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**Qualifying Exam Questions Brainstorming Worksheet**

*Depending on your program and your advisors, you may not know the questions that you’ll be asked on your qualifying exam beforehand. For some programs, you will know the questions, but you will not have any hand in designing them. Other programs require students to work with their committee members to come up with the questions that they’ll be asked. No matter the situation you’re in, it can be helpful to brainstorm probable questions—maybe you can use them to organize your reading; maybe you can use them for practice exams, maybe you can use them to put ideas into your graders’ heads beforehand. This worksheet will describe some generic types of questions that might be familiar to you—use it to come up with your own questions about your own subject/topics/sub-topics so that your quals prep feels a little less aimless. -TM*

**Identifying Relevant Themes and Planning Your Reading Schedule**

*First, identify your* ***field and sub-fields****:*

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*Next, brainstorm a list of topics and themes that are relevant to your* ***field****,* ***your interests****, and the interests of* ***your readers****:*

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| Field Themes/Topics | Personally Relevant Topics | Reader Interests |

Identify any topics/themes that are **shared** across all three groups (or maybe just two of the three) and assign them a color.

Next, if your readers have provided you a **reading list/bibliography**, go through it and mark each entry with the color(s) that best represent the themes and ideas that the source deals with (if you haven’t read it yet, use context clues to make an informed guess).

Lastly, **group the readings together** according to color/theme. Reading them in groups will give you a better chance of identifying ways to connect them. Remembering content is good; remembering an argument is better; remembering a conversation is best.

At this point, **check in with your advisor** about the way that you’ve organized your sources. This will help you get a sense of whether or not you are approaching the process in a way that seems viable to them.

**Types of Questions**

I’ve offered an example for each of the archetypical question types, below. In the blank spaces provided, try to come up with your own version of each kind of question:

*“Dumb” Questions with Smart Answers*

* What is religion?

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*“So-and-so says” Questions (and “He-said-She-said”)*

* For Karl Marx, religion functioned as an “opiate;” on the other hand, Weber describes religion as a kind of energizing mechanism (an amphetamine, if you will). Which framing do you think is more accurate and why?

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*Public-Facing Questions (Contemporary issues)*

* You are invited to speak on a CNN panel about voter suppression in the United States. Keeping your audience in mind, detail the history of voter suppression in the United States, dominant theories about voter engagement, and how you think this information should influence the average voter going into the 2020 election

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*Literature Review Questions*

* More than many other academic disciplines, the field of Communication Studies (and Mass Communications) has had to directly confront a shifting social and technological landscape. Where would you locate the beginnings of the modern field of Comm Studies and what major advances/arguments have marked its development?

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*Methodological Questions*

* For the following case-study synopsis and research question, please detail a mixed methods approach of study. Discuss, also, the relative merits (strengths and limitations) of a longitudinal research design and a cross-sectional research design for this project:

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*Theory Questions*

* Discuss the differences between how “candidate-centered” theories and “party-centered” theories consider the role of (1) election-seeking politicians, (2) policy goals, (3) party insiders, and (4) intense policy-demanders. Give examples for each.

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If you will be required to write your own questions for the actual exam, consider sharing these with your advisors. For each, write a short explanation of why you think it is an important question to answer.