Comps

Through the integrative exercise Russian majors demonstrate their competency in four areas:

1. Broad understanding of the people, movements, and events that have shaped Russian cultural history over the past 1000+ years
2. Reading proficiency in Russian
3. Familiarity with theoretical approaches common in the field of Slavic Studies or one of its sub-fields
4. Competence in research methodology

Typically, comps consist of two parts and completed over three terms for six credits (RUSS 400).

I. One part of the exercise, a factual exam to be taken fall term of the senior year, tests competency in the first area. In preparation for the exam, you should plan to do the following:

- Review class notes from all relevant content courses.
- Study the lists of names, dates and terms and artworks provided by the department.
- The list of reference sources at the bottom of this guide will help you fill in the gaps.

Study tips:

- Start early
- Work in groups when possible
- Make up a study schedule so you have time to review all the material
- See list of general reference sources below

II. The second part of the exercise focuses on areas 2, 3 and 4, while giving you an opportunity to investigate in depth a topic of interest to you. This work may take the form of an individual research project, or a group research-and-translation project. If you choose an individual topic, you will need to do one of the following:

A. Take a 6-hour written exam on your topic at the end of the eighth week of the term.
B. Write a research paper on your topic (typically 40-50 pages, with bibliography).

If you elect option B, you must hand in a complete draft of your paper by the end of the seventh week of the term. Failure to hand in the draft on time will result in automatic reversion to Option A.

For group projects, you will be required to translate a Russian work into English and give a presentation about the work, its historical and cultural context, and the translation process.

Things to keep in mind:

- Keep your topic as narrowly focused as possible---time is short!
- Think methodically. Once you've chosen a topic, you need to devise a research question, and with the help of your adviser, determine the most appropriate methodology for investigating that question.
• Include in your bibliography background sources that ground you in a particular field of inquiry (your methodology), in addition to sources specific to your topic.
• All bibliographies must include untranslated Russian sources, but you should take into account your level of reading proficiency in Russian when choosing a topic. For example, a paper on a contemporary Russian writer will most likely require you to read sources mainly in Russian.
• Allow enough time for ordering materials through interlibrary loan. The University of Minnesota library is also an invaluable resource.
• Ask our reference librarians for assistance; they can save you time by teaching you the most efficient search strategies.

**In consultation with your advisor** you should work along the following schedule:

**Spring and Summer of junior year**: begin thinking about possible topics, doing general reading as needed to help you narrow the field

**Fall of senior year**: settle on a topic and work toward formulating a thesis; begin compiling a preliminary bibliography

**Winter break**: begin serious reading of sources related to your topic, being sure to take copious notes and carefully record bibliographic information; continue to revise your thesis

**2nd week of winter term**: Hand in proposal and bibliography to all members of the department

What kinds of topics have worked in the past?

**Group topics** have included:

• Translating Akhmatova: a comparative study focusing on translations by the late Milton Ehre (University of Chicago), among other professional translators as well as production and critique of student translations;
• Translating Georgii Demidov's long short story "Without a Toe Tag" (Без бирки): a practical study of the problems of rendering lexical variation (specially, Soviet prisoner slang and thieves' argot) and professional terminology (Soviet penal and juridical terms and specialized mining terminology);
• Translating the Buryat-Mongol oral epic, Gesser: a practical study of the problems of rendering cultural signifiers when translating folk sources;
• Translating Lidiia Golovkova's investigative monograph on the Soviets' introduction and use of cremation in Russia (Soviet Union) and the abuses that accompanied it during the Great Purges, a practical study in problems of translation with specialized terminology, real historical figures, bibliography, and glossing.

**Individual topics** have included:

• The evolution of oligarkh as a cultural concept in post-Soviet Russia
• Aleksandr Vampilov's Last Summer in Chulimsk as Colonized Theater
• An analysis of translations of Chekhov's Cherry Orchard
• B. Akunin's historical fiction
• The cult of Vladimir Vysotsky
• Daniil Kharm's poetry for children
• Lunacharsky's reading of Bakhtin
• The paradigm of the "sinful Mary" and the "fallen woman" in two novels by Dostoevsky
• Andrei Tarkovsky's readings of Fedor Dostoevsky
• The "superfluous man" in the music of Viktor Tsoi
• Viktor Pelevin as a postmodern writer

Comps' resources

Click [here](#) to find links to online reference sources. The following general reference print sources in literature and history can be found in the Main Reference section of our library:

- *Dictionary of Russian Literature* / William Harkins PG2940 .H3
- *Dictionary of Russian Literature since 1917* / Wolfgang Kasack PG2991.4 .K3713 1988
- *Companion to Russian History* / by John Paxton DK36 .P39 1983
- *Dictionary of Russian Historical Terms from the Eleventh Century to 1917* / Pushkarev, S. DK36.P78

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