Tips for Preparation
Graduate Foreign Language Exam

1. What is the purpose of the exam?
To determine graduate students' ability to read and comprehend foreign language texts in their field to aid them in their research or teaching. This ability will be measured by having the student translate a short text from the foreign language being tested into English.

2. How should the text be chosen?
Since the purpose of the exam is to evaluate graduate students' ability to read foreign language texts in their field of expertise, the books/series of articles in the foreign language should be ones that students would normally use as sources for their research/teaching if the books were written in their native language. The student should consult with his/her advisor (or an advisor in SILC, if necessary) to choose the book/article for the reading exam.

3. What will be the format of the exam?
Students will translate the FL text into coherent English. The translation should include the main ideas and important details of the passage.

4. What steps can be taken to facilitate the creation of a successful translation of the passage?
Step 1: *Reading for main ideas:* Students use top-down processes to read, understand and interpret the text; Students skim the text to search for main ideas; they look for topic sentences and supporting ideas and evaluate the meaning of discourse markers (e.g., transitional phrases such as "therefore," "in contrast") within the text in order to understand the relationship between ideas in the passage.
Step 2: *Written gist:* Students identify the main ideas of the text in writing (in English); this exercise measures the students' ability to take notes and capture the most important ideas in the FL text
Step 3: *Close Reading:* Students read for important details, making some intelligent guesses or logical deductions about unclear passages based on the context. Students should on the first reading ignore a word or passage unnecessary for understanding the text defer judgment about unknown word or passage if there is possibility it may be cleared up later in the text (repetition in text or paraphrasing in text) guess meanings of words from the context and read on to see if the guess was correct; use logic to made these deductions. (Students may use dictionaries to confirm their hypotheses about the meaning of unknown words and ascertain the meaning of words they cannot guess from context.)
Step 4: *Integration of main ideas and important details:* Students integrate the main ideas with important details from the close reading to revise the translated text in English; they need to pay attention to the English translation's compositional infrastructure and make sure that they create a coherent text; the translated English text should contain all necessary information for interpreting the FL texts.
Step 5: *Check for coherence:* Students read over the final translated English text for coherence of ideas; the English text should be able to stand on its own.

How will the exam be graded? Descriptors for pass, fail.

PASS: Translated text contains the main ideas and important details of the FL text. Propositions in English text are easily recognized and their relationship to each other reflects their relationship in the FL text. Vocabulary and grammar reflect the appropriate level of discourse formality or other sociolinguistic features found in the FL text. English translation consists of grammatically correct sentences which form a coherent text that could stand on its own as an understandable piece of prose.

FAIL: Translated text lacks significant main ideas or important details of the FL text. Propositions in text do not reflect their original relationship. Vocabulary and grammar do not reflect the appropriate level of discourse formality or other sociolinguistic features found in the FL text. English translation contains ungrammatical sentences or sentence fragments, lacks coherence and cannot stand on its own as a text.

Samples of Translated Text

Spanish

Manuel de Falla
Su situación musical era buena, representándose habitualmente operas y zarzuelas y con reuniones de música de cámara, entre ellas la de la familia Viniegra, primeros protectores y en cierto modo descubridores del talento de Falla.

Unsuccessful Translation:
Manuel de Falla
Its musical situation was good, representing habitually operas and zarzuela and his reunion of music for church, between them she of the Viniegra family, first protectors and then in a certain mode discovered of the talent of Falla.

Successful Translation:
Manuel de Falla
His musical (career) situation was sound, with frequent performances of his operas and zarzuelas and with chamber music recitals, among them one for (sponsored by) the Viniegra family, the first protectors, and to a certain extent, the discoverers of (de) Falla's talent.

French

Durant l'automne 1864, le curé Lacourcière faisait prier ses paroissiens pour obtenir de la pluie; les fontaines était en effet à sec et les animaux "avaient de la misère" à trouver assez d'eau dans les ruisseaux pour apaiser leur soif.

Unsuccessful Translation
During l'automne 1864, the Lacourcière priest made request his parishioners to obtain rain; was the fountains indeed dry and the animals "had of misery" to find of water in the brooks enough to alleviate their thirst.

Successful Translation
In the autumn of 1864, Fr. Lacourcière had his parishioners pray for rain; the fountains were quite dry and the animals "had trouble" finding enough water in the brooks to alleviate their thirst.

German

Auf alle Fälle hat dem unter französischem und ziemlich sicher auch unter deutschem Einfluss entstandene englische antikirchliche Roman das in England allgemein gewordene Verlangen nach Grusel-geschichten, zusammen mit seiner papstfeindlichen Stimmung, zu ungeahntem Erfolg geholfen.

Unsuccessful Translation:
In any case has the under French and rather surely also under German influence arisen English anticlerical novel the in England generally become desire for creepy stories, together with its antipapal tenor, to unthought-of success led.

Successful Translation:
At any rate, the English anticlerical novel, which arose under French and rather certainly also under German influence, experienced unfathomed success owing to the prevalent longing in England for horror stories and the antipapal mood there.