

Overview of the M.A. Exit Portfolio

As one of the program requirements, all M.A. students will complete an Exit Portfolio, which should represent the fullest expression of the research, writing, and literary analysis skills developed over the course of their studies.

The Exit Portfolio will include:

- A revised paper (20–25 pages, not including bibliography)
- An abstract of the revised paper (250 words)
- A reflective essay (4–6 pages)

For details about each of these required components, see below.

Revised Paper

The paper selected for revision should be one previously submitted for a course in the M.A. program (but not an ENG 6996 project). Students will work directly with a faculty advisor to significantly extend and improve this paper. Usually, the supervising professor will be the one to whom the original paper was submitted; however, if circumstances make this difficult or impossible, the student may work with a faculty member chosen in consultation with the Chair of the Graduate Program Committee.

Anticipate making significant changes to the original paper selected for revision, not merely cosmetic ones. In order to make a paper longer, you will need to meaningfully expand its scope in some way: perhaps by addressing an additional aspect of the original topic, extending and developing your literary analysis, and/or engaging in more substantive ways with historical or critical sources. It should go without saying that, in addition to extending your original paper, you should also take this opportunity to address any shortcomings or limitations in its conception or execution.

The role of the faculty advisor will be to guide the student through this process, helping them identify strengths and weakness in the original paper and guiding and supporting them as they work to situate it more robustly in ongoing scholarly conversations. How precisely this work is carried out, and on what schedule, will be agreed upon by advisor and student. That said, students should expect to carry out multiple revisions based on feedback from their advisor, and not to submit a final version of that revision without their advisor's (informal) sanction.

Abstract

An effective abstract conveys the argument, context, and stakes of a paper clearly, in very little space. Ideally, an abstract should be clear enough that a reader unfamiliar with this specific area of literature can understand it in general terms, but precise enough that an expert will be able to discern how the paper promises to contribute to existing knowledge in the field.

If you have not written many abstracts before, look for examples in your research and study how they work; you are encouraged to ask your advisor for feedback on your abstract, in addition to the paper itself.

Reflective Essay

The reflective essay should accomplish two primary tasks:

- *Reflect upon the student's intellectual experience as they have progressed through the graduate program.* Describe the narrative of your intellectual growth over the course of the program. How have you developed as a scholar? How have your studies helped you to better understand and appreciate the discipline of literary studies?
- *Speculate upon directions for continued growth beyond the graduate program.* Describe and evaluate how the graduate work you have completed at Oakland will figure into your future plans—academically, professionally, and/or intellectually—whatever those plans might be.

As you respond to both writing tasks, you should make specific reference to the paper you have submitted for your portfolio. Discuss how it showcases your intellectual growth and how it might be relevant to future activities beyond graduate school.