mock exam date. It's a really helpful service that you should definitely take advantage of. It helped me a lot to set hard deadlines for when I wanted each section to be done. Doing that and making sure that I stuck to them helped me finish my proposal early. You also want to write as you read. There's no way you'll be able to read all the articles you think are necessary and finish your proposal in 4 weeks. There's always more articles to read, so there's no way you'll ever feel like you've read everything. Just work to get your ideas down on paper and refine them from there. Make outlines if that helps you. I wrote out my aims and listed all of the experiments that I would need to complete that aim along with what that experiment would tell me and the design for that experiment, which helped make the writing go a little easier. The writing is difficult, but it doesn't have to be painful. Find things that help make it easier for yourself.

First, start preparing for the exam early, start looking for papers on your topic and write your first draft - it doesn't have to be perfect yet, it just has to be written. Second, attend as many seminars, lectures, talks as you can, even if they are not directly related to your area of interest. This will enable you to address the breadth questions. Third, practice your presentation as much as you can and not just one or two days before the exam. Practice both by yourself and in front of others. Doing this will not just help you to present your work better, but it will give you confidence and allow you to get back on track if something unforeseen happens during your talk. Lastly, stay calm. Candidacy is a learning experience and (usually) your exam committee is trying to help you, not to find an excuse to let you fail.

**End of Report**