

New Instructions for Studying Comprehensive Exams
Northern Illinois University
School of Family and Consumer Sciences (FACS)
Applied Human Development and Family Sciences (AHDFS)

GENERAL QUESTION

The purpose of the general question is to test your scholarship and knowledge of research and theory in the general field of human development and family sciences, and to test your ability to apply this knowledge to a practical situation. The general question part of the exam will be two hours. You must **provide two hard copies of two reference lists in APA Style, 7th ed.**, containing any resources you plan to use in constructing your answers to the exam (Since you will choose two different topics, you will have two reference lists, one for each topic.) You may bring in 12-15 published resources, including research articles, textbooks, etc. You may not, however, bring in any resources that you yourself have generated, such as lists, or a review of literature (other than the two hard copies of the reference list). You may not access any computer files during the comprehensive exam. You must choose two sub-topics from two different groups in the list provided on the FACS website. For each of the sub-topics, identify the specific variables you want to study within the literature on the topic. You must choose from the list of topics provided. The two subtopics should not be the same as the topics you wrote for HDFS 601 or HDFS 604. The list is now posted online together with the application form and this study guide. The coordinator will select one of the two sub-topics you have chosen and put that topic in your General Question package.

1.1 Review of Literature (3-4 pages)

*Obtain 12-15 published articles on each of the two sub-topics to support a review of literature on each sub-topic. It is NOT likely that these articles will be enough for a thorough review of the literature, so find all the relevant literature published over the past 10 years on the variables you are studying, and any relevant "classic" studies which may be older than 10 years.

*Be prepared to write a review of the literature (~3-4 pages) on either sub-topic. You will learn which of your two sub-topics you are to write on the day of the exam.

1.2 Theory (1-2 pages)

*Choose a theory of human development, family relationships, or human ecology that would be useful to guide your study of each of the sub-topics you have chosen. You may choose **ONLY** one theory that would apply to both of your sub-topics, or you may need to choose two different theories, depending on the nature of your two sub-topics.

**Please note that since the program is embedded in the area of Human Development and Family Sciences, you need to pick a theory that is either in Human Development or Family Science. Attached please find a list of applicable theories for you to choose from.

*Be prepared to explain and discuss the theory and if applicable, tell how it has evolved over time.

*Be prepared to apply the theory to the sub-topic you review during the exam. Be specific in explaining which of the variables that you have reviewed represent the specific constructs of the theory.

1.3 Application (1-2 pages)

An important aspect of learning in the *Applied Human Development and Family Sciences* program is mastering the skills to apply the theories and literature of the discipline to your work with families and children. To prepare for this aspect of the exam, you should review studies related to your sub-topics in which programs, workshops, or other interventions have been tested. In addition, you should pay particular attention to the *Implications* sections of the articles on your sub-topics and note the authors' suggestions for the use of the research findings in practice. Likely, the articles you review in preparing for this aspect of the exam are the same articles you will study for the review of literature.

For this part of the exam, you will be expected to do the following:

- a) Prepare a short review (~1-2 pages) of the approaches used to convey information related to your sub-topic, and the reported success of such approaches. In this context, "approaches" can mean programming, workshops, or other methods used for conveying information to families, individuals, and children. (For some sub-topics, there may be few studies detailing such interventions. In such cases, you may detail the applications suggested by researchers for using the research findings in practice.). The approach that you suggest must have been studied, i.e., you need to cite the approach and explain how effective researchers or practitioners have found it to be.

- b) Choose three key points that you think are most important based on your review of the literature and theory sections. (At least one key point should connect the literature with the theory you have discussed.) Detail how you would apply each of these points in practice.

Examples:

1) *For example, let's say you were interested in parenting styles and children's outcomes. In your parenting program, you would discuss parenting styles, and how each style leads to different behaviors in children. You could educate parents about children's developmental stages, so parents are aware of major milestones in their children and adjust their parenting techniques accordingly. Last but not the least, you could include a discussion of cultural variations and how parents in other cultures may interpret parenting styles differently. Explain implications for social agencies working with diverse family groups.*

For example, let's say one of your key points based on the literature and theory is that individuals experiencing financial problems report lower financial distress when they have a more internal locus of control. You could then detail an example of what you might incorporate into a financial education program to help participants experience more control over their personal finances. One suggestion might be to track one's expenditures for a one-month period, then determine changes that need to be made. Participants could then make spending plans (budgets) based on their own financial goals, which would provide them with a sense of control over their own financial decisions.

SPECIAL QUESTION

The purpose of the special question is to test your scholarship and expertise in conceptualizing and applying information in your chosen area of specialization. For example, Specialization in Marriage and Family Therapy (SMFT) students will be taking the AMFTRB practice exam. Applied Human Development and Family Sciences (AHDFS) students should consult their advisor and should plan their courses and/or study in such a way that there is a concentration in a particular area.

AHDFS students should consult their advisors about selection of topics and selection of a faculty member to write the question. Opportunities to select unique areas of interest to the student may or may not be available. AHDFS students will usually select areas such as (but not limited to) "parent education," "adolescent sexuality," or "aging." A faculty member and student will agree on the special topic area ahead of time. However, the student will not be told specific questions that s/he will be asked to answer. Be sure to consult your advisor about the special question. In some cases (especially for AHDFS students) your advisor may ask you to consult another faculty member. In some cases, the special question may be written by a faculty member in another department. However, you must ask your advisor to initiate this process.

- 2.1 The topic must **NOT** be the same as you choose for your general question.
- 2.2 Document your essay with names of at least the most important researchers/theorists (especially the researchers). For example, if you're writing about children of divorce, you should mention the research of Hetherington and of Wallerstein.
- 2.3 The Special Question for AHDFS students will be a take home examination. You will be given the question upon finishing the Research Question on the day of the comprehensive examinations. You will submit the completed answer to the Special Question by 8:00 a.m. the following Monday on blackboard.

RESEARCH QUESTION

The research question is designed to test your knowledge and understanding of the research process. It is based primarily on the concepts covered in the quantitative research methods class but assumes that you can apply what you have learned. Therefore, it is extremely beneficial to read and critique quantitative research articles in technical journals in the field of human development and family sciences to prepare for this exam. On the exam, you will be required to critique a quantitative research article. The following strategies are suggested as an appropriate way to prepare for this comprehensive exam research question.

- 3.1 Gather at least 10-15 [quantitative] research articles on topics of interest to the field of human development and family sciences. (If you use the same research articles you have gathered to prepare for your general question, you will become quite familiar with that body of literature.)

- 3.2 For each article, prepare an abstract that identifies each of the parts of the research study. Make an outline of the review of literature, summarizing major and minor parts. Do the same for the conclusions, discussion, and implication sections.
- 3.3 Describe how each part is linked to all other parts. For example, do the hypotheses sound like they are testing variables suggested in the purpose of the study? Were hypotheses based on the review of literature? How do you know?
- 3.4 As you encounter items in the study that you do not understand [and you will], consult resources from your research methods and statistics classes to try to find the answers. For example, if the researcher stated that the sampling method used was a snowball sample, and you do not remember what “snowball” means, consult your resources and review this method.
- 3.5 Critique the article you have abstracted. For example, what are the implications of using the snowball sampling method mentioned in item 3.4 above? In addressing this issue, you would need to know that snowball sampling is a method of non-random sampling. In exploratory research, non-random sampling reduces generalizability of the findings to the population. In experimental research, however, where there is random assignment of subjects to groups and groups to treatments, random selection of subjects is not an issue. Thus, to address the issue of snowball sampling, you would need to understand not only sampling, but also external validity and research design. In addition, you would need to be able to identify correctly the type of research design used in this particular study.
- Since most published articles are based on correct techniques, point out why the authors’ choices were appropriate. This will help you distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate techniques.
- 3.6 Examine all parts of the article, including the review of literature. For example, is the review current? Is the review based heavily on articles written by the author of the current article? If so, what are some explanations for and possible implications of this?
- 3.7 Based on your abstract, view your article as a whole. Do the parts fit together? Has the author gone beyond the data of the study in forming conclusions and implications? Does the new information make a contribution to the body of knowledge on this topic?
- 3.8 Remember that published articles have been through a review process, so you are more likely to find limitations rather than outright flaws. Examining published articles helps you become familiar with what *acceptable research* looks like. The comprehensive exam will require that you critique a *flawed* report.

3.9 It is not likely that you will be asked to critique specific APA style errors or to point out other technical details such as levels of headings or length of the report. Focus your efforts instead on the substance of the research process as detailed in the report.

3.10 You will **NOT** be allowed to bring in any published resources for Research question.

3.11 You will be expected to critique a research study for the exam. The topics you need to critique may include (but are not limited to) the following:

Introduction

Justification

Statement of the Problem

Hypothesis section

Review of Literature (including reference list and citations)

Selection of Subjects (procedures, rationale, etc.)

Research Design

Instrumentation

Data Analysis

Discussion

Conclusions

Implications

Pick from the following HDFS theories for the General Question

Sigmund Freud's Psychoanalytic Theory

Erikson's Psychosocial Development

Ethology and Attachment

Sociobiology and Ecological Theory

Behavioral Models: Pavlov, Watson, and Skinner

Bandura's Social Learning Theory

Piaget's Cognitive Theory

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory

Neo-Piagetian and Information Processing Theory

Kohlberg's Moral Development Theory

Social Exchange Theory

Conflict Theory

Symbolic Theory

Family Development Theory (Circumplex Model and Double ABC – X model are discussed along with Family Development theory)

Feminist Theory

System Theory Ecological

model

Life Course Theory

Paul Baltes' Lifespan Developmental Theory