

Overview of Mission Hill School's Graduation Requirements and Portfolio Review process

What does it mean to graduate from the Mission Hill School?

During the critical transition years between childhood and high school, young people need schools that share certain characteristics. First of all, they should be schools where young people work in small groups with a small number of adults who know them well. Second, students need to experience high and rigorous academic expectations. Third, they need to see the connections between academic work and the work that takes place outside of the classroom. Fourth, they need opportunities to explore the world in authentic and engaged ways--through music, dance, theater, visual art and outdoor education. And finally, students should have opportunities to make their own positive individual and collective mark on their environment: to be useful to others. Graduation from our school is a process that incorporates all of these opportunities and expectations. But how do we measure students' accomplishments and gauge their knowledge?

During the three years of the middle school program, students will be preparing to show the world--specifically their graduation committee--their readiness for high school. An eighth grade diploma from the Mission Hill School represents the completion of six exhibitions where students demonstrate their knowledge and competence in areas prescribed by the faculty. Exhibitions include traditional schoolwork, as well as evidence from the experiences students have had in the outside world. Each student's work is represented and collected in a portfolio, which, along with on-demand tasks, becomes the basis for that student's exhibition.

What are portfolios?

While portfolios and exhibitions have not been used extensively in the Boston Public Schools, they are commonly used in the adult world. As we prepare young people for adulthood, school exhibitions are a reflection of adult practice. Consider how gymnasts train and prepare for a demonstration of their skills and abilities or how a researcher presents her work in science as the oral defense of a doctoral dissertation. Even obtaining

a driver's license requires demonstrating competence in operating a car and knowing the rules of the road.

Our graduation requirements represent a broad range of evidence for a student's readiness and competence for high school level work. Conversely, standardized testing offers only one way to measure knowledge. Imagine asking drivers only to complete a timed multiple choice test in order to get a license. Portfolios put the students at the center of the process: they are given the opportunity to thoughtfully prepare and defend what they have learned through demonstration, conversation, and written material. This process of presenting and defending one's work before a group of parents and teachers -- experts in the adult world-is tangible, interactive and concrete, and has immediate and very real consequences.

The Mission Hill School faculty has delineated six domains for the school's graduation requirements: Science, History, Literature and Writing, the Arts, Beyond the Classroom, and Mathematics. Each requires that students demonstrate mastery of the Habits of Mind. These Habits of Mind, put succinctly, are the habits of asking oneself questions (in whatever situations, conversations or processes in which one finds oneself) about evidence, relevance, supposition, connections and alternative points of view. The Habits of Mind are an approach to both the traditional academic disciplines (math, science, literature, and history) and the interdisciplinary topics of everyday life. They lead us to ask good questions and seek solid answers. In short, they are our definition of a well-educated person and one who is ready to do high school level work.

Preparation for graduation begins in the sixth grade as students begin to build their portfolios. Portfolios are a collection of a student's best work. A history portfolio may include a first draft of a research paper alongside the finished product and some work done in prior years. This gives a true picture of how well the student has mastered the skills needed to produce a good research paper. Each middle school student will have his or her own portfolio box in which evidence will be collected. Boxes will contain a "living history" of a student's middle school experience-and will contain a variety of works in progress as the student prepares for his/her exhibition.

Exhibitions will take place throughout the students' 7th and 8th grade years. While the graduation standards (see p. 7) apply to all students, the ways they present their work varies according to individual interests and strengths. In this same spirit students with special learning needs and disabilities will

require modifications of this process to take into account the ways in which they can best show off their work. When a student has an IEP that indicates such special needs modifications, we will inform the committee before the presentation. All work collected for graduation purposes as well as videotapes of some of the presentations and the committee judging discussions will be kept for public record.

Advisors and the graduation committee

Each student is assigned a staff member as an advisor: someone other than their classroom teachers: who assists in preparing them for these final steps and serves as a judge on the graduation committee. Presentations are made based during the last two years of school. Students enter the senior class, equivalent to the 8th grade, when there is reason to believe they can and should complete the graduation requirements by the end of that school year. The graduation committee includes at least four people: the student's homeroom teacher, advisor, a family member and a community member who is not directly connected to the school. The student may include another adult, if desired. A younger student serves as a helper to the candidate.

How are students judged?

It is the graduation committee's job to determine if a student passes the graduation requirements. A scoring method that provides consistency from presentation to presentation called a "scoring rubric" guides the work of the graduation committee. The rubrics have been developed in collaboration with other schools with similar approaches and they enable members of the committee to more reliably and consistently judge work. Mission Hill's scoring rubrics assess how well a student demonstrates Habits of Mind, specific levels of skills and competencies relevant to the particular work in each domain (math, literature, history, etc.), and the effectiveness of the student's written and oral communication. The graduation committee will also note whether the candidate has developed appropriate habits of work--reliability, resourcefulness, ability to work with others and to meet deadlines--based on the evidence presented.

In its final recommendation to the faculty, the graduation committee provides a score indicating either 1) Pass 2) Provisional Pass, 3) Partial Pass, or 4) No Pass. A Provisional Pass means the student has passed with a few provisions. These are small editing changes or additions (such as a missing bibliography) that do not require a full committee meeting, and can be presented to the homeroom teacher and advisor. A Partial Pass means that the student has passed only a part of the presentation and must re-present whatever work has not passed to the committee. A score of No Pass means the student has not yet demonstrated readiness in a sufficient number of areas. This could be an indication that the student needs more time, or that he or she has not presented a best effort. A narrative will accompany the score summarizing the committee's comments on the final recommendation.

Based on recommendations from the committee, faculty will vote to graduate students by June 1st of each year.

The following pages outline the special role of the student's advisor and specific requirements and timelines for each domain. The scoring rubrics used to judge an exhibition are also included.

The role of the advisor

The advisor has an important role in the graduation preparation. Advisors are assigned in the sixth grade year. Each advisor will be responsible for an eighth grader preparing to graduate, a seventh grader preparing for two spring portfolios, and, as of January, a sixth grader. The sixth grader will help the seventh grader in her/his presentation; the seventh grader will similarly help the eighth grader. At times, it may be necessary to assign additional advisees to the advisor, and sometimes an advisor will not have all three.

Before the presentation

Prior to the presentation, advisors serve primarily as supportive friends to the student. They help the student to:

- collect all necessary pieces of work
- organize work for presentation
- plan format and timing of presentation
- practice the presentation

- send copies of work to all committee members at least one week before the presentation is scheduled.

Advisors should plan to meet with the teacher in charge of the portfolio as early as possible to discuss how they can best serve their particular advisees. Each student is different and will have different needs. When advisors have questions about the student's work, they should consult with the teacher.

During the presentation

- Ask questions, so that the student can demonstrate her or his habits of mind and depth of understanding.
- Act as an impartial judge of the work and presentation, basing questions and decisions on the school standards.

After the presentation

Advisors are responsible for meeting with the student presenter after the presentation to relay the committee's decisions orally. Advisors should then prepare a written report of committee decisions, including a careful summation of all committee recommendations, and should get copies of that report to the student, the family, all committee members, the teacher in charge of the portfolio, and the homeroom teacher. All records, including the rubrics and the summation, should be given to the 8th grade staff to be added to the student's permanent record.

Time involved

Two portfolios will be presented in May and June of the seventh grade year. Two more will be no later than February of the eighth grade year, and the final two by the end of April. In the event of a partial pass or failure, the retry will be in the month following the attempt, or will be added to the next portfolio presentation.

Students and advisor will make a plan for the work to be presented at least four weeks before each presentation. At this point the student and the advisor will, in conjunction with the teacher in charge of the portfolio, determine whether the student will be ready to present. If not, another year in middle school should be considered.

Another checkpoint will take place at least ten days before the presentation. At this point all work should be final, ready to

be sent to committee members. In the event that it is not, the presentation will be cancelled, a failure will be recorded, and the student may reschedule for a second attempt.

In addition to these meeting times, advisors should plan to meet advisees several times to support them, ascertain their progress, and help plan and practice their presentations. The amount of time given depends on the individual student.

The role of the student helper

The presenter and the advisor have the final say about how to use the student helper. However, the helper should offer and be prepared to do the following:

- have water ready if needed at the presentation
- hand the presenter any necessary materials in the correct order
- run any technological equipment necessary to the presentation
- help with timing the presentation, warning the presenter when the allotted time for each section is nearing an end

Time involved

Student helpers should attend at least two meetings with the advisor and the presenter, one to find out the presenter's needs and another to practice his or her role in the presentation. In addition, student helpers should be available if the presenter would like help in organizing and practicing the presentation, or if the advisor would like help in copying and sending materials. Whenever possible, these meetings should take place when classes are not in session : if students must miss class time, advisors should be certain that classroom teachers are informed.

The role of the parent and the external committee member

All committee members, including teachers, parents and advisors, are equally responsible for judging the student work. The goal of the process is to be certain the school has served the student as well as possible. This means not only that the student is well-prepared academically and in the habits of mind,

but also that he or she will go on to high school with greater self-knowledge about his or her own strengths and weaknesses as a learner.

All committee members should plan to do the following:

Before the presentation

- become familiar with the rubrics used for judging work
- examine the models available in each rubric category
- look closely at work the student will be presenting

During the presentation

- Ask questions, so that the student can demonstrate her or his habits of mind and depth of understanding.
- Act as an impartial judge of the work and presentation, basing questions and decisions on the school standards.

After the presentation

- Look at the rubrics to decide whether work Needs More, Meets, Approaches or Exceeds in each category
- Determine whether the student has passed fully, provisionally, partially or not at all
- Give precise feedback about what the student needs to do if the pass is provisional
- Be available to return for a make-up presentation if necessary

Time involved

Ideally committee members will serve during the full process for each student, in all six domains. Each presentation involves some preparation time reading and evaluating student work. In addition each presentation, consisting of two domains, requires at least an hour and a half from beginning to end. Presentations occur three times. In the event of a failure or a partial pass, students need extra presentations. When the student has finished all six presentations, committee members may then decide whether to continue serving, moving on to the advisor's next student, or to stop. We appreciate the incredible contribution of time, thought, and skill involved.

Graduation Standards

In all of the following domains work will be assessed on the basis of relevant use of the Mission Hill five habits of mind as well as competent presentation of material orally, in written form, and visually. At some point in the presentation process the following should be evident: appropriate and varied use of technology, and teamwork and collaboration. Students also must present evidence of a public performance in one of the domains.

History

On-demand: a short oral presentation about a research topic in American history using and citing at least three sources. This topic will be given on the day of the presentation, and students will have a limited amount of time to use the library to gather facts and prepare their presentation. The purpose of this on-demand task is to assess research skills.

Presentation: an oral presentation based on a major piece of written research that argues for a point of view using historical evidence and data. This should be in an area of special interest to the student, with a particular focus on possible alternate viewpoints.

Evidence: a portfolio of past work that includes evidence of the use of Mission Hill's habits of mind, and of progression on the part of the student. The portfolio will contain at least three pieces of work.

Evidence of the ability to use maps and locate events on a timeline around the periods of history studied at Mission Hill, and passage of Mission Hill's "ultimate challenge" in geography. This can be done on demand in the classroom, and attested to during the committee meeting.

Beyond the Classroom

Presentation: a reflective presentation, accompanied by a written paper, demonstrating how student has grown from participation in activities taking place outside of school. This should include a SCI placement, any extended projects that contributed to the larger school or neighborhood community, and any other activities the student chooses to include.

Evidence: evidence of learning activities initiated by the student or the family that take place outside the classroom. This must include a SCI journal and may include attestations, videos, certificates, trophies etc.

Science

Presentation: a description of a scientific experiment or investigation designed and implemented by the student that meets good scientific rules and habits; methods, records, and findings will be presented and defended.

Evidence: a portfolio containing evidence of prior study in both the physical and natural sciences. The work should demonstrate an ability to ask scientific questions, make a hypothesis, pursue an inquiry, collect data, keep careful records of observations, draw conclusions and suggest areas of further investigation.

Literature and Writing

On-demand: a persuasive essay done without help on a specific topic selected by the teacher. This is to assess skills in topic organization and grammatical conventions.

Presentation: an oral presentation of a written comparison of at least two books approved by the staff; be prepared to discuss and defend this work.

Evidence: a portfolio of prior work including samples of:
persuasive writing (at least one)
research based writing with appropriate citations (at least one)
personal and/or autobiographical writing (at least two)
short story/poem/drama (at least two)
Evidence of having reached at least a Level 6 on Mission Hill's Reading and Writing Scale, and demonstration of basic competency on a nationally standardized test.

The Arts

Presentation: an oral presentation based on a written comparison of two forms of art, or a critique of a particular artist or genre in one of the above areas of the arts.

Evidence: Portfolio of past work in the arts showing growth in technical competence and a willingness to take artistic risks.

Mathematics

On-demand: written work demonstrating the thinking that led to a solution to a short problem presented by the faculty and done without help.

Presentation: students will teach a problem they have previously solved to the committee. Students will present four problems they have solved at appropriate levels of mathematical skill, one in each of the strands: number sense, data and statistics, geometry and patterns and functions. They need to use at least two strategies in each problem, one of which can be visual.

Evidence: a portfolio of past work that reflects Mission Hill's math competencies.

Evidence of mastery of appropriate mathematical terms and facts (the "basics").

Evidence of basic competency as measured by a standardized test.

Note: These requirements may be modified for special needs students.

Timeline for graduation presentations Presentation Schedule

Grade 7

May 31

History

Art or Beyond the Classroom

Grade 8

By November 30

History, Art and Beyond the Classroom Redos

By February vacation

Science

Literature and Writing

By April 30

Math

Beyond the Classroom or Art

By May 15

All portfolios finished, including redos

By June 1st

Deadline for graduation approval by faculty

Advisor Schedule

By November 1

Advisors will meet with Grade 8 teachers to discuss roles each should play for their particular student in the upcoming year.

Four weeks before each presentation date

Advisors will have a formal meeting with advisees four weeks before each presentation as a first checkpoint. At this meeting it will be decided whether or not the student has enough work to attempt the domain four weeks later.

Ten days before each presentation date

Advisors will have a formal meeting with advisees to check on final work. If it is not done, the presentation will be cancelled.

(Advisors will also have informal meeting with advisees as needed)

HISTORY RUBRIC

E X P E C T A T I O N S	Viewpoint, focus, purpose	Connections, organization, structure, form	Evidence	Knowledge Base	Conventions of historical research	Portfolio Item:
	<p><u>Encompasses knowledge base appropriate to age</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● clearly identifies & addresses key questions & ideas ● demonstrates understanding of the issues ● presents positions persuasively ● shows awareness of alternate viewpoint and explanations ● "takes a stand" where and when appropriate 	<p><u>The whole is greater than the sum of its parts</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● organized so that all parts support the whole ● conjectures, predicts and explains observations when appropriate ● explains significance of problems beyond the project ● notes critical junctures, decisions ● "what if" – sees other possibilities 	<p><u>Credible and convincing</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● generalizations and ideas supported by specific, relevant and accurate information ● ideas developed in appropriate depth ● discusses strengths and weaknesses of evidence ● cites appropriate sources (graphs, formulas, figures, equations, maps, illustrations) where appropriate 	<p><u>Good store of knowledge</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● names ● dates ● places/geography ● surrounding events, context 	<p><u>Intelligible</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● distinguishes facts and fiction ● correct format (bibliography, footnotes, references, etc.) ● uses proper quotations ● good mechanics and standard notations ● aware of rules of plagiarism 	<p>Student:</p> <p>Advisor:</p> <p>Reader:</p> <p>Score:</p> <p>Date:</p>
	EXCEEDS MEETS	EXCEEDS MEETS	EXCEEDS MEETS	EXCEEDS MEETS	EXCEEDS MEETS	
	APPROACHES NEEDS MORE	APPROACHES NEEDS MORE	APPROACHES NEEDS MORE	APPROACHES NEEDS MORE	APPROACHES NEEDS MORE	

WRITING RUBRIC (non-fiction)

E X P E C T A T I O N S	Viewpoint, focus, purpose	Connections, organization, structure, form	Evidence	Voice, tone	Conventions	Portfolio Item:
	<p><u>Encompasses knowledge base appropriate to age</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● clearly identifies & addresses key questions & ideas ● demonstrates understanding of the issues ● presents positions persuasively ● shows awareness of alternate viewpoint and explanations ● "takes a stand" where and when appropriate 	<p><u>The whole is greater than the sum of its parts</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● organized so that all parts support the whole ● conjectures, predicts and explains observations when appropriate ● explains significance of problems beyond the project ● contains transitions ● concludes in a satisfying way 	<p><u>Credible and convincing</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● generalizations and ideas supported by specific, relevant and accurate information ● ideas developed in appropriate depth ● discusses strengths and weaknesses of evidence ● cites appropriate sources (graphs, formulas, figures, equations, maps, illustrations) where appropriate 	<p><u>Engaging</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● lively, interesting use of language ● awareness of reader ● explains concepts so they are understandable ● project has a distinct identity 	<p><u>Intelligible</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● excellent appearance ● correct format (bibliography, footnotes, references, etc.) ● varied sentence structure ● good mechanics and standard notations ● appropriate, broad vocabulary and word usage 	<p>Student:</p> <p>Advisor:</p> <p>Reader:</p> <p>Score:</p> <p>Date:</p>
	EXCEEDS	EXCEEDS	EXCEEDS	EXCEEDS	EXCEEDS	
	MEETS	MEETS	MEETS	MEETS	MEETS	
	APPROACHES	APPROACHES	APPROACHES	APPROACHES	APPROACHES	
	NEEDS MORE	NEEDS MORE	NEEDS MORE	NEEDS MORE	NEEDS MORE	

**WRITING
RUBRIC (creative work)**

E X P E C T A T I O N S	Idea, concept Is the idea of some depth, is it worthwhile? • connections with work of others • significance (e.g. politically, culturally) • intrinsic value	Organization, composition, structure, form Is the whole greater than the sum of its parts? • organized so that all parts support the whole • evident structure • Problems of form like balance, symmetry/asymmetry, beginning, middle & end, rhymes and rhythms, etc., solved as appropriate • use of traditional forms as appropriate • completeness	Communication, effectiveness, aesthetic Does it work? Is it interesting to the reader/viewer/listener? • original, lively, innovative • intrinsic interest • meaning in its own terms • aesthetically satisfying	Expressiveness Does the work have character? • characteristic of creator • conveys feeling • individual style	Elements, materials (e.g., words, paints, clay, diorama) Is there adequate knowledge of and control over materials? • technical skill • ability to manipulate materials for specific purposes • familiarity with broad potential of materials • use of varied materials and elements, sometimes in new combinations	Portfolio item: _____ Student: _____ Advisor: _____ Scorer: _____ Score: _____ Date: _____
	EXCEEDS	EXCEEDS	EXCEEDS	EXCEEDS	EXCEEDS	
	MEETS	MEETS	MEETS	MEETS	MEETS	
	APPROACHES	APPROACHES	APPROACHES	APPROACHES	APPROACHES	
	NEEDS MORE	NEEDS MORE	NEEDS MORE	NEEDS MORE	NEEDS MORE	

M A T H

Content	Focus, Purpose, Question	Connections, Relevance	Organization, Structure of Methods	Observation, Results, Viewpoint	Conclusion, Evidence, Math Habits	
<p>Number sense</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> clearly identifies key questions and ideas demonstrates understanding of the purpose 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> explains significance of the activity/task/problem looks for patterns makes comparisons to other work or prior knowledge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> describes activity so that others can understand step by step process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses drawings, charts, graphs to support findings gather ample and appropriate data if appropriate analyze work, reflective stance double checks results with different method 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> defends conclusions with sound reasoning makes conscious decisions about whether the results are credible or not explains how problem can be redone to be more organized or clearer shares about difficulties and triumphs throughout process – shows diligence and perseverance 	<p>Portfolio Piece:</p>
<p>Geometry</p>						<p>Student:</p>
<p>Data</p>						<p>Advisor:</p>
<p>Patterns, Functions, Algebra</p>						<p>Overall Score:</p>
	EXCEEDS	EXCEEDS	EXCEEDS	EXCEEDS	EXCEEDS	
	MEETS	MEETS	MEETS	MEETS	MEETS	
	APPROACHES	APPROACHES	APPROACHES	APPROACHES	APPROACHES	
	NEEDS MORE	NEEDS MORE	NEEDS MORE	NEEDS MORE	NEEDS MORE	
						Date:

ORAL PRESENTATION RUBRIC

IS THE PRESENTATION INTERESTING?

Score	1.	2.	3.	4.
Oral Conventions	little or no sense of audience, unclear, mumbling, no eye contact, limited vocabulary and sentence structure	occasional eye contact. Some awareness of audience, speech sprinkle with "like" "um" "well" . Simple sentences	sense of audience, clear and concise, some complex sentences and interesting vocabulary	3 plus comfortable enough with audience to play with them, while keeping to point
Voice/Style/Tone/Relevance	no voice, style -- flat narrative of events or facts			engaging, lively, interesting, relevant, deliberately uses voice to enhance presentation.

This rubric should not be used as a pass/fail tool – it is to help give feedback to the presenter