

NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY  
Office of Testing Services

**Procedures For Average And High Proficiency  
Graduate Foreign Language Reading-Translation Exams  
(Revised: Effective Beginning July 7, 2008)**

- Who: Graduate students whose program of studies calls for them to pass a foreign language reading-translation exam.
- When: **As needed. It takes several weeks from the date of registration until an exam has been prepared and is ready for administration. Additional time is needed for scoring and reporting results to the appropriate offices. Please keep this time frame in mind if you need to meet a deadline.**
- Where: Registration and testing occur in the Office of Testing Services, 128 Adams Hall

Selection of a Language and Level of Proficiency - The language in which a student is to test and the level of proficiency are to be determined by the student in consultation with the student's academic department. **Students may be tested in only those languages offered by NIU's Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures.**

The Test:

***Foreign languages other than Latin and Ancient Greek:***

Translation will be from the foreign language into English. A foreign language/English dictionary may be used. Average proficiency examinees will be given 90 minutes in which to translate a passage of between 575 and 625 words (all parts of speech included). High proficiency examinees will be given one hour in which to write an accurate translation of a 200-300 word passage (all parts of speech included), and two hours to provide a substantive overall summary of a 5 to 7 page passage. The examinee **must** provide a summary, not a translation of these pages.

***Latin and Ancient Greek languages:***

Translation will be from either Latin or Ancient Greek into English. A foreign language/English dictionary may be used. Average proficiency examinees will be given 90 minutes in which to translate two passages of between 10-15 lines taken from two different texts of 500 lines each. High proficiency examinees will be given one hour in which to write an accurate translation of a 20-30 line passage taken from one text of 500 lines and two hours to provide a substantive overall summary of a passage of between 100-125 lines taken from another text of 500 lines. The examinee **must** provide a summary, not a translation of these pages.

## Text Selection -

### *Foreign languages other than Latin and Ancient Greek:*

The test passages will be selected from text submitted by the student. The student should submit 200 pages of text chosen in consultation with his or her advisor, and with the approval of the director of graduate studies or chairperson of the student's academic department. The text is to be submitted to Testing Services at the time the student registers for the test. *The text content must be appropriate to the student's area of scholarship and the level of proficiency to be tested.* The specific passages to be translated and/or summarized will be selected by the examiner. **Note: To minimize the chances that the text you submit will be rejected by the examiner, you should read Choosing Appropriate Text, attached to this information pack.**

### *Latin and Ancient Greek languages:*

The test passages will be selected from **two** different texts submitted by the student. The student should submit 500 lines of text from each of the two texts. These texts are to be chosen in consultation with his or her advisor, and with the approval of the director of graduate studies or chairperson of the student's academic department. The texts are to be submitted to Testing Services at the time the student registers for the test. *The texts content must be appropriate to the student's area of scholarship and the level of proficiency to be tested.* The specific passages to be translated and/or summarized will be selected by the examiner. **Note: To minimize the chances that the texts you submit will be rejected by the examiner, you should read Choosing Appropriate Text, attached to this information pack.**

## Test Registration –

### *Foreign languages other than Latin and Ancient Greek:*

To register, a student must submit to Testing Services a test registration form (attached or available from Testing Services), 200 pages of text, and the appropriate fee. The required signature of the student's department chairperson or director of graduate studies indicates that the selected language, proficiency level, and 200 pages of text are approved by the department.

### *Latin and Ancient Greek languages:*

To register, a student must submit to Testing Services a test registration form (attached or available from Testing Services), two texts of 500 lines each in accordance with the level of proficiency sought, and the appropriate fee. The required signature of the student's department chairperson or director of graduate studies indicates that the selected language, proficiency level, and lines of the texts are approved by the department.

Scheduling the Test - After the examiner selects the passages for the exam, Testing Services will notify the examinee that the test is ready for administration and that the examinee may pick up the originally submitted texts with line numbers indicated. The examinee is to schedule the test through Testing Services. **The test must be taken within one month of the date of notification of its availability.**

Test Administration- The examination is administered in the testing center of the Office of Testing Services. The student will be asked to provide translations and/or summaries as described above.

Test Evaluation - Upon completion of the exam the passage(s) and translation(s) will be evaluated on a pass/fail basis. The criterion for average proficiency is reading knowledge of a language comparable to that acquired by the end of two years of reading instruction in the language at a college or university in the United States. The criterion for high proficiency is reading knowledge of the language sufficient to enable the student to use effectively appropriate literature in the student's field.

Reporting Results - Approximately two weeks after the test, Testing Services will report the results to the examinee, the Graduate School (if pass), and the director of graduate studies or the chair of the student's academic department.

Fee - The fees for average and high proficiency exams are listed on the Registration Form. The fee is payable by the student to Testing Services at the time the student registers for the exam. **This fee is not refundable after the submitted text has been approved by the examiner.** If the text is not accepted by the examiner and the student decides not to take the Graduate Foreign Language Reading-Translation exam, the student will receive a partial refund of the testing fee. If the student cancels after an examiner has been selected they will need to register again and pay the registration fee.

Frequency of Testing - Normally a student may request to test in a particular language only once per academic session.

## Choosing Appropriate Text

It is important to choose appropriate text for this examination. The description of the text selection in the document detailing the procedures for the exam indicates "The text content must be appropriate in terms of the student's area of scholarship and the level of proficiency to be tested." The textual material should correspond to the criteria against which the student's translation will be evaluated. The criteria, described in the procedures for the exam, are as follows: The criterion for average proficiency is reading knowledge of a language comparable to that acquired through two years of reading instruction in the language at a college or university in the United States; The criterion for high proficiency is reading knowledge of the language sufficient to enable the student to use effectively appropriate literature in the student's field.

The examiners, the NIU faculty from the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures who select the material from the submitted text and evaluate the translation, have the right to reject the text submitted if they judge it to be inappropriate for the purposes of the examination. Examiners have exercised that right in the past resulting in significant delays in the completion of the examination process. Some examples of rejected texts and the reasons for the rejections are provided below.

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**Student's Major Department:** Chemistry  
**Language Tested:** French  
**Book:** Temoin A, Temoin C, Optique Cristalline (C.R. Acad. Sci.), Le Spectre D'Absorption ... (Spectrochimica Acta), Le Tour De La Méditerranée Par Deux Enfants

### Reason for Examiner's Rejection

It is not appropriate for the exam. It is a book meant for children, and contains limited vocabulary. The verbs are all in the present tense, and there are no complex sentences. This text does not offer passages that would test the reading knowledge of the examinee.

Reading knowledge of the language comparable to that acquired through two years of reading instruction would include an ability to recognize and translate correctly: 1) all the verb tenses; 2) subordinate and relative clauses; 3) vocabulary that the educated adult reader could be expected to know.

Examinees generally provide a text in their field of study. A book or a scholarly journal in the area of the candidate's specialty would be the best choice for this exam.

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**Student's Major Department:** English  
**Language Tested:** German  
**Book:** Homo Faber by Max Frisch

### Reason for Examiner's Rejection

The purpose of the reading examination is to determine "whether the examinee's reading knowledge of the language is sufficient to effectively use professional journals and other scholarly works in the field." The novel, Homo Faber, by Max Frisch is not a scholarly work and is, therefore, inappropriate for the examination.

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**Student's Major Department:** Mathematical Sciences  
**Language Tested:** French  
**Book:** Théorie Des Distributions, by Laurent Schwartz

### Reason for Examiner's Rejection

I find that this book is not suitable for the reading exam because there is simply not sufficient prose text. In general, the book is a series of equations and proofs accompanied by minimal description. For this reason, I am asking the student to submit another book for the exam. Since it is often difficult to find appropriate French texts in math, I would urge the student to consider a book concerned with the history of mathematics or one offering a biography of a mathematician.

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**Student's Major Department:** English  
**Language Tested:** German  
**Book:** Im Westen Nichts Neues, Remarque, Erich Maria, Berlin: Ullstein A-G, 1928.

**Reason for Examiner's Rejection**

The text chosen ... is a novel and not suitable for testing a graduate student's ability to read and do research in German in his/her chosen area of study. [T]he text provided was to be from a secondary source, e.g., a journal article.

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**Student's Major Department:** Art History  
**Language Tested:** Spanish  
**Book:** Ocho Mundos, Wegman, Brenda

**Reason for Examiner's Rejection**

The text is too elementary.

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**Student's Major Department:** Art History  
**Language Tested:** Spanish  
**Book:** Civilizacion Y Cultura, Copeland, Kite, Sandstedt

**Reason for Examiner's Rejection**

The Intermediate Spanish reader Civilizacion Y Cultura, Copeland, Kite, Sandstedt, is not an adequate text to test average reading knowledge at a post-graduate level, as required through two years of post-graduate reading instruction in Spanish. The text received is an auxiliary text for teaching third- or fourth-semester undergraduate Spanish, as the Introduction states.

(To further clarify, in order for me to choose a passage from another work, I would need to receive a text pertinent to the examinee's field and level of graduate study, and especially without English marginal glosses, explanatory notes and translated vocabulary, as is the case in the text I am returning. I also find it difficult to choose a 600-word passage from a text shorter than the required 200-page length ...)

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**Student's Major Department:** Art History  
**Language Tested:** Spanish  
**Book:** Literature Y Arte

**Reason for Examiner's Rejection**

I would suggest that the student consider using a text that, while designed/written for native speakers, is an expository text (perhaps based on the examinee's field of expertise) rather than a literary one. I am quite familiar with the text the examinee presented in Spanish, and I am not sure it is appropriately used for this purpose due to the level of language and number of terms/vocabulary specific to Mexico.

[Another examiner also rejected the book because:] The Intermediate Spanish supplementary reader Literature Y Arte is not an adequate text to test average reading knowledge as acquired through two years of reading instruction in Spanish.

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**Student's Major Department:** English  
**Language Tested:** Spanish  
**Book:** Biblia de Estadio

**Reason for Examiner's Rejection**

I cannot clearly see the advantage for the student to take this examination as it is projected now ( a translation and summary from the New Testament).

I would say the student will benefit by exposing him/her to actual material taken from academic journals and other scholarly work in the field [monographs/literary criticism/essays] written in Spanish, all of which we have plenty in our library.

The student might be asked otherwise to translate/summarize a passage from contemporary or modern literature written in Spanish (XIX or XX cents.), according to his/her area of interest. In this manner the examination will correspond better to the objectives.

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**Registration Form For  
Graduate Foreign Language Reading-Translation Exams**

Each student who wishes to register for a graduate foreign language reading-translation exam must complete this form.

**Note: You can be tested in only those languages offered by NIU's Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures.**

Today's Date: _____	
Student's Name: _____	Z-ID# _____
Address _____	
City: _____	State: _____ Zip Code: _____
Phone Number(s): _____	Email Address: _____
Student's Academic Department: _____	
Language in which testing is to occur _____	
<input type="checkbox"/> Average Proficiency	<input type="checkbox"/> High Proficiency

To be completed by the student in consultation with his or her advisor, the department director of graduate studies, or the department chairperson.

Approximately two hundred pages of text **OR** 500 lines from two different texts in Latin or Ancient Greek – List book title(s), title(s) of articles and journals from which articles are drawn, etc.

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Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Department chairperson or director of graduate studies** – This signature indicates that the selected language, proficiency level, and 200 pages of text are approved by the student's department.

**For Office Use Only**

<input type="checkbox"/> \$45 Average Proficiency Fee Paid	Date Paid _____
<input type="checkbox"/> \$65 High Proficiency Fee Paid	Receipt No. _____