Comprehensive Examination B grading rubric

Written proposal / max points	20	Excellent (9-10)	Good (6-8)	Adequate (3-5)	Poor (0-2)	Score
Is the proposal clearly written, well-organized, and following the NSF / NIH proposal conventions?	**10**	Clear and well organized, logical flow between sections, follows NSF/NIH formatting and structure	Mostly clear and organized, minor issues in flow or clarity; small format / structure deviations.	Poor clarity/organization, proposal is hard to follow; significant structure issues (e.g. missing or unorganized sections)	Poorly organized, difficult to follow; no NIH/NSF structure	
Are proposal sections complete and internally consistent?	**10**	All required sections complete; content is consistent (no contradictions)	Sections complete with minor inconsistencies (e.g. aims and methods do not match fully)	One or more sections are underdeveloped; inconsistencies between sections (e.g., approach doesn't address the aims).	Missing/incomplete sections; contradictions in sections (methods don't match aims, background not supporting hypothesis)	
Notes:						

Oral examination	80	Excellent (9-10)	Good (6-8)	Adequate (3-5)	Poor (0-2)	Score
Defense of specific aims: can the student justify why they chose their aims?	**10**	Clear decision making logic, demonstrates the aims are independent	Explanations use the exact proposal language, issues with answering questions	States the aims but struggles to justify choices, dependent aims.	Cannot explain the rationale behind the choice of aims, dependent aims.	
Notes:						
Experimental design and feasibility: what is the why behind the approach (strategic reasoning), rather than just how will be done?	**10**	Explains the logic connecting method to hypothesis and aims; can defend design choices	Solid understanding of design but some hesitation on deeper rationale	Can describe what will be done but not why; treats methods as a checklist not one of many choices	Cannot explain how the method connects to the hypothesis; answers are vague or contradictory	
Notes:						
Pitfalls & alternative approaches: can the student reason about likely failures and how they would address them?	**10**	Provides a reasonable plan; demonstrates thinking through specific failures, not just generic issues.	Gives a reasonable answer but does not go beyond the written text when questioned	Struggles to reason; answers are generic without specifics.	Cannot generate any plausible pitfalls; unaware of realistic issues for their approach	
Notes:						

Choice of methods and analyses (technical understanding): Do students understand the methods/instruments/analyses, are they sufficient for proposed aims?	**10**	Explains logic, assumptions, and expected results correctly and independently.	Understands the general logic and expected results but needs prompting on specific assumptions	Can name the tests/approaches but not justify/explain them; treats them as a black box	Cannot explain the methods and analyses at all; unaware of what was proposed or why	
Notes:						
Literature understanding: Do students understand the field, and can they present previous work that supports and challenges their hypothesis?	**10**	Comprehensive literature overview/understanding of the field (including recent papers); offers a presentation of how their project fits.	Knows the supportive literature well but needs some prompting in presenting the prior and competing work.	Superficial knowledge of literature; has citations on slides but can't present their key findings and limitations.	Cannot discuss literature; unaware of key work	
Notes:						
Novelty: What is novel about the project?	**10**	Identifies a true, specific novelty and clearly demonstrates how it advances beyond the current state of the field.	Identifies a genuine novelty but explanation of how it compares to the current state of the field is incomplete.	Identifies only a minor or vague aspect of novelty, after significant prompting; little context of the broader field.	Cannot identify any novel aspect of the project.	
Notes:						
Communication and responsiveness to questions: Do the students think on their feet?	**10**	Thinks clearly under impromptu questions; adapts answers in real time; states what they know and don't know	Generally responsive but occasionally reverts to reciting prepared material when pushed.	Frequently flustered by unanticipated questions; answers feel rehearsed rather than reasoned	Unable to engage with questions; long pauses, no answers, or answers that contradict earlier statements.	
Notes:						
General knowledge: Is the student demonstrating a broad knowledge of fundamental principles behind their project?	**10**	Excellent grasp of fundamentals; explains core concepts accurately and connects them to the aims and the wider field.	Solid understanding of principles directly relevant to the project; may need prompting to explain some principles	Basic / superficial familiarity with principles; struggles to explain concepts independently or in depth	Significant gaps in fundamental knowledge; answers are vague, incorrect, or not given	
Notes:						
					TOTAL	

Suggested scores

Fail	Conditional Pass	Pass
<50% written proposal <50% oral examination or total score < 50%	50% < total score < 80%	Both exam components at > 80%