

<p style="text-align: center;">Saint Louis University Medical Family Therapy Program Department of Family & Community Medicine</p>

Guidelines for Masters Oral Exam

Preparing for your oral exam begins at the onset of your program and culminates with your oral defense. The formal meeting in which your exam is held is generally scheduled during the last semester of your program. A first draft should be handed to your advisor at the beginning of that semester. The following guidelines have been established to help you begin this process early and to help you understand what is expected of you in this process. The following are guidelines and should be used as a reference point for your paper. However, you are responsible for integrating the information in a way that is consistent with your worldviews and in a way that effectively captures the theory you use in your clinical work.

Oral Exam Paper:

Beginning Phase: You should begin this process during your first two semesters in the program

Understanding why we work with clients the way that we do (theory of therapy) is an important part of the therapeutic process. This understanding is a developmental process that continues throughout our careers as therapists and both influences and is influenced by our personal and professional interactions, as well as materials that we encounter. It is also assumed that your personal background (gender identity, social class, ethnicity, etc.), belief system, worldviews, and thoughts about diversity and multiculturalism will greatly influence your style of therapy. Therefore, it is crucial that these personal aspects are considered before you begin applying a specific theory or theories. During this initial phase you are encouraged to spend some time thinking about what you believe and why you believe it and how those beliefs influence how you interact with others. Use the following questions to guide your thoughts and discussions.

1. Think about how you define a healthy/successful/well-functioning individual/family (and even what term you would use to capture that).
2. How does diversity (gender, race, ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation, age, religion, ability status) inform that description?
3. What brings people into therapy?
4. How do people change?
5. How do you know if people are getting better?
6. What is your role as a therapist/counselor in facilitating that change?
7. What has influenced your approach?
 - a. Think about experiences within your personal life, your family or origin, or your education that may have influenced these beliefs.

8. What is the role of the therapist's use of self in therapy?

Middle Phase

Using the knowledge and experiences you gain from your introductory courses, begin developing a theory of therapy by comparing your personal beliefs with the information/knowledge that is already exists. For example, pay attention to what assumptions existing theories/models are based upon, and how these existing theories/models fit within your own ideas of how to help others. A vital part of this process is reading literature in the field. It is highly recommended that you read original theory/model pieces in addition to newer articles and books written on those theories/models. As you begin this step of the process, use the questions outlined above to guide your thoughts and discussion regarding the underlying beliefs of each model/theory of therapy.

1. Epistemological and theoretical base:
 - a. How would each theory (or theory developer) answer the following questions:
 - i. How do those model developers define a healthy individual/family?
 - ii. How does diversity (gender, race, ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation, age, religion, ability status) inform their definition?
 - iii. What brings people into therapy?
 - iv. How do people change?
 - v. How do you know if people are getting better?
 - vi. What is your role as a therapist in facilitating that change?
 - vii. What is the role of the therapist's use of self in therapy?
 - viii. When would you work with different family (or other system) constellations (individual, couple, family, group, other sub or supra systems)?
 2. Identify the key assumptions and guiding principles of these models. If using more than one model, are there contradictions between the epistemological bases? If so, what do you do with that?
 3. How do you adapt the theory/model or theories/models to different presenting problems?

Final Phase:

Relying on your experiences during these initial phases, you are now ready to begin writing your Master's Oral Exam paper. Remember, a first draft of your paper should be handed to your advisor at the beginning of the Spring Semester of your final year. Contact your advisor with questions or concerns regarding the process as early as necessary. In the end, you should consider the following elements, in approximately the proportions listed below.

1. Influences on Theory of Therapy (15%)
 - a. Personal and professional experiences that have influenced your choice of theories.
 - b. Personal beliefs that shape your work/choice of a theory.
2. Theory(ies) of Marital and Family Therapy (60%)
 - a. Use your answers from the initial phases of this process to organize and shape this section.
 - b. Specific attention should be given to these topics:
 - i. Characteristics of a healthy individual/family and how that is defined.
 - ii. How does diversity (gender, race, ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation, age, religion, ability status) inform your theory of therapy?
 - iii. What brings a person to therapy?
 - iv. How do people change?
 - v. What is your role as a therapist in facilitating that change?
 - vi. When would you work with different family (or other system) constellations (individual, couple, family, group, other sub or supra systems)?
3. Clinical examples (25%)
 - a. Provide clinical examples from practicum and internship of how you have implemented the theory(ies) discussed in section two.
4. Discuss any or all of the following issues that arose during the course of your case and how you dealt with them therapeutically:
 - a. multicultural,
 - b. ethical,
 - c. professional, etc.

Oral Exam:

The following section will discuss the things that you need to do in order to prepare for the actual day of the exam.

1. Establish Oral Exam Committee: Each oral exam consists of a committee of three faculty members, one member being your advisor. Committee members can be chosen from the full-time faculty members or, with approval of the program director, from adjuncts. Decisions regarding committee members should be based on conversations with your advisor and existing relationships you have with professors within the department. You are encouraged to establish your committee as soon as you can to ensure that the faculty members you want on your committee will be available.
2. Enroll in MFT 595: You need to enroll in Special Study for Examinations (MFT 595) during the semester in which you plan on sitting for your exam. Typically, this is the spring semester of your final year.

3. Schedule a room: Meet with Mary Donjon to schedule a room for the exam.
4. Send Paper to Committee: You are expected to send the final copy of your oral exam to your committee at least 1 week prior to your oral exam.
5. Oral Exam: Generally, the oral exam lasts for one hour. At that meeting you are expected to briefly highlight the main components of your paper (approximately 15-20 minutes). After your brief synopsis, members of the committee will ask you questions regarding any number of topics. Topics may include, but are not limited to: your paper, your experiences within the program, your professional identity and your clinical work. Students should be prepared to discuss various aspects of their training and how that has influenced their professional identity. After the committee is finished asking questions, you will be asked to leave the room so that the committee can make their decision.