

**WHEREAS once upon a time** in the Berkeley Mathematics Department, there was a system of Qualifying Exams in which students had to pass three out of a fixed list of one-hour oral exams on standard syllabi,

**AND INASMUCH AS** at that time, students scheduled to take a Qualifying Exam customarily had other students who had taken exams in the same subjects, especially with the same examiners, give them “mock quals” for practice,

**BUT, SINCE** the advent of our system of individualized Qualifying Examinations, this custom has fallen into desuetude, and the performance on many Qualifying Examinations I have taken part in since then has been disappointing, especially to the students’ prospective dissertation supervisors, at times resulting in a failure where a pass might have been expected,

**AND WHEREAS** I believe that the main value of the “mock qual” was never, as the students thought, that they learned what questions were asked in specific exams by specific faculty, but, rather, that it gave them practice in answering questions on their feet, accustomed them a little to the exam situation, and made them realize gaps in their preparation,

**THEREFORE I HAVE RESOLVED** that henceforth (with such exceptions as seem warranted) I will serve on students’ Qualifying Examination committees only if the students agree that they will ask other students to give them “mock exams” some time before the actual exam, in one or preferably more sessions, totaling at least 2 hours.

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***Additional Advice: know basic examples***

A surprisingly common occurrence at Quals (both under the old system and the current one) is that students are taken aback when asked for *examples* of various sorts of objects. These are asked for at most every Qual; but perhaps after a Qual is over, other students ask, “What did they have you prove?”, and the fact that examples were also expected is forgotten.

Knowledge of basic examples is a fundamental part of understanding any field, and should be part of your preparation for the Qualifying Examination.

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