

“ O T T O ”

Organizing Texts and Themes for Orals (in Literary Studies)

Please read this text carefully BEFORE seeing us during our office hours!

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Bach/ Göske/Heiler

In your oral exams you will be asked to read, interpret, and contextualize literary texts of different kinds, genres, and periods. OTTO may be of some help to prepare for these exams. Here are some hints for organizing your private reading ("Selbststudium") and your course readings. They are designed to show you how to study properly and how to prepare in time for your oral exams.

Preparation should begin in your first semester (and continue in the vacation periods). Read those works of literature that are printed in standard anthologies, mentioned in literary histories (see DIANA for our recommendations), discussed in survey lectures, and concentrate on those that appeal to you. Anthologies usually offer shorter works from many different authors and periods and will be a great help, but you should also purchase interesting or required books in order to build your own, private library.

The official regulations for the various degree courses ("Studien-" or "Prüfungsordnungen") give you only a very general idea of the knowledge and skills you are expected to have acquired by the time you take an oral exam. We expect you to offer your personal reading lists as soon as you approach us to register for a mid-study or final exam. This should happen several months(!) in advance so that we can give you detailed advice about how to organize your survey knowledge (Überblick "Literaturgeschichte") and your special topics ("Gebiete"). Rather than prescribing a rigid canon with texts and authors you must have read, we prefer a more rewarding method: we expect you to create your personal reading lists.

Special Topic(s) / "Gebiet(e)"

According to the various "Prüfungsordnungen", students in the **L 1** program have to offer one special topic ("Gebiet"), all others two. Your special topic(s) will be the major focus of our conversation in the exam. You may define and shape it (them) according to your interests. Each special topic, however, should follow a certain model ('Rahmenmodell') and come with a standard work of criticism of your choice. Each topic should cover the equivalent of six to eight books of medium length by at least three authors. There are three models for organizing special topics that you should flesh out by listing those texts you have studied (we include some examples from past exams):

Model 1: A historical survey of a major genre ('Gattungsgeschichte'), i.e., ca. 80-100 years of novel writing, short fiction, poetry, drama, or selected forms of non-fiction.

Examples:

- "The City novel between 1925 and 1995"
- "Stories of initiation in 20th century American fiction"
- "The history of the English sonnet"
- "Ethnic autobiographies in the 21st century"
- "Women's Writings, 1680s-1820s"

"Postwar drama"

"The historical novel between 1820 and 1900"

Model 2: The transition from one literary period to the next ('Epochenschwelle'), i.e. ca. 30-50 years, with texts from at least three of the four major genres.

Examples:

"From Renaissance to Restoration: English literature in the 16th and 17th centuries"

"From the Age of Enlightenment to Romanticism"

"From Romanticism to Realism"

"From Realism to Modernism"

"From Modernism to Postmodernism and beyond"

Model 3: A specific approach or a standard theory of literary criticism ('Literaturtheorie'), based on a number of theoretical texts, which are brought to bear on several works of literature.

Examples:

"Sociology and literature"

"Metafiction"

"Psychological criticism"

"Feminist Criticism"

"Gender and class in drama"

"Narration in fiction and film"

Historical Survey / Überblick "Literaturgeschichte"

This list must contain poetry, drama, fiction, and non-fiction. Ideally, your reading should cover all the important literary periods. You should adopt those period terms that you find in literary histories or anthologies as helpful markers. In preparing your list, please indicate which literary history and anthology you have consulted in your studies. (See the 1st semester model list below for an example. In your 4th or 8th semester, however, it ought to be much more encompassing.) The scope of your reading will vary, of course, according to the workload ("SWS") of the various degree courses. Here are some general guidelines:

L 1 (1st-4th grade): future primary school teachers present a reading list which is structured in terms of textual genres ('Textsorten'). The scope of reading should be equivalent to 4-6 novels of medium length.

L 2: future secondary school teachers present a *historical* survey of all genres with an emphasis on *the 19th to the 21st century*.

L 3, L 4 ("WiPäd"): future high or trade school teachers present a *comprehensive historical* survey of *all genres and periods*.

Exam Procedures

In general, an oral exam works like this: we will start with an excerpt from one of the texts you have chosen for in-depth study (special topic). You will be asked to read, interpret, and comment on it in the context of other texts on your list. Then we will branch out from there and discuss, in a less detailed manner, topics from your

survey list. We may also start with an open question about a key concept of your special topic and then invite you to elaborate. You can practise the art of oral examinations privately with your fellow students and in the exam colloquia that we offer on a regular, if voluntary, basis each semester. Remember: OTTO and we are here to help. When the time comes to think seriously about an exam, revise your lists and see us in our office hours. We will be glad to assist you.

Example: survey list of 1st [!!!!] semester students

(based on OK "Introduction to the Study of Literature", with lots of space for your own reading)

Name: Semester: Degree course: Email:

Period	Fiction	Non-fiction	Poetry	Drama
Renaissance (16th – early 17th century)			Shakespeare, "My Mistress' Eyes" (1609)	Shakespeare, <i>Macbeth</i> (ca. 1606)
Restoration and Age of Enlightenment (late 17th – late 18th century)				
Romanticism (late 18th – early 19th century)	Poe, "The Tell-Tale Heart" (1843)		Blake, "London" (1794) Wordsworth, "Composed upon Westminster Bridge" (1807),	
Victorianism, Realism (middle – late 19th century)				
Modernism (20th century)	Mansfield, "The Fly" (1922) Jackson, "The Lottery"(1949)		Frost, "Out, out-" (1916)	
[Contemporary literature] (late 20th – early 21st century)	McEwan, "Conversation with a Cupboard Man" (1975)		Reading, "Fiction" (1979)	

Literary history used:

Anthology used: