HANDBOOK ON STANDARD ORDINATION EXAMINATIONS

June 2024 / 3.3

in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Prepared by the Presbyteries' Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates and the Mid Council Ministries area of the Office of the General Assembly

Your Per Capita Dollars at Work!

The development and distribution of this Handbook on Standard Ordination Exams is made possible through the Per Capita budget of the Office of the General Assembly.

Exam Handbook Release 3.3, June 2024

Handbook on Standard Ordination Examinations

IN THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.)

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION

Why Standard Ordination Examinations?

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) administers ordination examinations as a reasonably uniform (standard) process for assessing candidates' readiness to begin service as ministers of the Word and Sacrament. But that general statement of *what* we do in the PC(USA) doesn't explain *why* we do it. To answer that question, we need to look at both the history of the exams and their purpose.

How the Standard Exam Process Began

The issues that gave birth to denominational ordination exams within the Presbyterian Church arose in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Primary among them was a perception that the historic pattern of each presbytery having sole responsibility for examining candidates for ordination was creating a growing disparity between the qualifications and preparedness of persons entering ministry across the church. This disparity expressed itself in quite distinct ways.

First, there was a general perception that standards were too lax in some places. As one person recalls in a history prepared about the ordination exams, an individual about whom one presbytery had serious concerns might go to another presbytery and be quickly ordained. Seminarians were sharing stories and advice about which presbyteries a person should avoid, and which presbyteries would offer an easy path to ordination.

At the same time, there was also a perception that particular types of persons were routinely being treated more stringently in presbyteries' examination procedures. Even in presbyteries considered to have higher standards generally, men from the dominant culture navigated the system more easily than others—especially those who were well connected. Women and racial-ethnic candidates were not being treated equitably with their white male peers.

An overture from the Presbytery of San Francisco to the General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America in 1963 set in motion the ordination exams. Their purpose, as stated in the overture referred to the presbyteries for study and comment the following year, was "to provide a more equitable standard of expectation among all the presbyteries, and to offer candidates a more equitable basis for their preparation for ordination examination." The provision of the constitution of the predecessor United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America requiring standard ordination examinations took effect in 1965. Examinations have been given continuously (in the UPCUSA stream) since 1967. Exams were administered nationally, and ruling elders and ministers of the Word and Sacrament who were elected by their presbyteries evaluated the exams.

The 115th General Assembly (1975) of the Presbyterian Church in the United States called for standard written examinations for ordination to begin effective January 1, 1977. This assembly instructed the Council on Theology and Culture, in consultation with the General Executive Board, to prepare a plan by which such examinations could be described, developed and conducted. The 116th General Assembly (1976) approved the establishment of a Permanent Committee on Ordination Examinations. The committee designed exams in Theology, Bible, Sacraments and the Book of Church Order. Exams were administered and evaluated by the presbyteries of the PCUS.

In October 1978 discussions were begun to unite the two examining bodies. The first joint meeting of the two groups occurred April 22-24, 1979, in Erlanger, Kentucky.

The Purpose of the Standard Exams

The exams began, then, from a concern for equitable treatment of those seeking ordination to the ministry of the Word and Sacrament. There was from the earliest years a realization that "equitable" treatment required taking into consideration differing ministry contexts of racial and cultural groups across the country. The principles formed to achieve this purpose of "equitable" treatment have provided the basis for the exams up to the present day. Historically, the Presbyterian Church (USA) and its predecessor bodies have expressed three principles on which the exams are based.

- *The exams are evaluated through a process of blind review by future peers in ministry (ruling elders and ministers of the Word and Sacrament) from outside one's own presbytery of care.*

The model of written examinations identified only by code number and evaluated by readers selected by presbyteries across the church works to minimize biases in reviewing the exams that might arise from preconceptions formed by evaluators about the candidate (either positive or negative) based on past contacts or stereotypes regarding geographical differences, gender, race, or human networks and connections. That evaluations are done by peers in ministry brings to the fore that the exams are focused on the practice of ministry.

- *The exams are an assessment of the ability to integrate seminary education with one's gifts for and past experience in ministry through demonstration of "pastoral imagination."*

The ordination exams are carefully constructed to perform a unique role within the preparation for ministry process. They are *not* tests of academic achievement; the seminaries properly assess that through grades in course work and fulfillment of degree requirements. They are *not* tests of the acceptability of the candidate's theological views or understanding of the church; the presbyteries properly make those assessments in relationship to particular fields of ministry. They *are* assessments of a candidate's ability to integrate academic training and experience gained through the supervised practice of ministry when responding to situations typical of those encountered in fulfilling the responsibilities of a teaching elder engaged in the ministry of the

Word and Sacrament. This integrative ability has been described as "pastoral imagination" by one study of clergy professional preparation and formation.[1]

- *The standard of assessment is readiness to begin service as a minister of the Word and Sacrament.*

In forming their assessment of responses to exam questions, readers are instructed to use three basic considerations. (1) Whether the response addressed all the elements required by the questions. The abilities to listen carefully to what is set before you and to respond completely to what is required in a given situation are key pastoral skills. (2) Whether the response demonstrates sufficient understanding of the issues presented reflecting the benefits of a theological education. (3) Whether the response shows an ability to convert that understanding and personal gifts for ministry into practical application as would be expected of someone beginning in the ministry of the Word and Sacrament. The issue is not whether an answer shows the depth one would hope to see from someone with decades of ministry experience, but rather of someone starting out.

Recent conversations within the Presbyteries' Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates (PCC) that administers the exams for the church have raised a fourth key principle:

- *The evaluations are done in a context and spirit of Christian community.*

The exam scenarios arise from the lived experience of the church and are evaluated with concern for the future of those who will serve it and those who will be ministered to by them. The evaluation process, then, is always to be an expression of loving Christian concern for all those within the community of the church.

The Role of the Exams in the Overall Process

These principles have informed the standard ordination exams process throughout its more than 50-year history. Taken together with the reasons for why they were created in the first place, it is clear that the ordination exams are different in significant ways from other types of tests either within academic circles or professional licensure settings.

Through the discernment and educational training of the preparation for ministry process, both the candidate and the presbytery's committee will have reached some decisions about "fitness and readiness" for ministry in the areas of the Word and Sacrament (see G-2.0604). The ordination exams provide an opportunity for others in the broader church to take a quick look—obviously limited by the structures of the exams themselves—and provide some advice to both the candidates and those working with them. The exams are not meant to substitute the readers' judgment for all that has been learned in the preparation process, but rather to provide another

[1] Charles Foster, Lisa Dahill, Larry Golemon, Barbara Wang Tolentino, and William M. Sullivan, *Educating Clergy: Teaching Practices and Pastoral Imagination* (The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching: Preparation for the Professions; San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006).

angle of vision on the candidate's developing gifts for ministry as demonstrated by the responses to the exam questions.

The church takes these reader evaluations very seriously because both the process of demonstrating ministry competencies in these areas and the results of the assessments are the one part of the preparation for ministry process that the Form of Government does not allow a presbytery to waive (see G-2.0610). But the church also recognizes the exams are only specific pieces in a much larger picture. When the standard examination results simply cannot be fit into that broader picture, the Form of Government permits a presbytery to consider "alternate means" for demonstrating these core ministry competencies. That process, however, is separate from the standard examinations system. If you are interested in learning more about alternate means of assessing ministry competencies, you should review the materials in the *Advisory Handbook on Preparing for Ministry in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)*.

There are currently five standard ordination examinations approved by the General Assembly: Bible Content, Bible Exegesis, Theological Competence, Worship and Sacraments, and Church Polity. "Evidence of readiness to begin ordered ministry as a teaching elder" in these areas of competence is required of all those who will serve the functions of ministry of the Word and Sacrament as teaching elders (G-2.0607, G-2.0610; see also G-2.0505a). The Bible Content examination is an "objective" exam (multiple-choice and matching questions) ordinarily taken after at least one year of formal theological education including introductions to both testaments of the Bible. The other four exams (collectively referred to as the "senior ordination exams") present pastoral challenges whereby candidates can demonstrate how they integrate faith and theological education in ministry. The underlying questions are: Do these examination responses provide evidence that the person is ready to engage in pastoral ministry in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)? Is there evidence that the intellectual skills developed in seminary can be applied to pastoral situations with "energy, intelligence, imagination, and love"? (See the eighth Constitutional Question to all those ordained to ministry in the church, W-4.0404h.).

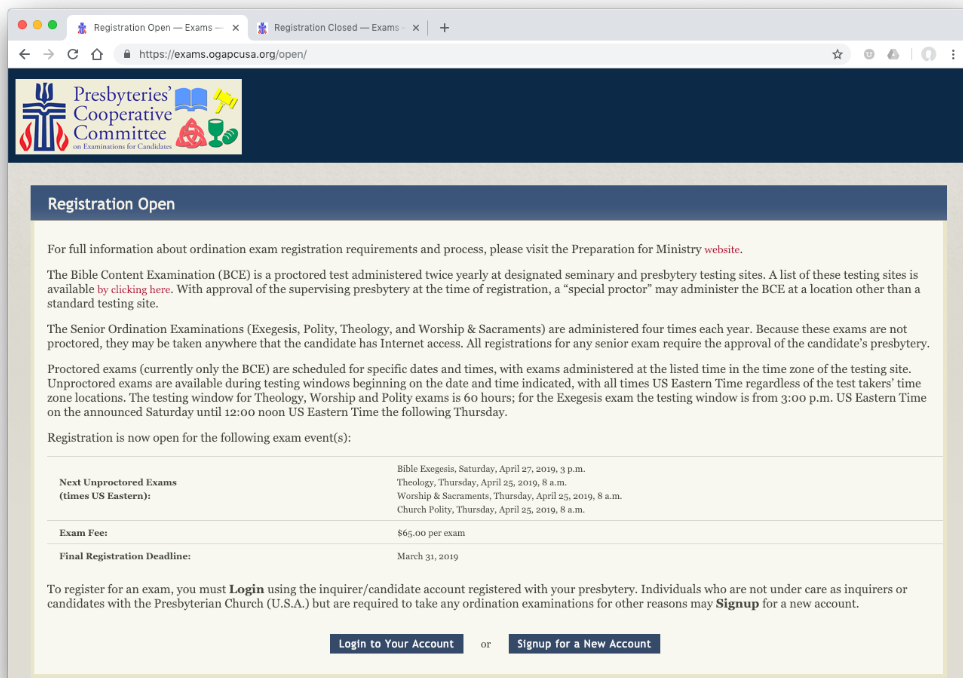
Ordination Exams for a Digital Age

Beginning with the Bible Content Examination in 2009 and all other areas of examinations since 2012, the ordination exams are taken, evaluated, and reported using online technology. These changes in administration permit the immediate release of Bible Content Exam results and make possible the release of senior ordination exam results within about two weeks as compared to the more than two months it took for the paper-based exams of the past. Additionally, online technology makes it possible to offer the senior ordination exams three times a year rather than only twice each year as was the practice in the first 45 years of their administration.

Just as the exams have changed to take advantage of the digital revolution, we are committed to making this a *Handbook on Standard Ordination Exams* for our digital age. One of the new realities of our current circumstance is the accelerating rate of change which itself requires that we become more flexible both in how we do things and how we share insights and information.

We are making the *Handbook on Standard Ordination Examinations* available in “print-friendly” formats, but distributing it in electronic forms. There are many reasons for this approach. Certainly it saves natural resources. It also makes the *Handbook on Exams* easily accessible to those who prefer laptop computers, tablets, and e-readers to three-ring binders. But most importantly, it permits the *Handbook* to be one of a variety of digital resources we can make available through our online training process.

ADMINISTRATION OF EXAMS



Registration Open — Exams —
Registration Closed — Exams
https://exams.ogapcusa.org/open/

Presbyteries' Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates

Registration Open

For full information about ordination exam registration requirements and process, please visit the Preparation for Ministry website.

The Bible Content Examination (BCE) is a proctored test administered twice yearly at designated seminary and presbytery testing sites. A list of these testing sites is available by clicking here. With approval of the supervising presbytery at the time of registration, a "special proctor" may administer the BCE at a location other than a standard testing site.

The Senior Ordination Examinations (Exegesis, Polity, Theology, and Worship & Sacraments) are administered four times each year. Because these exams are not proctored, they may be taken anywhere that the candidate has Internet access. All registrations for any senior exam require the approval of the candidate's presbytery.

Proctored exams (currently only the BCE) are scheduled for specific dates and times, with exams administered at the listed time in the time zone of the testing site. Unproctored exams are available during testing windows beginning on the date and time indicated, with all times US Eastern Time regardless of the test takers' time zone locations. The testing window for Theology, Worship and Polity exams is 60 hours; for the Exegesis exam the testing window is from 3:00 p.m. US Eastern Time on the announced Saturday until 12:00 noon US Eastern Time the following Thursday.

Registration is now open for the following exam event(s):

Next Unproctored Exams (times US Eastern):	Bible Exegesis, Saturday, April 27, 2019, 3 p.m. Theology, Thursday, April 25, 2019, 8 a.m. Worship & Sacraments, Thursday, April 25, 2019, 8 a.m. Church Polity, Thursday, April 25, 2019, 8 a.m.
Exam Fee:	$65.00 per exam
Final Registration Deadline:	March 31, 2019

To register for an exam, you must **Login** using the inquirer/candidate account registered with your presbytery. Individuals who are not under care as inquirers or candidates with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) but are required to take any ordination examinations for other reasons may **Signup** for a new account.

Login to Your Account or Signup for a New Account

Timing of Exams in the Preparation Process

The Bible Content Examination (BCE) is ordinarily taken after the first year of seminary to determine whether a person under care of a presbytery in preparation for ministry has the necessary familiarity with the Scriptures that the church expects in its ministers of the Word and Sacrament. The BCE results can also provide insight to both the one under care and those supervising their preparation on behalf of the presbytery about relative strengths and weaknesses in familiarity with the different sections of the biblical canon. This information can be useful in formulating a plan for course selection in the area of Biblical Studies during the remainder of the inquirer/candidate's graduate theological education.

Inquirers/candidates who are writing exams in the areas of Exegesis, Polity, Theology, and Worship and Sacraments are encouraged to do so "only after completion of two full years of theological education, or its equivalent, … and [when] adequate supervised experience in the practice of pastoral ministry" indicates the person will be able to perform the integrative pastoral tasks assessed by the examinations (guidelines approved by the 218th General Assembly [2008]). Decades of experience with the senior ordination examinations have demonstrated that the best statistical predictor for satisfactorily completing the tests is that candidates wait to write the exams until they and their supervising presbytery committee believe they are prepared to take all four subject areas.

For that reason, candidates are also encouraged to write *all four senior exam areas* the first time they take these tests. The examinations are *intentionally* given over a period of days as a way of evaluating the person's stewardship of time and energy, an important aspect of life in ministry. Introductory materials included in this handbook (see the "Areas of Examination" section) and sent along with the email confirmation of registration indicate the testing periods and time allotted for each exam. Members of the Presbyteries' Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates, who write and administer the exams, understand that a candidate's response will be shaped and constrained by these time requirements. They emphasize during the readers' training process that exams are to be evaluated on the basis of the time allotted.

When and Where the Exams are Given

Like many other standard professional tests, the ordination examinations of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) are administered only on specific dates during the year. The Presbyteries' Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates (PCC), which develops the tests and oversees their administration, has established policies to assure the integrity and security of the exams.

The Bible Content Exam

Scheduling: The Bible Content Exam (BCE) is given twice each year on the first Friday in February and the Friday before Labor Day from 10 a.m. until noon local time. Because of its machine-scored question structure and the nature of the competencies it assesses, the PCC requires that this exam be taken under a proctor's supervision.

Testing Locations: The BCE is administered on many seminary campuses nationwide and at a limited number of presbytery offices. Inquirers/candidates who do not live within a reasonable distance of one of these regular testing sites (about two hours by driving or public transportation) may explore possibilities for taking the exams with a special proctor (see below). Be aware that because of local circumstances not all testing sites may be available for every administration.

Regular Testing Sites for the Bible Content Examination		
State/District	**City**	**Testing Site**
California	San Anselmo	San Francisco Theological Seminary
Connecticut	New Haven	Yale Divinity School
Florida	Deerfield Beach Orlando	Tropical Florida Presbytery Central Florida Presbytery
Iowa	Dubuque	University of Dubuque Theological Seminary
Indiana	Indianapolis	Christian Theological Seminary
Kentucky	Louisville	Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary
Massachusetts	Cambridge	Harvard Divinity School
Maryland	Rockville	National Capital Presbytery
Michigan	Birmingham Holland	Detroit Presbytery Western Theological Seminary
Minnesota	St Paul	Luther Seminary
Missouri	St Louis	Eden Theological Seminary
North Carolina	Charlotte	Union Presbyterian Seminary at Charlotte
	Durham Winston-Salem	Duke Divinity School Wake Forest University School of Divinity
New Jersey	Princeton	Princeton Theological Seminary
New York	New York Rochester	Auburn Theological Seminary Genesee Valley Presbytery
Oklahoma	Tulsa	Phillips Theological Seminary
Pennsylvania	Lancaster Pittsburgh	Lancaster Theological Seminary Pittsburgh Theological Seminary
South Carolina	Simpsonville	Foothills Presbytery
Tennessee	Nashville	Vanderbilt University
Texas	Austin Fort Worth Houston	Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary Brite Divinity School New Covenant Presbytery
Virginia	Richmond	Union Presbyterian Seminary

Special Proctors: Persons registering for the BCE are encouraged to take the exam at one of the established testing sites. If persons taking the BCE do not live within a reasonable distance of a testing site (approximately two hours of driving time or public transportation), they may request that their presbytery approve a special proctor to administer the exam. A special proctor must be a person who is reliable, responsible, and who will administer the BCE in keeping with the policies established by the PCC. Special proctors may be pastors, ruling elders, or other persons approved by the committee/commission of the presbytery supervising the inquirer/candidate's preparation for ministry process.

All contact information for a special proctor must be included in the online registration form for the BCE. Since examination instructions will be distributed by email, be sure to include an email address or the special proctor will not have all the information necessary to administer the exam.

Severe Weather Policy: If severe weather at a testing site leads to the closing of the facilities, the administration of the BCE scheduled for that site only will be postponed until the next day when the facilities are open for normal operations. Those taking such rescheduled examinations will be required to submit signed statements that they have not discussed or reviewed comments about the examination by those who will have taken the tests at unaffected sites. The rescheduling of BCE administration will be determined by conditions that exist at the testing site, not local conditions at the residences of the test takers. If emergency road closures or other severe weather impacts on transportation systems prevent a particular test taker from reaching a testing site at the (re)scheduled time for the BCE, registration fees will be refunded in accord with emergency cancellation policies (see "Cancellation" in the registration section below).

The Senior Ordination Exams

Scheduling: The examinations in the areas of Theology, Worship and Sacraments, Church Polity, and Bible Exegesis are offered three times a year at the end of January, April, and September, usually on the last full weekend of those months. The PCC sets the specific dates so that the evaluation period by the readers will fall in the first full week of the following months.

Time of the Examinations: Test takers are eligible to take the Theology, Worship and Sacraments, and Polity exams only during the 60-hour period from 8:00 a.m. US Eastern Time on the announced Thursday of the testing period to 8:00 p.m. US Eastern Time on the Saturday of the testing period regardless of their particular time zone location when taking the tests. They will have nine (9) hours to complete each exam. Regardless of the amount of time remaining from the nine hours allotted for any individual's test, the system will close access at 8:00 p.m. on Saturday; therefore, it is the test takers' responsibility to begin examinations sufficiently in advance of 8:00 p.m. US Eastern Time on Saturday for the full allotted time to be available. The testing system will strictly enforce these time limits and will not permit further access to the exam after the allotted time has expired or the testing period has ended.

Candidates who may be taking examinations in more than one of the subject areas of Theology, Worship and Sacraments, and Polity need to be aware that the same 60-hour testing period applies to all three of these areas. It is each candidate's responsibility to manage her or his time to assure any of the three areas of examination for which they are registered are completed by the 8:00 p.m. close of testing on the announced Saturday of the examination period.

Access to the Bible Exegesis exam is opened to registrants for that test at 3:00 p.m. US Eastern Time on the scheduled Saturday. Each candidate must have her or his completed responses on the exam administration site by 12:00 noon US Eastern Time the following Thursday regardless of the candidate's particular time zone location when taking the test.

Registering for the Exams

Registration and payment of required fees for all of the standard ordination examinations is completed through an online process, accessed at https://exams.pcusa.org.

User Accounts

Inquirers and candidates under care of the PC(USA): The exam registration system has been completely integrated with the online platform presbyteries use for managing basic information about their inquirers and candidates. For this reason, *those persons who are under care as an inquirer or candidate with a presbytery in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) must register using their user accounts established with that presbytery.*

- Inquirers and candidates who took online examinations between October 2009 and February 2014 had their exam system user accounts registered with their presbytery of care and will continue to use those accounts.
- Inquirers and candidates taking examinations for the first time *must register using the user account created for them by their presbytery.* They will have received the username and password in an email message automatically sent when the presbytery enrolled them as an inquirer/candidate in the online management system.

Only presbyteries can create accounts for inquirers and candidates. Those planning to take examinations should confirm they have accounts well before exam registration deadlines so that presbyteries will have opportunity to enroll them in the system if they have not already done so. *Exam registration deadlines are firm and will not be extended because an inquirer/candidate had yet to be enrolled by their presbytery in advance of the deadline.*

If for any reason an inquirer or candidate does not remember or have access to their user account credentials (the username and password), they may attempt to recover those credentials using the "Forgot Your Username or Password?"-link on the exams site login page. They will need to provide the email address previously registered with the system by their presbytery. If they no longer have access to that email address, or should the system fail to recognize it, they should contact Mid Council Ministries Preparation for Ministry staff for assistance.

Members of other denominations: Some persons who are not in the preparation for ministry process with the PC(USA) nevertheless must take one or more ordination exams either as a requirement of their own denomination or educational institution or to be considered for transferring ordination into the PC(USA). These test takers must create a "User Profile" that will include a self-selected "User-ID" and password. Test takers should carefully select and record in a secure place that user-ID and password since they will need that information each time they log onto the examinations site to update contact information, request exam registrations, and/or to take any of the online examinations.

Multiple user accounts: It is essential that persons using the PC(USA) examinations systems do not create multiple user accounts. Records for completion of examination requirements will not be properly consolidated if a person has more than one user profile. Additionally, exams will not be available at the testing time if the individual logs into a user account not associated with the current exam registration. If it is discovered that an individual does have multiple accounts, contact the Mid Council Ministries Preparation for Ministry staff to request the accounts be consolidated.

Registration Periods and Deadlines

Access to registration opens approximately 60 days before the final registration deadline. An email confirmation is sent to each person who requests to take one or more of the exams. Anyone who does not receive the email confirmation should contact Mid Council Ministries Preparation for Ministry staff promptly to be sure the registration processing completed successfully. Applicants cannot complete partial or incomplete registrations after the registration period closes. For senior exam registrations, applicants will also receive a second email notification once their presbytery authorizes the request and the registration has been finalized.

Registration must be completed by the final day of the month preceding the exam administration date for the senior ordination exams. Thus, their registration deadlines are:

December 31 for **January** exams

March 31 for **April** exams

August 31 for **September** exams

The registration deadlines for the semi-annual Bible Content Examination are:

December 31 for the **February** exam

July 31 for the **August/September** exam

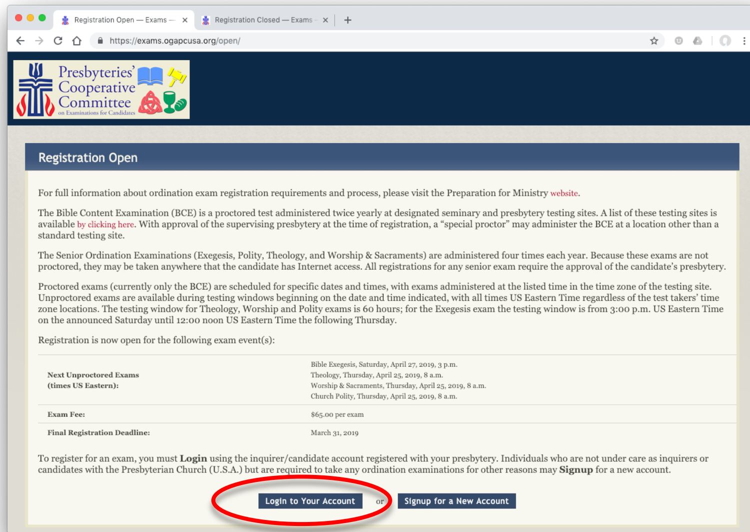
Access to the registration site will be closed once these deadlines have passed. Policies established by the Presbyteries' Cooperative Committee on Examinations do not permit extensions or exceptions to these registration deadlines.

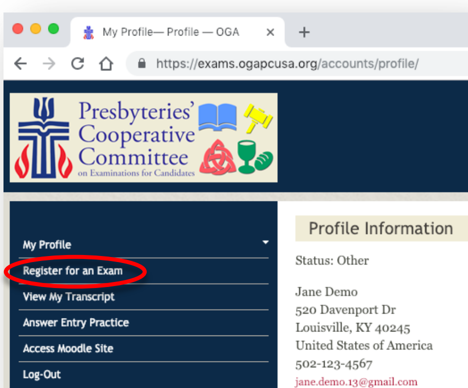
Fees

There is a $60 registration fee for each of the five standard examinations. Fees must be paid through the online registration system by either credit card or electronic check. Credit cards are only billed once the registration is finalized. Electronic check payments are required to be collected when the registration request is submitted.

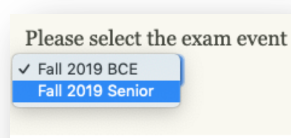
Online Registration Process

Separate registrations are required for proctored and unproctored examinations because different information is required to complete the registration (testing site or special proctor designations are required for the Bible Content Exam) and their registration periods do not always coincide (the fall administration of the Bible Content Exam is given just before Labor Day, whereas the senior exams are given at the end of September). Currently, only the Bible Content exam is a proctored examination. When registration is open, information will be provided on the exams home page (https://exams.pcusa.org) about dates and fees for proctored, unproctored, or both types of exams. If there is not an active registration period, more general information about the exams will be displayed on the home page; however, applicants can still login to their profiles to update personal information or review past exams history. To begin the registration process, applicants must login to their personal user accounts using the “Login to Your Account” button on the exams home page.





Once logged in, applicants will find a link to “Register for an Exam” in the menu options on the left side of the “My Profile” page (this link is only displayed during active registration periods). Clicking on that link will display the “Select Event” page. “Event” labels will include the season, year, and examination area(s) that will be offered during particular administrations. If registration is open for both proctored and unproctored exam events, the events will be listed in a “dropdown” list (see sample below). For example, registration for the Bible Content Exam to be given just before Labor Day would be selected by the “Fall 2019 BCE” event, but the Bible Exegesis exam to be given at the end of September would be selected by the “Fall 2019 Senior” exams event. Click on the list and select the event you



need for the examination you are registering for, and then click the "Submit" button to continue with the registration process.

At the beginning of the registration process, applicants will be required to attest that they have received information about the sensitive nature of topics that may arise in the ordination exams and have consulted with their presbytery's inquirer/candidate oversight committee (CPM) regarding supports that may be available to them in keeping with the provisions of the Honor Code for taking the exams.

> Exam questions include situations and topics often encountered in the practice of validated ministry, some of which may be disturbing. Candidates, pastors, Committees on Preparation for Ministry (CPM), and presbyteries are strongly encouraged to ensure that systems of support and care are available to candidates who are taking exams and those called to be pastors.
>
> The exam honor code does not preclude the candidate from seeking pastoral or mental health support during the exam period provided no material assistance is given in answering the exam questions themselves.
>
> Should a candidate find it is not possible to complete an exam, the candidate should consult with the CPM to arrange for a future exam or an alternative form of examination.
>
> By registering for the Standard Ordination Exams, I acknowledge receipt of this clarification of the Honor Code and affirm that I have consulted with the CPM to ensure systems of support are available if needed. I further understand that I am entitled to consult with those systems of support during exams should I need them.

The following screens will be tailored to the particular event. Proctored events will require selection of a testing site or providing information regarding a special proctor. An event with more than one examination area will require selection of which exams are to be taken.

If the applicant needs a combination of exams that includes both proctored and unproctored subject areas, then the applicant will need to complete separate registrations for each event. Applicants can, however, include more than one exam offered as part of the same event within a single registration. As examples, taking both Bible Content and Bible Exegesis exams would require separate registrations for both the "BCE" and "Senior" events; however, any combination of the four senior exams can be included in a single registration for a "Senior" event by checking the appropriate boxes for the requested exams.

Applicants need to continue through all of the screens included in the registration process until they see the screen confirming their registration selections. If any corrections are needed after a registration is submitted, contact the Mid Council Ministries Preparation for Ministry staff for assistance in modifying the registration. (Applicants cannot modify submitted registrations to prevent changes from being made after their presbyteries have provided any necessary authorizations.)

Authorization

Inquirers/candidates are not required to obtain their presbytery's authorization to take the Bible Content Examination unless they are requesting special accommodations or that the exam be given under supervision of a special proctor somewhere other than at a regular testing site (see "Special Arrangements" below).

Every person who takes the senior ordination exams must have their presbytery's authorization to do so. *The decision whether to authorize a person to write the examinations belongs solely to the committee/commission of the presbytery responsible for supervising the person's preparation for ministry.* Because authorization also certifies that the person is in good standing under the care of that presbytery as an inquirer or candidate in the process of preparation for the ministry of the Word and Sacrament, *candidates and inquirers must obtain authorization each time exams are to be taken*. The same attestation by the appropriate presbytery committee is also required of *ministers of other denominations* who are taking the examinations as part of a process seeking admission to the PC(USA).

The General Assembly has provided guidance to presbyteries as to when inquirers/candidates should be authorized to write exams in the areas of Exegesis, Polity, Theology, and Worship and Sacraments. They are encouraged to do so "only after completion of two full years of theological education, or its equivalent, … and [when] adequate supervised experience in the practice of pastoral ministry" indicates the person will be able to perform the integrative pastoral tasks assessed by the examinations (guidelines approved by the 218th General Assembly [2008]). Additionally, presbyteries should only authorize taking exams "after confirmation that [the inquirers/candidates] have completed the available preparation resources" provided by the PCC (225th General Assembly [2022]). Decades of experience with the senior ordination examinations have demonstrated that the best statistical predictor for satisfactorily completing the tests is that candidates wait to write the exams until they and their supervising presbytery committee believe they are prepared to take all four subject areas.

Once the request to take examinations has been completed on the registration site, an email notification is sent to the chair of the appropriate presbytery committee. That message includes a link that permits the chair to authorize or decline the examination along with any requested accommodations (including the designation of a special proctor for the BCE). Registrations are not finalized until this authorization has been received and any accommodations reviewed by the Associate Director for Ministry Leadership Development.

Languages

The Bible Content Exam is available in English, Korean and Spanish. The four senior ordination exams are available in English and Spanish. The Theology, Polity, and Worship and Sacraments exams are also available in Korean. At the recommendation of Korean members of the PCC, the

Bible Exegesis examination is not translated into Korean. Their position is that the questions on that particular exam (sometimes involving reference to the original Hebrew and Greek languages of the text and specific wording of English translations) can create misunderstandings when translated into Korean. Inquirers and candidates whose primary language is Korean may, however, register to write their responses to the Exegesis exam in Korean.

The choice between these language options is made during registration and may not be changed at the time of the examination. Those whose primary language is not English, Spanish, or Korean may request permission from the responsible committee of their presbytery of care for permission to write their responses to any of the four senior exams in their primary language as a “special accommodation” (see the information on “Special Arrangements” below). Such requests approved by the presbytery must be communicated to the Associate Director for Ministry Leadership Development as part of the online registration process to provide time to secure readers with facility in that language who can be prepared to evaluate the examination. The PCC does not permit the translation of the standard examination questions into languages other than English, Spanish, or Korean, or the translation of standard exam responses into English.

Please be aware that while the questions themselves will be displayed by the online testing system in English, Spanish, or Korean in keeping with the inquirer/candidate’s particular exam registration, all instructions and testing system prompts appear only in English.

Special Arrangements

There are two types of special arrangements that may be approved for the standard ordination exams: a “special proctor” to administer the Bible Content Exam, or “special accommodations” to the usual procedures for taking the standard ordination exams. Applicants should discuss either type of special arrangements with their presbytery of care before beginning the registration process. If committee chairs only become aware of these requests when they receive the authorization notice, they may delay or even decline authorizations resulting in missed deadlines.

Special Proctors: Inquirers and candidates unable to travel to one of the regular testing sites for the Bible Content Examination within a reasonable time may indicate a “special proctor” during the registration process rather than selecting a standard testing site. Full contact information for the special proctor (including an email address) must be provided at the time of registration. Presbytery committee chairs are required to authorize these arrangements before the registration is finalized.

Special Accommodations: Inquirers and candidates with learning differences or physical disabilities or any other issues impacting any of the standard examinations should discuss the need for any special accommodations with the presbytery committee overseeing their preparation process. Depending on the presbytery’s policies, they may require documentation of the limitations and any compensating accommodations from an appropriate professional prior to granting approval. If the presbytery approves any accommodations, they must be submitted during registration by responding “Yes” to the question about “approved special accommodations” and then either selecting the accommodation(s) from the list provided or by selecting "Other" and entering a description in the field provided. Presbytery committee chairs provide notice of their approval of any special accommodations through the regular exam authorization process. The Associate Director for Ministry Leadership Development must also review all requests for "other" accommodations to confirm they are in compliance with guidelines established by the Presbyteries' Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates. Proctors for the Bible Content Exam may not provide any accommodations at the time of testing that had not been properly authorized in advance.

The "special accommodations" for the Bible Content Exam presented in the registration process by the selection list are:

- Extended time of one (1) hour for the BCE (for a total of three hours)
- Private testing room

Neither of these options is applicable to the senior ordination examinations. Policies established by the PCC do not permit time extensions beyond the nine hours allotted for the Polity, Theology, and Worship and Sacraments exams or for the multi-day Exegesis exam. Since these exams are not given under a proctor's supervision, those taking these exams may select any setting that provides Internet access to the testing system.

The registration process presents only one "special accommodation" for the four senior ordination exams in the areas of Exegesis, Polity, Theology, and Worship and Sacraments:

- Include oral examination component for senior exams

Presbyteries may authorize this accommodation when there are circumstances known in advance that make it clear that the test taker may need to comment or elaborate upon written responses. Such circumstances could include written language processing issues such as dyslexia or dysgraphia, individuals whose primary language is not among those in which the exams are offered (English, Korean, or Spanish), etc. In order to protect the integrity of the assessment process, the PCC requires specific administration processes to assure that any oral examination phase does not permit the candidate to correct errors in initial responses by redirecting them in fundamentally different ways based on comments from either the readers who evaluate the online submission or the oral component examiners, or create an opportunity for the test taker to be coached to a stronger answer through leading questions from the examiners. By authorizing this special accommodation, both the candidate and the presbytery entity overseeing the preparation process (CPM) would be committing to the following:

1. The CPM appoints a panel of at least three oral examiners who are either ruling elders or ministers of the Word and Sacrament, preferably with experience as readers of the standard examinations.
2. The candidate takes the standard examination(s), with any other special accommodations approved by the CPM, and those exams then undergo the usual evaluation process.

3. On the morning the exam results are released, the oral examiners meet to review together both the candidate's responses and the readers' evaluations, and to formulate their own questions based upon both the responses and the evaluations.

4. Following their review, the oral examiners meet with the candidate for the oral review phase (either the same morning or during the afternoon of the day the results are released, depending upon the number of exam areas for which the special accommodation was granted). This oral examination phase must be conducted regardless of whether the readers had found the exam "Satisfactory" or "Unsatisfactory."

5. Up to one (1) hour is permitted for oral review of each exam. Either responding directly to the readers' comments or to questions from the oral examiners, the candidate elaborates or comments on the responses provided. During this oral phase, a candidate is permitted to explain the reasons for particular citations from the *Book of Order, The Book of Confessions,* or other resources provided as part of required responses, but the test taker is not permitted to substitute alternative citations for them. A candidate may, however, suggest further citations that would serve to clarify or support lines of argument already provided in the written responses. A candidate may also elaborate on points in the written response that he or she believes were either overlooked or misunderstood by the reader(s). The candidate will also be required to respond to any questions from the oral examiners even if those questions are unrelated to issues or concerns raised in the reader evaluations.

6. At the conclusion of the hour, the oral examiners meet separately from the candidate to deliberate and then vote on whether to "sustain" the readers' evaluation. This action is, again, required regardless of whether the readers had found the exam "Satisfactory" or "Unsatisfactory." Thus, it would be within the oral examiners prerogative to recommend that an "Unsatisfactory" evaluation be set aside in favor of a "Satisfactory" one, or that a "Satisfactory" evaluation be set aside in favor of an "Unsatisfactory" one. A majority vote of the three oral examiners determines their recommendation.

7. The oral examiners will then notify the candidate, the CPM, and the PCC (through the Associate Director for Ministry Leadership Development in the Office of the General Assembly) of their recommendation.

    a. If they sustain the readers' initial evaluation, then that result is finalized.

    b. If their recommendation is that the readers' evaluation should *not* be sustained, they must file with the PCC a written explanation of their rationale providing specific references to either the candidate's written or oral responses in support of their recommendation. This report must be filed within 48 hours of the close of the oral examination phase or phases (if there is more than one examination area). The chair of the PCC task group for the examination area (or the chair's designated task group member) will review the candidate's written responses, the readers' evaluations, and the report from the oral examiners. The PCC member reviewing all these materials will determine whether or not to concur in the oral examiners' recommendation or to sustain the original evaluation of the readers. The decision by the PCC task group chair or designated member will determine the final result of each examination.

8. A task group chair's decision (or that of the task group member designated to review the materials) is subject to appeal only to the PCC Executive Committee and must otherwise comply with all other requirements for the appeal of examination results.

Because of the nature of the questions on the Bible Content Examination, a special accommodation for inclusion of an oral component to that test is not available.

Confirmation

Receipt of authorization from the presbytery to write exams is confirmed with the applicant by email, generally within two weeks after the application is submitted through the registration website. The confirmation email will include the applicant's ID number along with attachments with information and preliminary instructions. The ID number is used throughout the exam process to ensure anonymity for candidates. The candidate is asked to verify the accuracy of the information in the email regarding examinations requested, any special accommodations, etc.

If an email confirmation has not arrived within two weeks after the online registration was submitted, please contact the Associate Director for Ministry Leadership Development. Unfortunately, "junk mail" filters and other network problems occasionally block email notifications requesting authorization from presbyteries or confirming registrations for test takers. There have been instances where individuals thought that they were registered but were not. It is most important to follow instructions carefully and to stay in close contact with the key persons in the process (e.g., committee chairpersons, BCE proctors, and the Associate Director for Ministry Leadership Development). It is the responsibility of the candidate or inquirer to ensure that all necessary steps in the registration process have been fulfilled.

Cancellation

After registrations have been confirmed, cancellation of exam registrations up until one week before the administration of the tests will be subject to an administrative fee of $25 per registration. If exams are canceled less than seven days before they are to be administered, all fees paid will be forfeited. In case of serious illness or emergency, please contact the Associate Director for Ministry Leadership Development; with confirmation of such circumstances registration fees will be refunded.

Exam registrations and related fees may not be "rolled over" from one cycle to the next. In the case of the senior examinations, presbytery authorizations to write the exam include attestation that the test taker is currently an inquirer/candidate in the preparation for ministry process.

Preparing for the Exams

Inquirers and candidates should familiarize themselves with the description of each standard ordination examination as approved by the General Assembly. There are periodic changes to these provisions, so this review should be done in the most recent edition of this handbook.

It is important for those taking the senior ordination exams to be prepared for this process. The exams are designed to encourage the candidate to express an understanding of ministry. They are not designed to "trick" the candidate, which would be contrary to life in the community of faith. The examinations are designed to provide opportunity for multiple approaches rather than to operate on the assumption that there is only one "correct" way of responding. Members of the PCC emphasize each of those points in training readers to evaluate the examinations.

To assist inquirers and candidates preparing to take the exams, the PCC has two online modules on the PC(USA) "Equip" training website. There is one course specifically on the Bible Content Exam, and another that covers all four areas of the "senior" ordination exams (Bible Exegesis, Church Polity, Theological Competence, and Worship and Sacraments). All inquirers and candidates are automatically enrolled in the BCE preparation course when their presbyteries create their user accounts in the examinations system. They can access the "Equip" website and the BCE course by clicking the "Access Moodle Materials" link on their "Profile" page at https://exams.pcusa.org. Once on the "Equip" website, they will be able to self-enroll in the "senior" exams course from the "E4U: Self-Enrollment Opportunities" links. Many of these resources are also available on the main denominational website; go to www.pcusa.org/prep4min and click on "Online Training Opportunities." The resources available in these courses are described below.

Preparation Materials

The Associate Director for Ministry Leadership Development has prepared a series of video tutorials designed to help test takers understand the structure of the Bible Content Exam and the senior ordination exams. A separate tutorial presents a specific, step-by-step method for analyzing questions on the senior exams to understand what must be included for a response to receive a satisfactory evaluation. It follows the process the PCC uses to train readers to assess whether a response covers all the required elements of the question. There is also a tutorial that provides opportunities to practice these tips through a series of interactive quizzes that give one a chance to analyze questions from past exams. Candidates are encouraged to utilize these materials as part of their preparation.

Obtaining Copies of Past Exams

Once senior ordination examinations have been administered and evaluated, they become part of the public domain. Copies of the most recently administered senior examination questions are available from links on the examinations section of the church website (www.pcusa.org/exams). A more extensive archive of past exams (typically those from the previous two years) is also included among the resources in the senior exams course on the "Equip" website. The BCE preparation course on that site includes a comprehensive database of questions used in past, online BCE tests. Where available, these archives include the Korean and Spanish language translations of the questions (when there are no registrations to take Polity, Theology, or Worship exams in Korean or Spanish, those exam questions are not submitted for translation).

Please keep in mind when using past senior ordination examinations as an aid for preparation that test structures and formats are changed by the PCC from time to time. Be sure to check the examinations website for announcements regarding upcoming and recent changes to the exams and to be sure that you have a copy of the most recent edition of this handbook.

Book for Bible Exegesis Exam

After registration closes, the PCC releases the name of the book of the Bible from which the passage for the Exegesis exam will be taken. The name of the book is posted on the “Preparing for Presbyterian Ministry” Facebook page and also emailed to theological institution contact persons at seminaries, presbytery committee/commission moderators, and those inquirers and candidates with confirmed registrations for the Exegesis exam.

Instructions

When exam registrations are finalized, the inquirer/candidate will receive information with general instructions for taking the examinations along with specific instructions pertaining to each examination area for which they registered. These instructions include the current General Assembly approved description for the respective subject areas, criteria for evaluating responses, and any special provisions that relate to that examination. These instructions are also available in this handbook (see the “Areas of Examination” chapter for information specific to each subject).

Be sure to read these instructions carefully when you receive them as part of your preparation for the exams. Some of these instructions relate to the process for accessing the exams, so reviewing them only at the time of the examination will be too late. Failure to comply with these instructions can result in an automatic “Unsatisfactory” evaluation of the exam response.

Online Administration of the Exams

Beginning with a pilot program that offered the Bible Content Examination (BCE) online in October 2009, the PCC committed to taking advantage of Internet technologies to improve the ordination exam program. All areas of examination have been administered using online technologies since the fall of 2012. Because the BCE is given in a machine scorable format, its results are available to the test taker immediately upon completion of the exam. The senior exams are given in essay formats, and those results will be available within about ten days following Exegesis exam submission.

Technology Requirements

All areas of examination are given using computers actively accessing Internet-based testing programs, and it is the test taker’s responsibility to comply with all necessary technological requirements.

The Bible Content Exam must be taken under the supervision of a proctor at an established testing site or of a special proctor at a location agreed upon by the test taker and the special proctor. The means for accessing the Internet and other technological issues vary considerably between sites. It is the test taker's responsibility—not the proctor's—to be prepared to comply with the technological requirements at the chosen testing location. Test takers should confirm in advance of the testing date the specific equipment availability and requirements for their particular testing location. The proctors for each site can provide this information, and test takers should be in direct contact with their proctors about these issues. Test takers may be required to supply for themselves a portable computer capable of either Ethernet or WiFi Internet access.

Because the senior ordination exams are not given at proctored sites, test takers will need to provide their own computers with active access to the Internet in order to review the test questions and upload their responses to the exam administration website. It is the test taker's responsibility to be prepared to comply with these technological requirements and to have become familiar with the testing system before the examination period begins. Mid Council Ministries of the Office of the General Assembly provide a range of online resources in both text and video formats to assist with this preparation (see the "Taking Senior Examinations" chapter of this handbook, and review the preparation courses on the "Equip" website or visit http://www.pcusa.org/prep4min and click on "Online Training Opportunities").

Accessing the Particular Exams

To access any of the online examinations, test takers must have the login information associated with their exam registration profile. If you need assistance recovering or resetting your password, please contact Mid Council Ministries Preparation for Ministry staff before the testing date. *Staff availability to assist with these matters outside of normal business hours of the Presbyterian Center cannot be guaranteed.* A secondary password provided by a proctor is also required for the Bible Content Exam. Detailed information about the online testing process in the other areas may be found in the "Taking Senior Exams" chapter of this handbook.

Professional Integrity in the Examinations Process

The Form of Government requires that those who are to be "certified ready for examination for ordination, pending a call" must provide "evidence" of such personal qualities as "honest repute, and sound judgment" (G-2.0607). Obviously, any form of cheating on the standard ordination examinations would be evidence of a lack of honesty and sound judgment. Prior to taking each exam, inquirers/candidates are required to attest they will abide by policies established by the PCC to protect the integrity of the examinations process. Although the precise wording will vary somewhat because of particularities of the different examination areas (see below in the respective portions of the "Areas of Examination" chapter), the basic principles are as follows:

1) I attest that while writing and submitting my standard ordination exams I will use only resources authorized by the exam instructions and will acknowledge any use of print or digital resources through proper, academic style citation.
2) I attest that while writing and submitting my standard ordination exams I will *not*:

   a. discuss the examination questions or my responses with anyone;
   b. include in my responses or citations material that would identify either myself or institutions where I am or have been a student (e.g., "course notes from class with Professor Smith," "lecture at Princeton Seminary," web links that include the school's identification, etc.).

3) I attest that I have not received and I will not share information that discloses the content of examination questions or my responses by any means of personal or remote communications (telephone, email, social media, etc.) during the testing dates for particular examination areas.
4) I understand that once submitted my responses will be reviewed by a program that will compare them to all other submitted responses and materials available on the Internet.

In the writing of the ordination examinations I will follow appropriate conduct as expected by scripture, the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA), and the Standards of Ethical Conduct.

You can download a copy of the PC(USA) "Standards of Ethical Conduct" from the denominational website (http://www.pcusa.org/resource/standards-ethical-conduct-ministers-and-others/).

Any violation or suspected violation of these standards of professional integrity will be reported to the presbytery committee/commission overseeing the inquirer/candidate's preparation for ministry for further investigation and possible disciplinary action.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a serious abuse of this system. The following definition used by Harvard College provides a good description of what plagiarism is and why it cannot be tolerated:

> In academic writing, it is considered plagiarism to draw any idea or any language from someone else without adequately crediting that source in your paper. It doesn't matter whether the source is a published author, another student, a Web site without clear authorship, a Web site that sells academic papers, or any other person: Taking credit for anyone else's work is stealing, and it is unacceptable in all academic situations, whether you do it intentionally or by accident.[2]

Those taking any of the senior examination areas acknowledge by their attestation of the policies for exam administration required at the beginning of each test that they are aware that all exam responses are submitted to a review program that will compare their responses to all other submitted responses and materials available on the Internet. To avoid even the appearance of plagiarism, candidates should be sure to cite all appropriate references and quotations in their exam responses.

If the digital review of exam responses identifies areas of verbal correspondence that are consistent with plagiarism, the following process will be followed:

1) The exam will proceed to evaluation by the readers. These readers will not be provided with the results of the digital review of responses so that their evaluations will not be influenced by that information. Nevertheless, readers may recognize materials either from

[2] Cited from Matt Ashare, "Understanding & Preventing Plagiarism: Strategies & Resources for Students and Teachers," http://www.accreditedschoolsonline.org/resources/preventing-plagiarism/ (accessed March 1, 2016).

their preparation for or their evaluation of other exams, leading them to independently suspect or identify areas of verbal correspondence consistent with plagiarism. Readers will be instructed to register such concerns in their "Notes to the Presbytery," but not to evaluate exams as "Unsatisfactory" solely on that basis.

2) The Manager of Preparation for Ministry will prepare a report of documentation from the digital review of the responses indicating the extent and identified sources of verbal correspondence. The report will be reviewed by members of the PCC task group for the respective area of examination during the evaluation period.

3) The purpose of the review by PCC task group members will be to determine whether the extent and nature of the verbal correspondence would indicate a failure to abide by the exam administration policies. Direct correspondence with material published elsewhere in print or digital formats that is not properly cited may be considered a violation of item 1 in the administration policies. Direct correspondence with material presented in the response(s) by one or more other candidates may be considered violations of items 2a or 3 of those policies. The PCC task group members will base their determination of any possible violation of the exam administration policies solely upon the extent and nature of the documented verbal correspondences in the report; they will not undertake further investigation by interviews with the candidate(s) whose responses appear in the report (to protect the anonymity of candidates). A majority vote of the PCC task group members will determine whether or not there is evidence the exam procedures were violated.

4) If the PCC task group members determine there is evidence the exam administration policies were violated, they will assign a final evaluation of "Unsatisfactory" to the examination. This "Unsatisfactory" evaluation would supersede any "Satisfactory" evaluation that may have resulted from the readers' review of the responses. The PCC task group will add a statement to the "Notes to the Presbytery" section of the exam report indicating the "Unsatisfactory" evaluation and identifying for which exam procedures they found evidence of possible violation. A copy of the documentation of verbal correspondences will also be forwarded to the presbytery committee or commission overseeing the candidate's preparation process.

5) Once the presbytery committee or commission receives the report when exam results are released, it may conduct whatever further investigation of the evidence it deems appropriate to reach its own conclusion regarding the evidence of possible violation of the exam administration procedures, including interviews with any involved candidate(s) under that presbytery's care. In order to protect the anonymity of candidates under care of other presbyteries, any questions for which the presbytery wishes to have answers from such individuals should be forwarded to the Associate Director for Ministry Leadership Development who will serve as a liaison between the respective presbyteries for this purpose. Such investigations may lead to further disciplinary action beyond the "Unsatisfactory" evaluation of the exam, or conversely to an appeal of the

"Unsatisfactory" evaluation if the presbytery reaches a different conclusion regarding the possible violation of exam administration procedures.

6) If the investigation by the presbytery committee or commission leads them to the conclusion that there was no violation of the exam administration procedures, they may appeal the PCC task group's assignment of an "Unsatisfactory" evaluation. The appeal should provide additional evidence from their investigation that would explain the verbal correspondences documented in the report of the digital review of the responses in a manner which would not be a violation of the procedures. Such appeals will be ruled upon by members of the PCC Executive Committee who are not members of the task group for the exam area that is the subject of the appeal. If the presbytery's appeal is sustained by the PCC Executive Committee, the evaluation resulting from the readers' review of the exam (whether "Satisfactory" or "Unsatisfactory") will be reinstated and the reference to evidence of possible violation of exam administration procedures removed from the "Notes to the Presbytery" section of the exam report.

Because exam administration policies prohibit test takers from "includ[ing] in [their] responses or citations material that would identify" themselves (item 2b), they are advised to avoid making direct, verbatim use of any materials they may have previously published either in print or online. Inclusion of such material could be identified by the digital review of responses as verbal correspondence consistent with plagiarism and result in assignment of an "Unsatisfactory" evaluation by the PCC Task Group members reviewing these reports.

Inquirers and candidates who are uncertain about expectations regarding the use and crediting of other's works or who need specific strategies for avoiding plagiarism may wish to review Matt Ashare's article for Accredited Schools Online at http://www.accreditedschoolsonline.org/resources/preventing-plagiarism/.

Music, iPods, etc.

Out of respect for all those at a testing site who are taking the Bible Content Exam, inquirers and candidates may not use iPods, MP3 players, or other personal audio devices when taking that exam.

AREAS OF EXAMINATION

Bible Content Exam

The General Assembly has approved the following description of the Bible Content examination:

> This examination shall assess the candidate's knowledge of the form and content of the Bible.

The BCE is currently given only twice a year, on the first Friday of February and the Friday before Labor Day. There are no alternate dates for taking this exam. Although administered online, the BCE must be taken under a proctor's supervision.

Description and Preparation Guidelines

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) considers basic knowledge of the content of the Bible to be an essential prerequisite for ministry. The purpose of the Bible Content examination (BCE) is to determine whether a person under care of a presbytery in preparation for ministry has this necessary familiarity with the Scriptures that the church expects in its ministers of the Word and Sacrament. The questions relate to the stories, themes and key passages of the books in the Old and New Testaments. Presently the BCE presents questions in "multiple choice" and "matching" formats (see below, "Specific Instructions for the BCE"). The BCE uses the ability to answer questions about specific passages from across the Scriptures to assess general Bible knowledge. The BCE includes questions that have been publicly released and questions that have not been previously released. After each administration, all questions that had not been previously released will be published on a website maintained by the PCCEC.

Many of those in the preparation for ministry process will benefit from the systematic study of the themes and key passages of each book in the Bible often gained from introductory courses in biblical studies within seminary curriculums to build a foundation and framework for their general knowledge of the Scriptures. For this reason, the Presbyteries' Cooperative Committee on Examinations recommends that the BCE be taken after at least one year of formal theological education including introductions to both testaments of the Bible.

The Bible Content Examination consists entirely of short responses to objective questions about the Bible that seek to assess a person's knowledge of scripture generally, and whether there are significant differences in the extent of knowledge regarding the different sections of the biblical canon. Beyond providing evidence that the individual has the requisite familiarity with the Scripture to be ready to begin service as a minister of the Word and Sacrament (G-2.0607), BCE results can provide insight to both the one under care and those supervising their preparation on behalf of the presbytery about relative strengths and weaknesses in familiarity with the different sections of the biblical canon. This information can be useful in selection of Biblical Studies courses during the inquirer/candidate's continuing graduate theological education.

After the exam is completed, the inquirer/candidate can review how many questions were missed for each section of the canon and see the scripture references from which those questions were drawn. This type of report can clearly show patterns of weaknesses in knowledge about certain canonical divisions and possibly even of specific books within them. Once all test takers have completed the test, an email message with their exam results is sent to each inquirer/ candidate as well as their presbytery and the PC(USA) contact person at their seminary. If a test taker does not score least the 70% correct responses necessary to receive a “Satisfactory” evaluation for the BCE, the report helps to identify areas that need specific attention. If a majority of missed questions come from, say, two or three of the seven canonical divisions reflected in the BCE structure, then those canonical divisions deserve particular attention in preparing to retake the test.

But the same may be true even in the case of an inquirer or candidate who satisfies the 70% correct requirement. For example, one person in the first group to take the online version of the BCE received an overall score of 83%, and yet correctly answered only 30% of the questions on the General Epistles and Revelation in the New Testament. These results indicate that while the individual has a good general knowledge of scripture, there is a need to take a course on this particular portion of the New Testament as part of seminary studies.

The guidelines for the test approved by the General Assembly require that it reflect the overall content of the Scriptures. To achieve that balance, a total of 100 possible points on the exam are distributed across seven canonical divisions of the Protestant Bible. The breakdown is as follows:

- Pentateuch (Genesis through Deuteronomy): 16 points
- Historical Books (Joshua through Esther): 15 points
- Psalms and Wisdom Literature (Job through Song of Solomon): 10 points
- Prophets (Isaiah through Malachi): 16 points
- Gospels (Matthew through John): 18 points
- Acts and Pauline Letters (Acts through Philemon): 15 points
- Rest of the New Testament (Hebrews through Revelation): 10 points

Within each canonical division there is a range of difficulty among the questions. Some questions are designed to be “relatively easy,” others of about “average difficulty,” and the remaining questions are “more difficult.” On each exam, there are more “average difficulty” questions than either “relatively easy” or “more difficult” ones. These relative difficulties are established by the percentage of test takers who correctly answered the question in the past:

- about 85% or more would be a difficulty of “relatively easy”;
- the range between 70% and 85% is about “average difficulty”;
- and below 70% would be “more difficult.”

Each administration of the test is comprised of a combination of questions that have been used before (with performance by previous test takers giving a sense of relative difficulties) and new questions (with anticipated relative difficulties).

What are the best ways to prepare not only for the BCE but for future ministry? Well, look a bit more closely at what is covered on the BCE. Notice, first, that the name of this test is the "Bible ***Content*** Examination." This test is not a test of knowledge about certain interpretations of the Scriptures, reconstructions of their historical and cultural location, or the process that shaped their production. It is a test about the *content* of the Bible. Every question will ask about what is contained in the Bible itself. There will not be any questions about the Documentary Hypothesis regarding the Pentateuch or the Two-Source Theory about the Gospels. No questions about possible relationships between the requirements of the Torah and the Law Code of Hammurabi, or the debates about the authorship of the Pastoral Letters either. Every question will be about what is contained in the Scriptures themselves.

Second, notice that the description of the exam states that it assesses "one's knowledge of the stories, themes and key passages of the books in the Old and New Testaments." What may not be immediately obvious in that statement is that it will be important to be able to associate specific "stories, themes, and key passages" with their respective books within "the Old and New Testaments." A question may require the test taker to identify that it was Elijah and not Elisha who prayed that God would send fire from heaven to consume a sacrifice on the altar, or it might require that one be able to place that story in 1 Kings. Test takers might be asked to identify which of Paul's letters includes the words of institution used in observing the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians). Some questions will even quote specific key verses or phrases that express central themes—such as, "Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking"—and ask for the book in which it appears (Revelation).

This last example provides another tip for preparation. Some may be more likely to recall that verse in the phrasing from the King James Version, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock," than in the translation from the New Revised Standard Version just given. However, all quotations in the English BCE are taken from the NRSV (Korean and Spanish editions of the test quote from standard translations of the Bible in those languages.) An inquirer/candidate may personally prefer a different translation, but in preparing for the BCE she or he will want to use the NRSV.

Inquirers/candidates preparing for the BCE, then, should read broadly in the Scriptures and pay attention to where important stories and themes are developed in the Bible. There is obviously a lot of ground to cover in the sixty-six books of the Protestant Bible, and so having some other aids to organize these stories, themes and passages in one's memory can also be useful. Those preparing for the BCE should consider doing their reading from a good, academic quality study Bible edition, paying attention to the brief introductions at the beginning of each book. They may provide outlines that summarize the book's content. They could discuss key themes of the book and support their identification of those themes by citations of key verses or passages.

Beyond study Bibles, similar aids in Bible dictionaries and introductory textbooks on the Old and New Testaments can be useful. Very often these resources will also provide outlines or even more graphically oriented means for summarizing the contents of a book. They may have useful tables that help one to literally see the relationships between persons or events related in the

Scriptures. When using these resources, keep the focus on those things that relate to the specific content of the Bible.

Finally, the Office of Preparation for Ministry maintains a course on the PC(USA) Training Site on behalf the PCC that provides access to a full-length sample BCE, available in English, Korean and Spanish. This practice exam provides a taste of the kind of questions that are used in the BCE, and gives an opportunity to become familiar with the test administration system itself. This course also includes an archive of questions (in English, Korean, and Spanish) developed for the online BCE since 2009, grouped according to canonical division and presented in canonical order. These materials may be accessed by inquirers and candidates using the account created for them by their presbyteries on the ordination exams site (https://exams.pcusa.org/). Inquirers and candidates should logon to their Profile pages on the exams site, and then use the menu option "Access Moodle Site" to access the BCE Preparation course.

Having a basic knowledge of the full scope of scripture is an essential tool for Christian ministry. By keeping your focus on the Bible itself in your preparation rather than just "prepping to the test," the Bible Content Examination can provide you with important insight into areas of the Bible with which you are less familiar even as you expand and strengthen your knowledge of God's Word revealed to us in the pages of the Scriptures.

Special Accommodations

Any requests for special accommodations (such as extended time, private testing room, etc.) must be submitted during the registration process and approved by the inquirer/candidate's presbytery. Proctors may not provide any special accommodations at the time of testing that had not been properly authorized by the inquirer/candidate's presbytery in advance.

General Instructions for the Bible Content Exam

Technology and Online Administration: The Bible Content Examination is given at proctored sites using computers actively accessing an Internet-based testing program. The means for accessing the Internet and other technological issues vary considerably between sites. It is the test taker's responsibility—not the proctor's—to be prepared to comply with the technological requirements at the chosen testing location. Test takers should confirm in advance of the testing date the specific equipment availability and requirements for their particular testing location. The proctors for each site can provide this information, and test takers should be in direct contact with their proctors about these issues. Test takers may be required to supply for themselves a portable computer capable of either Ethernet or Wi-Fi Internet access.

Languages: The Bible Content Exam is available in English, Korean and Spanish. The choice between these language options is made during registration and may not be changed at the time of the examination. Please be aware that while the questions themselves will be displayed by the online testing system in Spanish or Korean in accord with the registration, all instructions and testing system prompts appear only in English.

The New Revised Standard Version is used for all quotations in the English language version of the test. Corresponding standard translations for Korean and Spanish are used for editions of the BCE in those languages.

Practice Tests: The Office of Preparation for Ministry maintains a course on the PC(USA) "Equip" training site on behalf the PCC that provides access to a full-length sample BCE, available in English, Korean and Spanish. This practice exam includes the kind of questions that are used in the BCE and gives an opportunity to become familiar with the test administration system itself. This course also includes an archive of questions (in English, Korean, and Spanish) developed for the online BCE since 2009, grouped according to canonical division and presented in canonical order. These materials may be accessed by inquirers and candidates using the account created for them by their presbyteries on the exams site (http://exams.pcusa.org). Inquirers and candidates should logon to their Profile pages on the exams site, and then use the menu option "Access Moodle Site" to access the BCE Preparation course.

Honesty: Each test taker must do his or her own work, without receiving aid from or giving aid to anyone either during or after the BCE testing period. Test takers may not refer to any print or digital materials (either stored locally on the computer or on any network) during the testing period. Prior to beginning the exam, they must affirm that they will abide by the PCC's "Affirmation of Compliance with Examination Procedures in the Area of Bible Content." That online affirmation has the same force and expectation as the test taker's signature on a page presenting the honor statement.

The specific "Affirmation" used with the Bible Content Examination is as follows:

Affirmation of Compliance with Examination Procedures
in the Area of Bible Content

I recognize and affirm the high standard of conduct expected of anyone called to and engaging in the preparation and practice of ordered ministry. As such, I hereby acknowledge the following with regard to submission of my Bible Content Examination:

1) I attest that while taking this examination I will not use unauthorized material, including but not limited to:

    a. material copied or viewed from personal notes (my own or anyone else's);

    b. material obtained by consulting databases, networks, or other electronic communication while taking the Bible Content Exam;

    c. direct reference to the Bible in any print or electronic form.

2) I have not received and I will not share information that discloses the content of examination questions or my responses by any means of personal or remote communications (telephone, email, social media, etc.) to others during the day the BCE is being administered. I understand that this requirement does not preclude seeking pastoral or mental health support during the exam dates provided no material assistance is given in answering the exam questions themselves.

In taking the Bible Content Examination I will follow appropriate conduct as expected by scripture, the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and the Standards of Ethical Conduct.

Specific Instructions for the Bible Content Examination

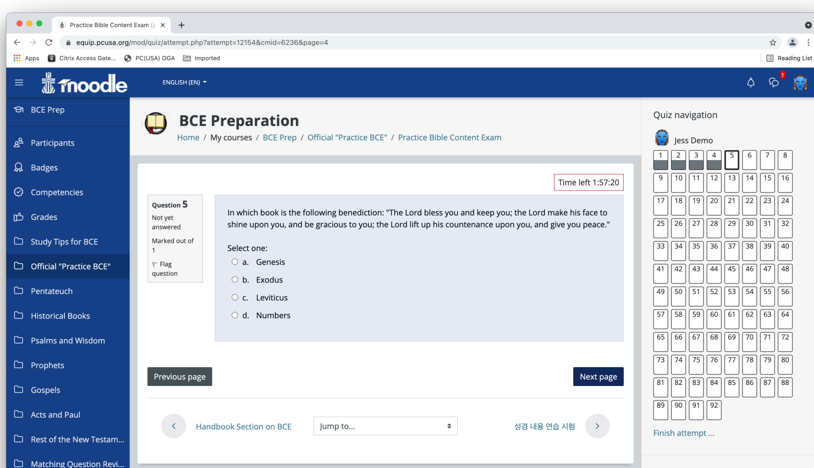
Time of the Examination: The BCE is given from 10:00 a.m. until noon local time on the Friday testing dates. The PCC requires that this exam be taken under a proctor's supervision. Test takers have two hours to complete the examination (unless the presbytery authorized a "special accommodation" for extended time). The computer program will keep track of the time a test taker has been logged-in to the test in order to enforce this limit.

Accessing the Examination: In order to login to the BCE web site, test takers will need the username and password used to register for the test. After they have logged-in on the exams website (http://exams.pcusa.org) and selected the "Access Moodle Site" menu option, they will be redirected to the PC(USA) "Equip" Moodle site where they will select the "course" associated with the administration of the current exam. They must first complete the "Affirmation of Compliance with BCE Procedures" before they will be able to access the BCE itself. Both the "Affirmation" and the BCE test will require a secondary password provided by the proctor to grant permission to access the test.

Internet Connection Issues: Should a test taker lose connection to the Internet during testing, she or he should follow the procedures to log back into the test site once the Internet connection is re-established. The test will resume where the test taker left the exam, and the system will display the time remaining to complete the exam. The proctor's secondary login information will also need to be re-entered. In the event of power or network outages at the site during testing, the proctor will contact the Associate Director for Ministry Leadership Development in the Office of the General Assembly who will work with the proctor to assure registrants are able to take the BCE in a timely and efficient manner.

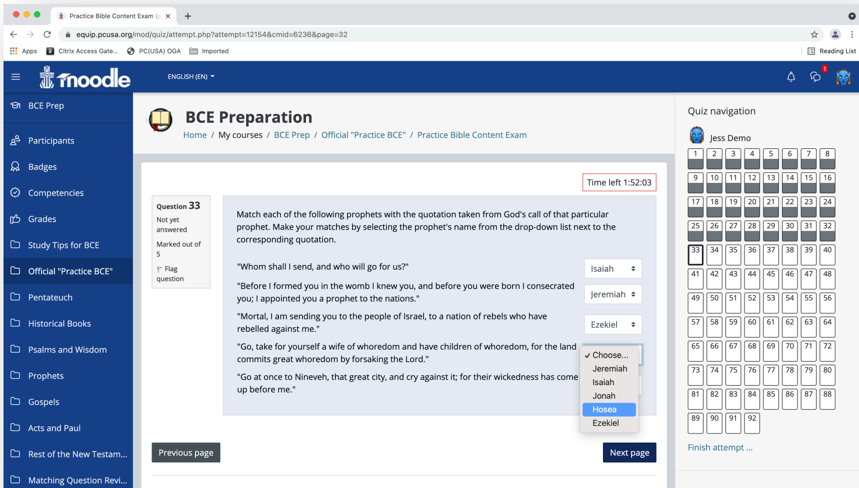
Entering Question Responses: Two types of question formats are used in the BCE—"multiple choice" and "matching."

The most common question format is "multiple choice," and at least 90 of the questions in the exam will be presented in this way. The introduction will either be a direct question or an open-ended sentence. It will be followed by four choices, identified as a, b, c, and d, respectively.



You indicate your choice for the answer to the question or the completion of the sentence by clicking on the circle just to the left of the letter identifying that choice. Each response to a "multiple choice" question will count as one point toward the 100 total points of the exam.

A "matching" question requires pairing items listed in a left column with their corresponding partners provided in a drop-down selection list repeated just to the right of each item in the column. The pairings are entered in the testing system by selecting the appropriate item in the drop-down selection lists. The pairings can be made in any order, and options are not eliminated from the selection lists once they have been paired with items in the left column.



Although each "matching" set will appear in the testing system as a single question, it will be scored as if each element in the list were a separate question. Thus, each correctly matched pair receives one point. This scoring is used because responding to one element in a "matching" set is equivalent to identifying one alternative among "multiple choice" options in a question. Of the 100 total points in each BCE test, no more than 10 will be presented in the "matching" format (thus, no more than two sets of five elements each).

Standard for Satisfying the BCE Requirement

A score of 70 or more points is required to satisfy this standard ordination exam requirement in the area of Bible Content. Each test taker's results will be displayed by the testing system at the end of the examination. Test takers will also receive an email confirmation of their personal results. That email will also be sent directly to the test taker's presbytery and the PC(USA) contact person at their theological institution.

Bible Exegesis Exam

The General Assembly has approved the following description of the Bible Exegesis exam:

> This examination shall assess the candidate's ability to interpret an assigned passage of Scripture by demonstrating attention to the original language of the text, an understanding of the text's

historical and literary context, and an ability to relate the text effectively to the contemporary life of the church in the world.

The candidate shall have access to Hebrew and Greek texts, translations, commentaries, and other exegetical tools.

Description and Preparation Guidelines

This examination assesses the candidate's ability to interpret a passage of Scripture in a way that both conveys an academically-informed understanding of the text to those without specialized training in biblical studies while relating it to a particular expression of the contemporary life of the church in the world. Candidates have access to the full range of exegetical tools during the examination period for this test. Using these, they are to provide a careful and critical interpretation of the passage, show how they arrived at this interpretation, and suggest how this passage might be used in the contemporary life of the church.

Purpose: The purpose of the Bible Exegesis examination within the overall preparation for ministry process is to serve as an assessment of a candidate's ability to apply academic training in biblical studies to contexts of ministry of the Word and Sacrament. It is intended to supplement, not replicate, assessments of an ability to use Scripture in the practice of ministry within a Reformed Christian context that are completed as part of seminary courses in biblical studies and languages (G-2.0607c) and through the preparation of a formal exegetical study and sermon required by some presbyteries for the candidate's "final assessment" (see "During the candidacy phase," in the *Advisory Handbook on Preparation for Ministry*).

Consequently, the exegesis examination is designed to assess three areas:

1) A candidate's knowledge about the text that leads to and sets limits on the possible interpretations and applications of that text

2) A candidate's ability to communicate the substance of careful, academically-informed biblical study, including interaction with the original languages, to those who have not had the opportunity for training in such fields

3) A candidate's ability to develop and support a careful and critical interpretation of some aspect of the text for application to the life of the community

In order to better appreciate why these particular assessments are chosen, it is helpful to consider both the historical understanding of the interpretation of Scripture within the Reformed tradition and some current presuppositions in the discipline of biblical studies.

Rationale: For much of the period since the Protestant Reformation, the interpretation of the Bible was guided by principles of historical-grammatical exegesis (often called "the historical-critical method"). Such interpretations were based on the assumption that it was possible to arrive at an objective understanding of "*the meaning*" of a scriptural passage through the rigorous study of the text in its original language and within its original historical context. That meaning could then be applied to the contemporary situation of the interpreter. This approach to exegesis received its classic formulation in Krister Stendahl's article on "Biblical Theology" for *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*,[1] in which he described the twin purposes of biblical interpretation as determining the relationship between what a text "meant" and what it "means."

The academic discipline of biblical studies has progressed over the past several decades in its understanding of how a text may be interpreted in multiple ways. The notion that there is such a thing as "*the* interpretation" or "*the* meaning" of a biblical passage, or even that there might be closely paired interpretations of what it "meant" and "means," is now considered too limited in describing how the church has heard God speak in and through the Scriptures. Even interpreters who employ more traditional critical methods now readily admit that there are multiple meanings when a passage is considered with regard to "its meaning *relative to what*" (theology, ethics, history, etc.), and that the choice of the *"what"* opens multiple possibilities for interpretation.

These changes in biblical studies do not challenge the use of Scripture within the church, but rather provide a theoretical support for the way the Bible is actually experienced and used within the Reformed tradition. While a Reformed understanding of Scripture would reject more radical literary theories – we believe there is not only a "what" of the text but a "who" of the Spirit that encounters us as an Other in the act of reading Scripture – it nevertheless acknowledges the multiple ways in which God has spoken in the past leading to the production of Scripture and continues to speak through the Scripture as seen in the confessional documents of the church and the ongoing life of the community.

This Reformed view of Scripture means that interpretations of the text both for the individual Christian and especially for the Christian community must be informed by a broad understanding about the text that both provides the foundation for and sets limits on those interpretations.[2] Any interpretations of Scripture from a Reformed perspective must take account of at least the following four areas:

1) *Language of the Text:* word meanings, grammar, literary and other features with respect to both its original language and its translation into the language of the modern community

2) *Historical Situation:* the influence of the historical and cultural context in which the engagement between God and God's people has come

3) *Scriptural and Theological Context*: the passage's relation to the broad teaching of Scripture and theological tradition of the church

4) *Significance for the Present Situation:* the application of the passage informed by points of correspondence between the original situation and the present one, guided by "the Rule of Love"—the commands to love God and neighbor (cf. Mark 12:28-32)

---

[1] Krister Stendahl, "Biblical Theology, Contemporary," in George Arthur Buttrick, ed., *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (New York and Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962) 1:418-432, particularly section A.2 "What it meant and what it means" (419-420).

[2] See the statements on "Presbyterian Understanding and Use of Holy Scripture" (123rd General Assembly of the PCUS [1983]) and "Biblical Authority and Interpretation" (194th General Assembly of the UPCUSA [1982]).

The Bible Exegesis examination as directed by the description of the examination approved by the General Assembly requires that a candidate develop and present a careful and critical interpretation of an assigned text and a plan for its use in a specific ministry context. By the phrase “careful and critical,” the instructions for the examination mean one that is consistent with the facts about its wording, its historical, social, canonical, and theological contexts, and so forth. Such an interpretation should fulfill the expectations for the use of Scripture as understood within the context of the Reformed tradition.

Structure: Because the Bible Exegesis examination is neither an academic exegesis paper nor practice for an exegesis and sermon required by some presbyteries at “final assessment,” it has its own particular components and arrangement. Candidates address the assigned passage in terms of knowledge about the text, theological interpretation, and application to a specified ministry context. Candidates have a period of approximately five days in which to complete the examination.

Each administration of the examination will present candidates with a passage from either the Old or the New Testament together with a scenario reflecting a particular ministry context. The exegesis of the passage in conjunction with the ministry context is to culminate in production of a specific form of ministry work product, such as a sermon outline or lesson plan. Examples of such scenarios might include: “You will be preaching on this passage as part of a series of sermons on stewardship.” “You will be using this passage with your confirmation class as it studies baptism.” “You have been asked by the family to use this passage as the primary Scripture reading at their mother’s funeral, and so it will serve as the scriptural basis for your funeral sermon.”

The examination has three major sections.

Section I - Language, Historical Situation, and Scriptural and Theological Context:

This section tests knowledge “about the text” corresponding to the first three areas of a Reformed perspective on interpreting Scripture outlined above. The questions may be formulated so that they reflect issues likely to be raised in the context of ministry rather than merely scholarly debate. As examples: “In your study of the passage you notice the New Revised Standard Version and the New International Version provide very different translations of the verse.” “What was going on at the time that made Isaiah push Ahaz to ask for a sign that God would be with the people of Judah?”

A total of four responses will be required in this section of the examination, and there will be a 600-word limit per response. These responses must *focus on the biblical text*. Discussion of the ministry context is not expected in Section I.

Section II – Careful and Critical Interpretation:

The second section of the exam responds to the final aspect of a Reformed perspective of Scripture – an interpretation of the passage informed by points of correspondence between the interpreter’s contemporary context and the original setting of the passage.

Candidates will write an essay presenting their interpretation of the passage supported by a careful and critical analysis of the text that reflects the use of scholarly resources (1,200-word limit). This essay may draw on material in responses to the questions in Section I, but also include exegetical methods and evidence relevant to the type of interpretation they provide. Readers will assess the interpretation based on its coherence, consistency, and clarity. This essay must *focus on the biblical text* and provide a basis for the application to be developed in Section III of the exam. Discussion of the ministry context is not expected in Section II.

Section III - Application:

In this final section of the exam the candidate presents the sermon, lesson plan, etc., required by the ministry context specified for the assigned passage. This section of the examination will be assessed on clarity, consistency with preceding sections of the exam, appropriateness for the specified context, and so forth. The response in Section III *must* address the ministry context.

Remember the audience: Readers of the ordination exams are both teaching and ruling elders, with differing levels of familiarity with the language and tools of exegesis. While some have academic specialization in biblical studies, most do not. Write simply and directly. Avoid excessive use of technical terms, but be precise in your descriptions of grammar and syntax. Keep in mind that a primary purpose of the examination is to assess your ability to communicate the substance of careful, academically informed biblical study, including interaction with the original languages, to those who have not had the opportunity for formal training in these fields.

Special Accommodations

PCC guidelines for the Bible Exegesis exam do not permit extensions of time or review and proofreading of exam responses by anyone other than the candidate submitting the test. The design of the exam extending over several days assumes that those taking the test will have to balance competing demands on their time just as they will have to do in ministry settings. All work presented in the exam responses must be exclusively the candidate’s own, building upon her or his use of biblical studies resources (supplying appropriate references as necessary). Any other requests for special accommodations must be approved by both the candidate’s presbytery committee and reviewed by the Associate Director for Ministry Leadership Development as part of the registration process.

General Instructions for the Bible Exegesis Exam

Technology and Online Administration: The Bible Exegesis exam is given using computers actively accessing an Internet-based testing program. It is the test taker’s responsibility to be prepared to comply with the technological requirements necessary to access the exam online and to have become familiar with the testing system before the examination period begins. Mid Council Ministries of the Office of the General Assembly provide a range of online resources in both text and video formats to assist with this preparation (see the “Taking the Senior

Examinations" chapter of this handbook, and visit http://www.pcusa.org/prep4min and click on "Online Training Opportunities").

Languages: The Bible Exegesis exam is available in English and Spanish. Candidates may also choose to submit their exam responses in Korean, but upon the recommendation of Korean members of the Presbyteries' Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates (PCC) the examination questions themselves are not translated into Korean (see the discussion on "Languages" in the "Administration of the Exams" chapter of this handbook). The choice between these language options is made during registration and may not be changed at the time of the examination. Please be aware that while the questions themselves will be displayed by the online testing system in Spanish in accord with the registration, all instructions and testing system prompts appear only in English.

Greek and Hebrew: Test takers who are familiar with the use of Unicode and who have Greek and Hebrew Unicode keyboards enabled on their computers will be able to use that system for entering words in those languages as part of their responses in the online exam administration system. Those unfamiliar with this system should transliterate any Greek or Hebrew words using the italics feature included in the response boxes. *Be aware that any Greek or Hebrew display or printing system that depends on a particular font will likely produce only gibberish when displayed on other computers through a web browser.* Candidates who do use Unicode Greek or Hebrew are encouraged to also include transliterations of words in those languages for the benefit of ruling elder readers who do not have formal training in those languages (a good practice for all ministry settings).

Form: Examinations are not evaluated on the basis of writing style. However, the evaluation of papers may be affected if they cannot be understood because of poor syntax or grammar.

Honesty: Each test taker must do his or her own work, without receiving aid from or giving aid to anyone after the Exegesis examination period begins. During the initial login for the exam, they will be asked to affirm that they will abide by the PCC's "Affirmation of Compliance with Examination Procedures for the Open Book Bible Exegesis Examination." That online affirmation has the same force and expectation as the test taker's signature on a page presenting the honor statement.

The specific wording of the "Affirmation" used with the Bible Exegesis exam is as follows:

Affirmation of Compliance with Examination Procedures
in the Area of Bible Exegesis

> I recognize and affirm the high standard of conduct expected of anyone called to and engaging in the preparation and practice of ordered ministry. As such, I hereby acknowledge the following with regard to submission of my standard Exegesis ordination exam:
>
> 1) I attest that while writing and submitting my standard ordination exams I will use only resources authorized by the exam instructions and will acknowledge any use of print or digital resources through proper, academic-style citation.

2) I attest that while writing and submitting my standard ordination exams I will *not*:

   a. discuss the examination questions or my responses with anyone;

   b. include in my responses or citations material that would identify either myself or institutions where I am or have been a student (e.g., "course notes from class with Professor Smith," "lecture at Princeton Seminary," weblinks that include any form of a personal name relating to my digital file storage [e.g., https://my.sharepoint.com/:p/:g/personal/jess_demo/...], etc.).

3) I have not received and I will not share information that discloses the content of examination questions or my responses by any means of personal or remote communications (telephone, email, social media, etc.) during the testing dates for particular examination areas. I understand that this requirement does not preclude seeking pastoral or mental health support during the exam period provided no material assistance is given in answering the exam questions themselves.

4) I understand that once submitted my responses will be reviewed by a program that will compare them to all other submitted responses and materials available on the Internet.

In the writing of the ordination examinations I will follow appropriate conduct as expected by scripture, the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and the Standards of Ethical Conduct.

Specific Instructions for the Bible Exegesis Exam

Time of the Examination: Test takers will be able to access the Exegesis exam administration site anytime between 3:00 p.m. Eastern Time on the Saturday that begins the testing period and 12:00 noon Eastern Time on the immediately following Thursday. *The end time of noon Eastern Time on Thursday is strictly enforced and applies to all test takers in all time zones.* Test takers are encouraged to keep in mind that their clock or computer's clock is probably not perfectly synchronized with the server. It is the server's time that controls access to the exam site. It is strongly recommended that test takers login to the exam site well before the deadline to assure that all their work is submitted before the deadline is reached. Further access to the exam after the testing period has ended is not permitted.

Test takers are strongly encouraged to compose their responses using the word processing features of the examination site response box. They may copy and paste responses from another word processing program to the exam website, but may not do so once the exam period has ended. Exegesis exams that do not include responses to all parts of the test are required, by PCC policy, to be evaluated as "Unsatisfactory" (see "Required Parts of a Satisfactory Exam" below).

Accessing the Examination: Test takers must have the login information associated with their exam registration profile to access the Exegesis exam. If they need assistance recovering or resetting their password, please contact the Associate Director for Ministry Leadership Development before the testing date. Staff availability to assist with these matters outside of normal business hours of the Presbyterian Center cannot be guaranteed.

Reminders for Formulating Responses:

1) Each section and question of the exam will have specific response boxes on the exam administration website. Test takers should ensure that their answers are entered in the proper response box for each section or question. Submissions that supply answers in the incorrect response boxes will be evaluated as "Unsatisfactory."

2) Remember that the readers will be looking for an ability to work with the passage in its original language and to communicate the findings of biblical scholarship to those who have not had the opportunity of formal training in the field.

3) Test takers must provide original answers to the exam questions. When using written material from other sources, they must identify the author and page number. They must also identify electronic sources, either software or on-line. They must use parenthetical citations within the text of their answers since the system will not accept endnotes or footnotes.

4) Test takers should include a bibliography of consulted works in the response box identified for this purpose in Section III of the Exegesis exam.

5) Most sections of this examination apply word-count limits to the responses (for the specific limits in each section, see the discussion in "Required Parts of a Satisfactory Examination" below). Because browser settings, the amount of formatting, etc. can impact automated word counts, the system does not limit what can be submitted for each section. When readers evaluate the Exegesis exam, they give it a single "Satisfactory" or "Unsatisfactory" evaluation on the submission as a whole, so it is unlikely a reader would assign an "Unsatisfactory" evaluation solely on the basis of exceeding the limit by a few words on one or two of the questions. You should be aware, however, that disregarding word limits has been identified as a factor in "Unsatisfactory" evaluations on past exams. The system's word count for a test taker's answer is displayed in the lower right corner of the response box (next to the resizing control).

6) Readers will be looking for logical organization and consistency within the examination. They will evaluate the exam as a unit and not in parts.

7) Maintaining the candidate's anonymity is of fundamental importance to assure fair evaluation of examination responses. **Failure to comply with any of the following instructions will result in an unsatisfactory exam:**

   - Do not include the test taker's name.
   - Do not include the name of the test taker's congregation or presbytery.
   - Do not identify the seminary the test taker attends or has attended.
   - Do not include a web address that includes any form of a personal name relating to your digital file storage (e.g., https://my.sharepoint.com/:p/:g/personal/jess_demo/...).

- Do not identify professors with whom the test taker has studied, except in citations of their published works in references or the bibliography (responses must not indicate personal relationships between the test taker and authors whose work is cited).
- Do not indicate whether the test taker has taken this or other ordination exams before.
- Do not indicate whether the test taker is writing this exam in his or her primary language (for example, "English is not my primary language.").

Required Parts of a Satisfactory Exam

The assigned passage and ministry context will be provided at the beginning of the exam. The following sections are required parts of a satisfactory examination. If any of these sections is incomplete the entire examination will be evaluated as "Unsatisfactory."

Section I: Language, Historical Situation, and Scriptural and Theological Context

After studying the passage, answer the questions in the following subject areas:

1) *Language of the Text*: word meanings, grammar, literary and other features with respect to both its original language and its translation into the language of the modern community
2) *Historical Situation*: the influence of the historical and cultural context in which the engagement between God and God's people has come
3) *Scriptural and Theological Context*: the passage's relation to the broad teaching of Scripture and theological tradition of the church

A total of **four** (4) responses will be required in Section I of the examination, and *there will be a 600-word limit per response.* These responses must *focus on the biblical text*. Discussion of the ministry context is not expected in Section I. Test takers should be sure that the response to each question of Section I is placed in the appropriate response box.

Section II: Careful and Critical Interpretation

Test takers will write an essay presenting their interpretation of the passage by a careful and critical analysis of the text that reflects the use of scholarly resources. The full exegetical study of the passage may draw on material in areas of the required responses in Section I and other evidence relevant to the interpretation. *This essay must focus on the biblical text* and provide a basis for the application in Section III: Application. *There is a 1,200-word limit for this essay.*

Section III: Application

Test takers will provide either a lesson plan, or an outline or summary description of the major themes of a sermon (as specified in the Ministry Context description) based on their careful and critical interpretation of the passage. This response *must* address the ministry context. *There is a 600-word limit for the sermon outline or lesson plan.*

Standards for Satisfying the Bible Exegesis Requirement

The Bible Exegesis examination is the only senior exam subject area that does not receive separate evaluations in each section of the test. While readers will provide comments on each separate section, the evaluation of this exam is based on the work as a unified whole. Three possible evaluations are available to the readers: "Satisfactory" (S); "Unsatisfactory" (U); and "Disqualified" (D, used when candidates fail to maintain their anonymity by disclosing any of the prohibited information listed in the "Specific Instructions"). If any section includes material warranting the "Disqualified" evaluation, then the examination receives a mandatory overall evaluation of "D" which is equivalent to an "Unsatisfactory" evaluation for purposes of fulfilling requirements in the preparation for ministry process.

If any required response is omitted from any section, then the examination must receive an overall evaluation of "Unsatisfactory."

Each examination will be evaluated independently by two readers. If both overall evaluations are "S," a final evaluation of "Satisfactory" will be recorded for the exam. If both readers evaluate the exam overall as "U," the exam receives a final evaluation of "Unsatisfactory." If the two readers disagree in their overall evaluations, the exam will be assigned to a third reader. The final evaluation of the exam will be determined by the two concurring overall evaluations.

Each reader's comments represent his or her considered appraisal of the paper. These comments are read by the candidate and the presbytery committee responsible for oversight of the candidate's preparation for ministry.

Church Polity Exam

The General Assembly has approved the following description for the Church Polity examination:

> This examination shall assess the candidate's working knowledge of the constitutional structure of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the method by which differences are properly resolved and programs to fulfill the mission of the church are determined.

Description and Preparation Guidelines

We orderly Presbyterians go about our ministries believing that one evidence of faithfulness to God is an ordered life together rooted in our sense of discipleship. Polity is a relational expression of the Church's theological commitments (foundation). The Church Polity examination provides an opportunity for the candidate to demonstrate an understanding of polity as a tool for ministry in the context of church life.

The examination is open-book and assesses how the candidate interprets, communicates and utilizes the *Book of Order* in his or her practice of ministry.

What Candidates Ought to Know:

- That the purpose of the Section I question, grounded in the Foundations of Presbyterian Polity in the *Book of Order,* is to test the candidate's understanding of constitutional order as founded on basic theological principles that have been passed down to us.
- That the purpose of the Section II and Section III questions is to test the candidate's ability to apply constitutional provisions to life in the church.
- That the Section II question addresses concerns that repeat themselves regularly in the practice of ministry.
- That many essay questions are based on actual contemporary situations in the church, and that they tend to have a preferable direction or resolution or range of responses rather than cut-and-dried correct answers; e.g., there is the general expectation that a satisfactory resolution of a situation is reconciliation rather than victory.
- That one should appreciate what "pastoral" means out in the church — not mushy or permissive, but caringly constructive.
- That one should read and follow directions carefully, that "list" does not mean "evaluate," and that sometimes one is asked to respond to an individual and sometimes one is not.
- That one should keep track of time.
- That at least two of the three sections must be evaluated as "Satisfactory."
- That at least two people will be reading and evaluating the paper – and eventually the presbytery committee overseeing the candidate's preparation will read it, too, as well as a calling presbytery committee.
- That, repeatedly, new readers and seminarians who attend the reading group process comment on the fairness and care of this system.

General Instructions for the Church Polity Exam

A maximum of nine (9) hours is permitted for completion of the Church Polity examination, beginning with the display of the first section. All sections of the test are open book. Candidates may use whatever resources they have available, but they must give credit for any resources used (see the specific instructions below related to "Resource Material").

The examination consists of three sections. All three sections are required. Some sections of the exam may take substantially longer to complete than others, depending on the nature of the required responses or ministry work products. There is, however, no expectation that anyone will need a full nine hours of uninterrupted work to fulfill the requirements of the examination. *The total word count for all required responses in each section of the exam is not to exceed 1,500 words* (not counting words used for required bibliographical information).

The intent of this examination is to assess readiness for ministry, which includes using the *Book of Order* effectively. In responding to the questions candidates shall utilize a printed copy and/or a PDF version of the *Book of Order* of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) that was current at the time of registration for the exam. Questions will be from the Foundations of Presbyterian Polity, the Form of Government, the Directory for Worship, and Church Discipline.

In order to receive a final evaluation of "Satisfactory" from a reader on this exam, two of the three sections must receive "Satisfactory" evaluations from that reader.

The readers, in evaluating the examination, will use the following criteria to assess readiness for ministry:

- Recognition and knowledge of the polity issues applicable to the question, and ability to cite relevant sections of the *Book of Order*
- Ability to relate the polity issue to the situation, considering both the letter and the spirit of the constitution
- Ability to express concern for the individual(s) involved in the situation and for the welfare of the church as a whole
- Knowledge of the process by which programs to fulfill the mission of the church are determined
- Ability to be coherent in expressing thoughts

Specific Instructions for the Church Polity Exam

Technology and Online Administration: The Church Polity exam is given using computers actively accessing an Internet-based testing program. It is the test taker's responsibility to be prepared to comply with the technological requirements necessary to access the exam online and to have become familiar with the testing system before the examination period begins. Mid Council Ministries of the Office of the General Assembly provide a range of online resources in both text and video formats to assist with this preparation (see the "Taking the Senior Examinations" chapter of this handbook, and visit http://www.pcusa.org/prep4min and click on "Online Training Opportunities").

Languages: The Church Polity exam is available in English, Korean, and Spanish. The choice between these language options is made during registration and may not be changed at the time of the examination. Please be aware that while the questions themselves will be displayed by the online testing system in Spanish or Korean in accord with the registration, all instructions and testing system prompts appear only in English.

Form: Examinations are not evaluated on the basis of writing style. However, the evaluation of responses may be affected if they cannot be understood because of poor syntax, grammar, or spelling errors.

Honesty: Each test taker must do his or her own work, without receiving aid from or giving aid to anyone during the Church Polity examination period. During the initial login for the exam they will be asked to affirm that they will abide by the Presbyteries' Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates (PCC) "Affirmation of Compliance with Examination Procedures in the Area of Church Polity." That online affirmation has the same force and expectation as the test taker's signature on a page presenting the honor statement.

The specific wording of the "Affirmation" used with the Church Polity exam is as follows:

Affirmation of Compliance with Examination Procedures
in the Area of Church Polity

I recognize and affirm the high standard of conduct expected of anyone called to and engaging in the preparation and practice of ordered ministry. As such, I hereby acknowledge the following with regard to submission of my standard ordination exam in Church Polity:

1) I attest that while writing and submitting my standard ordination exams I will use only resources authorized by the exam instructions and will acknowledge any use of print or digital resources through proper, academic-style citation.

2) I attest that while writing and submitting my standard ordination exams I will *not*:

    a. discuss the examination questions or my responses with anyone;

    b. include in my responses or citations material that would identify either myself or institutions where I am or have been a student (e.g., "course notes from class with Professor Smith," "lecture at Princeton Seminary," weblinks that include any form of a personal name relating to my digital file storage [e.g., https://my.sharepoint.com/:p/:g/personal/jess_demo/...], etc.).

3) I have not received and I will not share information that discloses the content of examination questions or my responses by any means of personal or remote communications (telephone, email, social media, etc.) during the testing dates for particular examination areas. I understand that this requirement does not preclude seeking pastoral or mental health support during the exam period provided no material assistance is given in answering the exam questions themselves.

4) I understand that once submitted my responses will be reviewed by a program that will compare them to all other submitted responses and materials available on the Internet.

In the writing of the ordination examinations I will follow appropriate conduct as expected by scripture, the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and the Standards of Ethical Conduct.

Time of the Examination: Test takers are eligible to take the Polity exam only during the 60-hour period from 8:00 a.m. US Eastern Time on the announced Thursday of the testing period to 8:00 p.m. US Eastern Time on the Saturday of the testing period. It is the test takers' responsibility to begin the exam sufficiently in advance of 8:00 p.m. on Saturday for the full nine-hour allotted time to be available. The testing system will also keep track of the time elapsed since the first section is displayed, and will strictly enforce the nine-hour time limit. *Test takers are not permitted further access to the exam after their allotted time has expired or the testing period has ended, whichever comes first.*

Candidates who may also be taking the Theological Competence and Worship and Sacraments exams need to be aware that the same 60-hour testing period applies to all three of these areas of examination. It is each candidate's responsibility to manage her or his time to assure that any of these three areas of examination for which they are registered have been completed by the 8:00 p.m. close of testing on the announced Saturday of the examination period.

Test takers are strongly encouraged to compose their responses using the word processing features of the examination website response box. They may copy and paste responses from another word processing program to the exam website, but may not do so once their allotted time has ended.

Accessing the Examination: Test takers must have the login information associated with their exam registration profile in order to access the Church Polity exam. If they need assistance recovering or resetting their password, please contact the Associate Director for Ministry Leadership Development before the testing date. Staff availability to assist with these matters outside of normal business hours of the Presbyterian Center cannot be guaranteed. The examinations will be available from the candidate's "My Profile" page on the examinations website (http://exams.pcusa.org) during the 60-hour testing period.

Internet Connection Issues: Should the test taker lose connection to the testing system for any reason during the exam, she or he should log back into the test site once the Internet connection is re-established. The test will resume at the beginning, but test takers may use the "Next" or "Go to Page" buttons on the question pages to proceed past work already saved to the system to reach the point where they left off. *Time offline is included in the nine hours allotted for the exam.*

Resource Material: A printed copy and/or a PDF version of the *Book of Order* (the edition current at the time of registration) will be required throughout the examination. All sections of the test are open book. Citations from the *Book of Order* must be provided in the customary format for Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) constitutional documents (for example, "The Presbyterian Church draws its name from the principle that it is to 'be governed by presbyters, that is, ruling elders and teaching elders (also called ministers of the Word and Sacrament)' (F-3.0202)."). Candidates may use whatever other resources they have available, but they must give credit for any resources using proper "in-text" citation formats and include proper bibliographical information at the end of the response where the citation appears. Lecture materials and personal conversations do not require citation. In formulating citations, candidates are reminded that disclosing seminaries they attend or have attended or professors with whom they have studied will result in disqualification of the examination and a mandatory "Unsatisfactory" evaluation.

Reminders for Formulating Responses:

1. Each question of the exam will have specific response boxes on the exam administration website. Test takers should be sure that their answers are entered in the proper response box for each question. Submissions that supply answers in the incorrect response boxes will be evaluated as "Unsatisfactory."

2. Test takers must provide original answers to the exam questions. When using written material from other sources, they must identify the author and page number. They must also identify electronic sources, either software or on-line. They must use parenthetical citations within the text of their answers since the system will not accept endnotes or footnotes. Since there is not a separate "Works Cited" section in the Polity exam, *full bibliographical information should be included at the end of the response for each section.*

3. All sections of this examination apply a word-count limit of 1,500 words to the responses. Any words in a response used to provide bibliographical information in support of reference citations are not counted as part of this 1,500-word limit. Because browser settings, the amount of formatting, inclusion of reference bibliography, etc. impact automated word counts, the system does not limit what can be submitted for each section. It is unlikely a reader will assign an "Unsatisfactory" evaluation solely on the basis of exceeding the limit of a section by a few words. You should be aware, however, that disregarding word limits has been identified as a factor in "Unsatisfactory" evaluations on past exams. The system's word count for a test taker's answer is displayed in the lower right corner of the response box (next to the resizing control).

4. The exam must be completed before the conclusion of the allotted time limit or the close of the 60-hour examination period. The testing system will deny access to the exam after either of those limits is reached.

5. Maintaining the candidate's anonymity is of fundamental importance to assure fair evaluation of examination papers. **Failure to comply with any of the following instructions will result in an unsatisfactory exam:**

   - Do not include the test taker's name.
   - Do not include the name of the test taker's congregation or presbytery.
   - Do not identify the seminary the test taker attends or has attended.
   - Do not include a web address that includes any form of a personal name relating to your digital file storage (e.g., https://my.sharepoint.com/:p/:g/personal/jess_demo/...).
   - Do not identify professors with whom the test taker has studied, except in citations of their published works in references (responses must not indicate personal relationships between the test taker and authors whose work is cited).

- Do not indicate whether the test taker has taken this or other ordination exams before.
- Do not indicate whether the test taker is writing this exam in his or her primary language (for example, "English is not my primary language.").

6. *Important:* Read the entire question before beginning to write your response.

Standards for Satisfying the Church Polity Requirement

The examination consists of three sections. Three possible evaluations are available to the readers: "Satisfactory" (S); "Unsatisfactory" (U); and "Disqualified" (D, used when candidates fail to maintain their anonymity by disclosing any of the prohibited information listed in the "Specific Instructions"). Each section of the examination will receive its own evaluation, and the agreement between the evaluations of at least two out of the three sections determines the reader's overall evaluation of the exam. However, if any section receives the "Disqualified" evaluation, then the examination receives a mandatory overall evaluation of "Unsatisfactory."

Each examination will be evaluated independently by two readers. If both overall evaluations are "S," a final evaluation of "Satisfactory" will be recorded for the exam. If both readers evaluate the exam overall as "U," the exam receives a final evaluation of "Unsatisfactory." If the two readers disagree in their overall evaluations, the exam will be assigned to a third reader. The final evaluation of the exam will be determined by the two concurring overall evaluations.

Each reader's comments represent his or her considered appraisal of the paper. These comments are read by the candidate and the presbytery committee responsible for oversight of the candidate's preparation for ministry.

Theological Competence Exam

The General Assembly has approved the following description for the Theological Competence examination:

> This examination shall assess the candidate's capacity to make effective use of the Reformed theological heritage, including the church's confessional documents, in relating the gospel to the church and the world today.

Description and Preparation Guidelines

The Presbyteries' Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates (PCC) desires that these exams be a moment of blessing, in which you begin to demonstrate your ability to exercise pastoral wisdom and imagination. While drawing on your study of theology, the questions are designed to bring your written theological reflection into the arena of church life. This exam helps presbyteries and their respective committees responsible for oversight of the preparation for ministry process to assess readiness for ministry in the area of theology by going beyond the seminary classroom into the actual practice of ministry to examine how Reformed theology and confessions inform a pastor's teaching and priorities both personally and for the church.

Because of the broad scope of the theology exam, it is essential that you have prepared yourself not only in foundational areas of knowledge but also with certain theological skills. You need to possess the ability to think theologically.

The theology exam asks you to make connections between the theology you have learned and developed in seminary on the one hand, and real-life situations on the other. You may be asked to make connections in two directions. 1) From Christian faith to contemporary life: What are the implications and practical relevance of a particular belief, or what difference does it make for Christians to confess a particular belief? 2) From contemporary life to Christian faith: What are the theological issues in a particular real-life scenario, and how does Reformed theology illuminate our understanding of the particular situation or set of issues?

You will be tested on your ability to function as a competent interpreter of our church's theological heritage, particularly as it is reflected in *The Book of Confessions*. You will need a basic, working knowledge of the confessional documents, a sense of the major themes and scope of the Reformed faith reflected in them, and an ability to articulate practical implications of the heritage and make connections with the contemporary life of faith.

Developing habits of ongoing theological reflection – considering the way theology comes alive in your own practice of ministry, your seminary community, or other relationships and contexts – will equip you with skills necessary for taking the exam, and far more importantly for the enriching and deepening of your work as a minister of the Word and Sacrament.

Finally, many candidates have found it helpful to go back to previous exams and practice taking the exam in the same amount of time allowed in the actual exam. A few practice runs of this type will help you get comfortable with the one-hour question format, which the exam utilizes. There are several things to note about responses to the question that, in general, characterize a satisfactory answer to the questions.

- **Make sure you answer the question that is stated**. Take time to dissect the question. Ask yourself: What is being asked? Do I need to respond to a given situation, to people in the situation, or simply take the situation as food for thought?
- **Be organized and coherent in your response**. Be straightforward and clear. Many people find it beneficial to sketch out an outline of their responses before writing the response itself. A shorter answer that is clear and coherent will often do better than a longer and rambling response.
- **Make sure you include at least the minimum number of required citations from at least the minimum number of required sources**. Without the required number of citations and resources, responses—regardless of quality—cannot receive a "Satisfactory" evaluation.
- **Remember that in the ordination exams you are writing for the church, not seminary professors in seminary classes**. The readers of your exams will be ruling

elders and ministers of the Word and Sacrament, your colleagues in ministry. Make sure your theological language is appropriate to this mixed audience.

- **Be both theologically substantive and pastorally sensitive.** Remember that the pastoral response called for in many ministry situations is a theological one.
- **Note that all sections of the exam are "open-book,"** at times requiring the use of *The Book of Confessions* but also permitting consultation with other resources. Do, however, keep in mind the time constraints. Readers will not be looking for researched answers, but they will expect an ability to use the broader Reformed theological tradition. If you do use other resources, you must properly cite them.

As you make use of this material in your preparation, remember that the advice and strategies contained in it are suggestions only. These are not official dictates of the exam committee. We pray for you the best possible experience in taking the ordination exams.

Preparation for this exam takes place on two levels.

FIRST LEVEL OF PREPARATION

First and foremost is the preparation you began when you were first baptized**.** Whether this occurred when you were a child, during your college years, or in middle age, you started soaking up the nuances of Reformed theology through worship, Bible study, participation in church life, and in church mission. This experience provides a grounding from which you may consider the many ways that Christians act and interact in the setting of shared discipleship expressed in the Reformed tradition.

In addition, you have been preparing for this exam since you first decided to become an inquirer and then candidate for ordination as a minister of the Word and Sacrament. In that time you experienced different practices of discernment, such as prayer, counsel with elders and other trusted advisors, and conversation with fellow candidates. You practiced pastoral work in concrete ministerial settings; took classes in theology and other disciplines of a Reformed theological education; and studied *The Book of Confessions* and *Book of Order*.

Alternatively, you may already be an ordained minister with another denomination who is seeking to transfer to the PC(USA). Your rich experience has been preparing you for this same moment through your education and practice in ministry.

SECOND LEVEL OF PREPARATION

The second level of preparation is study specific to taking the exam. The remainder of this section of the handbook includes orientation information for preparation, the general instructions for the exam, and standards used by readers to evaluate exam responses.

There are currently three sections on the Theological Competence exam:

I. Confessional Heritage

II. Constructive Statement of Christian Doctrine

III. Application to Ministry

Preparing for Confessional Heritage (I)*:*

This section of the exam always requires use and understanding of *The Book of Confessions* as your primary resource and conversation partner. It is intended to allow you the opportunity to demonstrate your knowledge of the church's historical doctrines. Questions in this section vary greatly; they may ask for discussion of continuities and changes in doctrine, scenarios from church life, or reflections on the intersection of doctrines.

If you receive and accept a call to ministry of the Word and Sacrament as a teaching elder, you will have to answer the following question in the affirmative:

> Do you sincerely receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the confessions of our church as authentic and reliable expositions of what Scripture leads us to believe and do, and will you be instructed and led by those confessions as you lead the people of God? (W-4.0404c)

The root of the word "heritage" refers to that which we inherit. As members of the PC(USA) and then as ministers of the Word and Sacrament, we follow Christ in the Reformed tradition that we have inherited from our brothers and sisters in faith before us. In this way, this section of the exam tests the degree to which you understand the history of the Reformed tradition.

As you study *The Book of Confessions*, consider the following approaches to analysis (figuring out what is in each confession), synthesis (seeing the connections between confessions), and development (how ideas shift and change throughout the confessional documents). Remember that confessions are statements of belief and affirmation written by the church in particular times and places to bear witness to God's Word in a particular context.

- Read the individual creeds, confessions, catechisms, and statements as narratives. How are they different in approach? How do you perceive the tone of different documents? What topics are covered?

- Learn the order and time periods for each document. What events affecting the life of the church were taking place at these times? How is that context revealed in the document?

- Using the index, choose a particular subject heading and trace it through the documents chronologically, noting the ways in which the church understood the subject differently at different times. What changes and continuities do you see over time?

- Using the index, choose a particular subject heading. Study the documents in which the subject is found and consider how that subject is revealed in the life of the church. Different confessional documents highlight different nuances of the same subject.

- Finally, look at exam questions of the last two or three years. These questions reflect many different ways in which pastors connect with our confessional heritage.

Preparing for Constructive Statement of Christian Doctrine (II):

The second section of the exam requires you to construct a statement of Christian doctrine in accordance with the Reformed theological tradition and in response to a particular context or dilemma. For instance, at a time when you least expect it a member of the congregation you pastor may ask you a question about the significance of who God is and the meaning of our life with God. Often these questions reflect the big questions of life, such as death, romance, suffering, happiness, etc. In these instances, the questioner wants an answer on the spot. There is no time to research or reflect on the question.

While you cannot prepare for the particular scenarios of the questions in this section, you can prepare your memory and skills of theological reflection. Consider the following approaches:

- Identify the particular Reformed theologians you have studied. What makes these theologians Reformed? What about their writing reveals their "broad agreement with the theology of John Calvin, the confessional literature of the Reformed churches, and *The Book of Confessions*"? (The quotation is taken from the "General Instructions" for this examination.) How do these theologians connect different doctrines or theological teachings to other doctrines? You might consider two different ways of assessing their work: what do they do *systematically* (that is, in terms of naming doctrines and organizing them), and what do they do *dogmatically* (that is, in terms of declaring the importance and vital role of doctrines).

- Identify the particular theologians you have studied who are not normally understood as being Reformed. How might they help to articulate a doctrine in a Reformed way? How do they differ from the Reformed tradition? For example, Dietrich Bonhoeffer is a well-known Lutheran theologian and pastor. In which ways is his thought in agreement with Reformed thought and in which ways is it in disagreement?

- Review books that are basic introductions to theology. Compare the organization of these books, the interrelation of subjects, and how the author connects the subjects.

- Review your papers, exams, and projects for the theology courses you have taken. How do these assignments help you articulate doctrines that make a difference in human life?

- Review situations you have encountered in ministry or other areas of life in which ideas about God have been relevant. If you had a chance to participate in these situations again, what would your theological response be?

- Finally, look at exam questions from the last two or three years. Imagine yourself as the pastor in those situations. Which theological resources would you bring to bear? To what aspects of the situation would you respond?

Preparing for Application to Ministry (III):

Questions in this final section deal with specific situations in the life of a congregation. In one sense, questions in this section are ethical questions. What is it one should do in a particular situation and why? Your task will be to establish the relevant theological themes, in accordance with the Reformed tradition, and to apply these themes to a situation.

This section addresses the wide variety of ethical situations. How do we decide to relate to science? How do we respond to issues of violence? How should Reformed Christians handle dilemmas of economics, the raising of children, pastoral impropriety, or ecumenical relations? As in the other sections, the form of the question will vary. You might be asked to respond to different people who are having a conversation, a person who drops by your office, someone who greets you after worship, or the session.

- Review exam questions from the last two or three years. Note the variety of themes and situations that are described and depicted in the questions.
- Review your own ministerial history. Remember situations in which you were called upon to address a particular dilemma. How did you sort through the situation? From your vantage point now, what do you think were the theological considerations in that situation? This section requires you to make connections. What theological ideas are at stake? With what resources will you have conversation about these theological ideas? How will you connect theologically to the situation?
- Remember that this section often requires you to draw upon a broader range of resources (the Scriptures, classical theology, modern theology) than just *The Book of Confessions*. Given the time constraints, you will most likely refer to these resources from memory and in general terms. However, should you consult any of them directly, you must properly cite the resources that you use.

General Instructions for the Theology Exam

A maximum of nine (9) hours is permitted for completion of the Theological Competence examination, beginning with the display of the first section. All sections of the test are open book. Candidates may use whatever resources they have available, but they must give credit for any resources used (see the specific instructions below related to “Resource Material”).

The examination consists of three sections. All three sections are required. Some sections of the exam may take substantially longer to complete than others, depending on the nature of the required responses or ministry work products. There is, however, no expectation that anyone will need a full nine hours of uninterrupted work to fulfill the requirements of the examination. *The total word count for all required responses in each section of the exam is not to exceed 1,500 words* (not counting words used for required bibliographical information).

What Is Being Examined:

The examination of Theological Competence seeks to determine the candidate's readiness for ministry in the use of biblical, classical, and modern theological insights within the Reformed heritage of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The examination may deal with questions of confessional, doctrinal, historical, or ethical significance. Accordingly, questions intend to assess a candidate's ability to discern the theological issues inherent in a situation and to address them competently as follows:

1) Articulating the contemporary relevance of the Reformed tradition as it is embodied in the confessional documents

2) Showing that Christian doctrines as expressed in the Reformed tradition illuminate Christian faith and life

3) Applying Reformed theology in the practice of ministry in relation to questions of ecclesiastical, political, social, economic, and personal ethics

The word "Reformed," wherever it is used in this examination, means a theological perspective in broad agreement with the theology of John Calvin, the confessional literature of the Reformed churches, and *The Book of Confessions*. In questions that distinguish between "classical" and "modern" theology, the year 1900 serves as the dividing line between classical and modern theologians, and the confessional documents as well as the writings of individual theologians are theological resources for their respective periods.

What Is Not Being Examined:

This examination does not seek to examine personal faith or to determine the acceptability of the candidate's views within Presbyterian confessional standards. That determination rests with the presbytery. Rather, this examination seeks to determine the candidate's competence to work within the Reformed theological heritage. There is some latitude within this heritage, and an answer will not be evaluated more rigorously for taking one position rather than another within the heritage. However, answers outside the scope of the Reformed heritage would tend to demonstrate lack of readiness for Presbyterian ministry.

It is to be recognized, however, that in becoming a candidate for or "in entering the ordered ministries of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), one chooses to exercise freedom of conscience within certain bounds. His or her conscience is captive to the Word of God as interpreted in the standards of the church so long as he or she continues to seek, or serve in, ordered ministry" (*Book of Order* G-2.0105).

Specific Instructions for the Theology Exam

Technology and Online Administration: The Theology exam is given using computers actively accessing an Internet-based testing program. It is the test taker's responsibility to be prepared to comply with the technological requirements necessary to access the exam online and to have become familiar with the testing system before the examination period begins. Mid Council

Ministries of the Office of the General Assembly provide a range of online resources in both text and video formats to assist with this preparation (see the “Taking the Senior Examinations” chapter of this handbook, and visit http://www.pcusa.org/prep4min and click on “Online Training Opportunities”).

Languages: The Theology exam is available in English, Korean, and Spanish. The choice between these language options is made during registration and may not be changed at the time of the examination. Please be aware that while the questions themselves will be displayed by the online testing system in Spanish or Korean in accord with the registration, all instructions and testing system prompts appear only in English.

Form: Examinations are not evaluated on the basis of writing style. However, the evaluation of responses may be affected if they cannot be understood because of poor syntax, grammar, or spelling errors.

Honesty: Each test taker must do his or her own work, without receiving aid from or giving aid to anyone during the Theology examination period. During the initial login for the exam they will be asked to affirm that they will abide by the Presbyteries’ Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates (PCC) “Affirmation of Compliance with Examination Procedures in the Area of Theological Competence.” That online affirmation has the same force and expectation as the test taker’s signature on a page presenting the honor statement.

The specific wording of the “Affirmation” used with the Theology exam is as follows:

Affirmation of Compliance with Examination Procedures in the Area of Theological Competence

I recognize and affirm the high standard of conduct expected of anyone called to and engaging in the preparation and practice of ordered ministry. As such, I hereby acknowledge the following with regard to submission of my standard ordination exam in Theological Competence:

1) I attest that while writing and submitting my standard ordination exams I will use only resources authorized by the exam instructions and will acknowledge any use of print or digital resources through proper, academic-style citation.

2) I attest that while writing and submitting my standard ordination exams I will *not*:

    a. discuss the examination questions or my responses with anyone;

    b. include in my responses or citations material that would identify either myself or institutions where I am or have been a student (e.g., “course notes from class with Professor Smith,” “lecture at Princeton Seminary,” weblinks that include any form of a personal name relating to my digital file storage [e.g., https://my.sharepoint.com/:p/:g/personal/jess_demo/...], etc.).

3) I have not received and I will not share information that discloses the content of examination questions or my responses by any means of personal or remote communications (telephone, email, social media, etc.) during the testing dates for particular examination areas. I understand that this requirement does not preclude seeking pastoral or mental health support during the exam period provided no material assistance is given in answering the exam questions themselves.

4) I understand that once submitted my responses will be reviewed by a program that will compare them to all other submitted responses and materials available on the Internet.

In the writing of the ordination examinations I will follow appropriate conduct as expected by scripture, the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and the Standards of Ethical Conduct.

Time of the Examination: Test takers are eligible to take the Theology exam only during the 60-hour period from 8:00 a.m. US Eastern Time on the announced Thursday of the testing period to 8:00 p.m. US Eastern Time on the Saturday of the testing period. It is the test takers' responsibility to begin the exam sufficiently in advance of 8:00 p.m. on Saturday for the full nine-hour allotted time to be available. The testing system will also keep track of the time elapsed since the first section is displayed, and will strictly enforce the nine-hour time limit. *Test takers are not permitted further access to the exam after their allotted time has expired or the testing period has ended, whichever comes first.*

Candidates who may also be taking the Church Polity and Worship and Sacraments exams need to be aware that the same 60-hour testing period applies to all three of these areas of examination. It is each candidate's responsibility to manage her or his time to assure that any of these three areas of examination for which they are registered have been completed by the 8:00 p.m. close of testing on the announced Saturday of the examination period.

Test takers are strongly encouraged to compose their responses using the word processing features of the examination website response box. They may copy and paste responses from another word processing program to the exam website, but may not do so once their allotted time has ended.

Accessing the Examination: Test takers must have the login information associated with their exam registration profile in order to access the Theology exam. If they need assistance recovering or resetting their password, please contact the Associate Director for Ministry Leadership Development before the testing date. Staff availability to assist with these matters outside of normal business hours of the Presbyterian Center cannot be guaranteed. The examinations will be available from the candidate's "My Profile" page on the examinations website (http://exams.pcusa.org) during the 60-hour testing period.

Internet Connection Issues: Should the test taker lose connection to the testing system for any reason during the exam, she or he should log back into the test site once the Internet connection is re-established. The test will resume at the beginning, but test takers may use the "Next" or "Go to Page" buttons on the question pages to proceed past work already saved to the system to reach the point where they left off. *Time offline is included in the nine hours allotted for the exam.*

Resource Material: A printed copy and/or a PDF version of *The Book of Confessions* (copyright 2016 or later) will be needed for Section I and may be used as a resource for Section II and Section III of the examination. (*The Shorter Catechism* and *The Larger Catechism* of the Westminster Standards will be considered one document for the purposes of this examination.) All sections of the test are open book. Citations from *The Book of Confessions* must be provided in the customary format for Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) constitutional documents (for example, "The 'chief end' of human existence 'is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever' (Westminster Shorter Catechism, 7.001)."). Candidates may use whatever other resources they have available, but they must give credit for any resources using proper "in-text" citation formats and include proper bibliographical information at the end of the response where the citation appears. Lecture materials and personal conversations do not require citation. In formulating citations, candidates are reminded that disclosing seminaries they attend or have attended or professors with whom they have studied will result in disqualification of the examination and a mandatory "Unsatisfactory" evaluation.

Reminders for Formulating Responses:

1. Each question of the exam will have specific response boxes on the exam administration website. Test takers should be sure that their answers are entered in the proper response box for each question. Submissions that supply answers in the incorrect response boxes will be evaluated as "Unsatisfactory."

2. Test takers must provide original answers to the exam questions. When using written material from other sources, they must identify the author and page number. They must also identify electronic sources, either software or on-line. They must use parenthetical citations within the text of their answers since the system will not accept endnotes or footnotes. Since there is not a separate "Works Cited" section in the Theology exam, *full bibliographical information should be included at the end of the response for each section.*

3. All sections of this examination apply a word-count limit of 1,500 words to the responses. Any words in a response used to provide bibliographical information in support of reference citations are not counted as part of this 1,500-word limit. Because browser settings, the amount of formatting, inclusion of reference bibliography, etc. impact automated word counts, the system does not limit what can be submitted for each section. It is unlikely a reader will assign an "Unsatisfactory" evaluation solely on the basis of exceeding the limit of a section by a few words. You should be aware, however, that disregarding word limits has been identified as a factor in "Unsatisfactory" evaluations on past exams. The system's word count for a test taker's answer is displayed in the lower right corner of the response box (next to the resizing control).

4. The exam must be completed before the conclusion of the allotted time limit or the close of the 60-hour examination period. The testing system will deny access to the exam after either of those limits is reached.

5. Maintaining the candidate's anonymity is of fundamental importance to assure fair evaluation of examination papers. **Failure to comply with any of the following instructions will result in an unsatisfactory exam:**

   - Do not include the test taker's name.

   - Do not include the name of the test taker's congregation or presbytery.

- Do not identify the seminary the test taker attends or has attended.
- Do not include a web address that includes any form of a personal name relating to your digital file storage (e.g., https://my.sharepoint.com/:p/:g/personal/jess_demo/...).
- Do not identify professors with whom the test taker has studied, except in citations of their published works in references (responses must not indicate personal relationships between the test taker and authors whose work is cited).
- Do not indicate whether the test taker has taken this or other ordination exams before.
- Do not indicate whether the test taker is writing this exam in his or her primary language (for example, "English is not my primary language.")

6. *Important:* Read the entire question before beginning to write your response.

Standards for Satisfying the Theological Competence Requirement

The examination consists of three sections. Three possible evaluations are available to the readers: "Satisfactory" (S); "Unsatisfactory" (U); and "Disqualified" (D, used when candidates fail to maintain their anonymity by disclosing any of the prohibited information listed in the "Specific Instructions"). Each section of the examination will receive its own evaluation, and the agreement between the evaluations of at least two out of the three sections determines the reader's overall evaluation of the exam. However, if any section receives the "Disqualified" evaluation, then the examination receives a mandatory overall evaluation of "Unsatisfactory."

Each examination will be evaluated independently by two readers. If both overall evaluations are "S," a final evaluation of "Satisfactory" will be recorded for the exam. If both readers evaluate the exam overall as "U," the exam receives a final evaluation of "Unsatisfactory." If the two readers disagree in their overall evaluations, the exam will be assigned to a third reader. The final evaluation of the exam will be determined by the two concurring overall evaluations.

Each reader's comments represent his or her considered appraisal of the paper. These comments are read by the candidate and the presbytery committee responsible for oversight of the candidate's preparation for ministry.

Worship and Sacraments Exam

The General Assembly has approved the following description for the Worship and Sacraments examination:

> This examination shall assess the candidate's understanding of the meaning and purpose of corporate worship and the Sacraments, familiarity with the Directory for Worship and *The Book of Confessions,* and their application to the life of worshiping communities.

Description and Preparation Guidelines

The Worship and Sacraments examination provides an opportunity for the candidate to show how *The Book of Confessions* and the Directory for Worship provide direction for those seeking to lead God's people in worship, faithful to the Reformed heritage of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

Worship and Sacraments are central to the development of faithful disciples within a community of faith. Because they are so central to our identity, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has always embraced the sense that our liturgical celebrations should be ordered according to constitutional standards. These standards are not so much "rules" as they are a communal discernment of, and reflection on, what God in Scripture would have us do and say in our worship.

What the Examination Tests

In preparing for the standard examination in Worship and Sacraments, it would be helpful to know, and on occasion to review, what the examination is testing.

THE FOCUS IN EACH SECTION OF THE EXAMINATION

The Worship and Sacraments examination has three sections: Reformed Liturgical Heritage; Constructive Theological Reflection on Reformed Worship; and Application to Ministry.

Reformed Liturgical Heritage

The worship life of our denomination reflects the conviction that the church's worship, witness and service are inseparable and that the worship of our churches is to be informed by Reformed theology. It is thus important that you be able to demonstrate your knowledge of the theological foundations for our worship. A well-grounded knowledge of *The Book of Confessions* is essential for answering some of the "why" questions that confront pastors in a parish setting.

This section of the examination is designed specifically to assess your ability to function as a *practical theologian* within the *distinctive framework* of a *Reformed theological and liturgical heritage* as these are expressed within *The Book of Confessions* and the Directory for Worship. Because this question always requires you to cite specific passages from *The Book of Confessions*, you will need to use a copy of that constitutional resource.

Ordinarily, the required responses will indicate the minimum number of citations from *The Book of Confessions* required for an acceptable response. In some cases you will discover a potentially large number of possible citations from which to draw; in other cases, you may discover that the number of appropriate citations is more limited. In either case, you should always seek to cite those passages that focus most directly on the issue at hand.

When the issue is addressed in several creeds or confessions, or when the confessional tradition witnesses to differences in emphasis (particularly between one historical era and another) the citations you offer should show that you are aware of the broad sweep of the Reformed confessional tradition.

The required responses may not call for you to cite specific passages from the Directory for Worship, but they do insist that you demonstrate a sufficient awareness of the Directory's provisions that bear upon the issue under discussion. Some questions may move from knowledge of *The Book of Confessions* to a particular liturgical situation, while others may arise within a worship context and need support from *The Book of Confession.*

Constructive Theological Reflection on Reformed Worship

The Directory for Worship, adopted in 1989 and revised in 2017, includes mandated and proscribed practices, but it also sets forth a fundamental practical theology of Christian worship, within which pastors and congregations are encouraged to explore new possibilities for worship that are appropriate to particular congregational contexts. Thus, your ability to function as a practical liturgical theologian, to develop a Reformed theological framework within which to address difficult questions, concerns or issues is a necessary dimension of "readiness for ministry" and the focus of this section of the examination.

This section of the examination asks you to engage in constructive theological reflection on a significant issue or practice within the church's understanding and practice of worship. This reflection, which is to be shaped by the specific form of the required responses, must be done in a way that demonstrates familiarity with the provisions of the Directory for Worship.

In many instances, the specific issue or practice under consideration is not addressed directly in the Directory of Worship. In every case, however, it is possible to use the provisions of the Directory for Worship to develop or construct a theological framework within which the issue can be understood and addressed in ways faithful to the spirit of the Directory.

In constructing this theological framework, you will need to weave together provisions from a variety of places within the Directory, but the fundamental building blocks for this task can often be found most often in Chapter 1 (the dynamics or worship), Chapter 2 (the elements of worship) and Chapter 3 (ordering worship).

Application to Ministry

You will be expected to demonstrate "appropriate pastoral sensitivity" to those persons involved in the situation. The readers will be looking for sincere and concrete expressions of the care and understanding that people deserve.

The distinctive emphasis in this final section of the exam is your ability to *apply* provisions in the Directory for Worship to concrete situations that might occur in the practice of ministry, and to do so in ways that demonstrate appropriate pastoral sensitivity to particular persons. This section of the examination is particularly important in discerning your readiness for ministry. While knowledge of the provisions of the Directory for Worship is essential, it is also insufficient. Your ability to respond to particular persons in a pastorally appropriate manner is also essential.

Often, the question in this section of the examination will focus upon your understanding of the material in chapter 4 (ordering worship for special occasions), and chapter 5 (worship and Christian life), and sometimes used to test your ability to apply your knowledge of the Directory's understanding and practices of Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

You will have access to *both* the *Book of Confessions* and the Directory for Worship, as well as any other resources available to you. Thus, as you demonstrate familiarity with the provisions of the Directory, you will also be able to cite or quote specific passages. However, unless a question calls for specific numbers of citations, readers will not necessarily be expecting *direc*t citations or quotations from these materials in Sections II and III of the exams. If you do use these or other materials in developing your answer, you must properly cite them within your response.

HELPFUL HINTS FOR ANSWERING EACH SECTION OF THE EXAMINATION

Perhaps the most important preparation you can make is to pay attention to the language of the Preface to the *Book of Order*, particularly the hermeneutical or interpretive framework for reading the Constitution which is set forth in the Preface.

(1) SHALL and IS TO BE/ARE TO BE signify practice that is mandated,

(2) SHOULD signifies practice that is strongly recommended,

(3) IS APPROPRIATE signifies practice that is commended as suitable.

(4) MAY signifies practice that is permissible but not required.

Reformed Liturgical Heritage:

Begin your preparation by studying those sections of the *Book of Confessions* that are referenced in footnotes throughout the Directory for Worship. These references indicate how the committee that developed the Directory attempted to do its work in conversation with our Reformed theological heritage. These references are important in seeing the connections between particular provisions of the Directory and particular creedal or confessional texts. Expand your preparation by reflecting upon the relationship between particular doctrinal themes and the Directory's discussion of particular liturgical elements or celebrations. For example, the Directory lifts up the theological significance of covenant in its descriptions of Baptism, the Lord's Supper, marriage, etc.

Prepare for the Theological Competence and Worship and Sacraments examinations at the same time. What you learn preparing for one will almost always help you in your preparation for the other, since both examinations require a discussion of *Book of Confessions* citations.

Pay attention to the specific instructions in each of the required responses. If the response requires you to identify and discuss at least three confessional citations, then identify and discuss at least three citations, making certain that each of them is central to the issues or questions involved. If these three citations are on target, citing and discussing additional references will often lead a reader to give a more positive evaluation for this section. Failure to identify and discuss at least three citations, however, or simply listing without discussing any number of citations will result in an "Unsatisfactory" evaluation for this section of the examination. In addition, when the instructions require you to do something in the second part of the answer on the basis of your answer in the first part, make sure you show the connection.

Readers are given these or similar instructions in evaluating this section of the examination:

> One key to be considered in evaluating this section is the extent to which the required responses cohere with one another. In other words, does the candidate's answer in the second part of the question really flow from and reflect the answer given in the first section? Candidates have access to both the *Book of Confessions* and the *Book of Order* with its Directory for Worship for *all* sections of the exam. Nevertheless they are *only required* to cite or quote specific passages from the *Confessions* or the Directory in their answers as directed in the questions, although they should clearly demonstrate their knowledge of the Directory's provisions. Candidates will need to link the confessions' and creeds' teaching with the church's understanding and practice.
>
> It is not necessary for the candidate to cite and discuss every possible *Book of Confessions* reference, but those references cited and discussed should be central to the issue under discussion.

Constructive Theological Reflection on Reformed Worship:

In one sense, it is difficult to prepare for this section of the examination. In Section I, the focus upon the relationship between the church's worship and its confessional heritage provides a kind of road map for how to proceed. Likewise, in Section III the need to address a specific series of comments and questions and respond to particular persons in a pastorally appropriate manner sets up the answer in a very concrete way. Section II, by contrast, is more open-ended. The situation identifies a problem or concern that you will need to address, but asks that you first set up a theological framework within which you will attempt to address the problem or problems. In order to do that, you will need to make use of the Directory as whole, and not just those sections that may deal specifically with the topic at hand.

The most important thing to do is to focus upon the way the Directory for Worship is structured or organized, because it provides a model for how to construct a theological framework within which specific issues of understanding and practice can be addressed. The Directory begins by outlining the theological foundations for Christian worship (Chapter 1). It then moves on to identify and discuss the essential elements of Christian worship (Chapter 2). Next it discusses how worship is to be ordered in both ordinary contexts (Chapter 3) and in special contexts (Chapter 4). The final chapter is devoted to the relationship between worship and personal discipleship and the church's ministries to the community of faith and the world (Chapter 5).

Ordinarily, a "Satisfactory" answer in Section II of the examination will depend minimally upon your ability to work constructively with the provisions in the first three (sometimes four) chapters of the Directory. Occasionally, Section II will involve a situation which is discussed quite specifically in one of the later chapters of the Directory, but even in such cases, you can develop a perfectly acceptable passing answer just by drawing upon your knowledge of the provisions in the Directory's first three or four chapters. If your answer demonstrates your knowledge of all sections of the Directory, however, it will often receive a more positive evaluation by the readers.

Work together with someone else (or several others) in your preparation, using questions of the type drawn from previous standard examinations or from questions developed by the members of the group. Focus upon pastoral situations that may seem to challenge the normative language of the Directory.

Remember that the first task is almost always to articulate a *Reformed* understanding or theological framework within which to address the specific issue, request or problem raised in the question. Absent that theological framework, the answer to the question will be "Unsatisfactory," even though the response to the specific situation might be in compliance with the Directory for Worship.

Readers are given these or similar instructions to guide them in evaluating answers in Section II:

> This section of the examination asks the candidate to engage in constructive reflection and on some liturgical topic or issue as this informed by Reformed theology and practice. This constructive statement is to be shaped by the specific form of the two required responses. The answer must be one that demonstrates familiarity with the provisions of the Directory for Worship. In order to receive a "Satisfactory" evaluation on this section of the examination, the candidate must fulfill both required responses. The first required response asks the candidate to articulate a Reformed theological framework for understanding some matter within the worship life of the church. The second required response asks the candidate – *informed by his or her answer in the first required response* – to engage in a practical theological task (e.g., writing a newsletter article). The range of possible answers to the second required response will depend upon the number and quality of the Directory resources chosen by the candidate in developing the theological framework. In every case, however, the answer to the second required response must grow out of the theological framework offered in the first required response. In this section of the examination, there is no explicit rubric requiring the candidate to demonstrate "appropriate pastoral sensitivity" in responding. Thus, one may not evaluate a candidate's answer more or less positively because of the pastoral sensitivity issue here. On the other hand, if the candidate shows either remarkable pastoral sensitivity or frighteningly high insensitivity in responding, you would be fully justified in pointing it out in a note to the presbytery committee responsible for overseeing the person's preparation for ministry. One could argue that "readiness for ministry" includes demonstrating appropriate pastoral sensitivity all the time, not merely when one is "on duty." Demonstration of appropriate pastoral sensitivity *is specifically at issue in Part III* of the examination; because of the need to bring together many ideas from the Directory in a very brief time, however, it is not central in this section of the examination.

Application to Ministry:

Questions in this section are taken from every part of the Directory for Worship. One of the things that make this section of the examination distinctive is the focus upon liturgical and sacramental *practices* – including some practices with which you may be unfamiliar – within a variety of congregational contexts. Thus, one of the first steps in preparing for this section of the examination would be to review chapters three and four, where the many ways in which the ordering of such "practices" is set forth. Pay attention to three things in particular: first, norms regarding sacramental celebrations; second, the fundamental patterns or frameworks for ordering Christian worship; and third, the wide variety and distinctive character of services appropriate for special purposes.

Pay attention to the ways in which the Directory links the whole of the Christian life to worship, such that worship shapes and is shaped by personal discipleship, communal nurture and care, and the church's mission in the world. Note the explicit ways in which patterns and norms from earlier chapters in the directory take form in the Directory's discussion of the relationship between, for example, worship and the church's ministry of evangelism or social justice.

The setting of the question focuses this section of the examination is in a very particular way. Often, the comments or questions of other persons will lift up the issues to be explored, and you will be required to show "appropriate pastoral sensitivity" in responding to these persons. Pastoral sensitivity includes both affirmation and confrontation, but it never involves manipulating or demeaning the persons involved.

Readers of the examinations are reminded that there are often multiple issues that could be addressed on the basis of the situation, and that candidates may choose from among them in answering the question. If the situation involves several people and you are asked to discuss at least one issue raised by each of them, your answer needs to show that you have done so. Occasionally, the question in this section of the exam will ask you to discuss particular types of worship services or to write prayers appropriate for sacramental celebrations based on the provisions of the Directory for Worship. In such cases, readers are advised of possible alternative ways that candidates may take in developing satisfactory answers.

General Instructions for the Worship and Sacraments Exam

A maximum of nine (9) hours is permitted for completion of the Worship and Sacraments examination, beginning with the display of the first section. All sections of the test are open book. Candidates may use whatever resources they have available, but they must give credit for any resources used (see the specific instructions below related to "Resource Material").

The examination consists of three sections. All three sections are required. Some sections of the exam may take substantially longer to complete than others, depending on the nature of the required responses or ministry work products. There is, however, no expectation that anyone will need a full nine hours of uninterrupted work to fulfill the requirements of the examination. *The total word count for all required responses in each section of the exam is not to exceed 1,500 words* (not counting words used for required bibliographical information).

This examination shall assess the candidate's understanding of the meaning and purpose of corporate worship and the sacraments, familiarity with the Directory for Worship and *The Book of Confessions,* and their application to the life of worshiping communities.

Questions on this examination deal with both worship and sacraments. Test takers will be expected to demonstrate the following:

- An ability to illustrate the connection between the contemporary understandings and practices of worship set forth in the Directory for Worship and the theological heritage of the Reformed tradition as it is expressed in *The Book of Confessions*
- An ability to articulate a Reformed theological framework for addressing issues and practices related to worship and sacraments that arise from contemporary contexts for ministry
- An ability to discern theological components in liturgical situations that may arise in ministry
- An ability to discuss provisions of the Directory for Worship and to apply them in concrete contexts for ministry
- An ability to reflect theologically and pastorally on the many different relationships between the ways the church understands and carries out its ministry and mission in the world and its worship and celebration of the sacraments
- An ability to respond to individuals or groups in given situations with sensitivity to their needs, while also expressing the spirit of the constitutional standards

In writing their answers, test takers should bear in mind that presbyteries elect ruling elders and ministers of the Word and Sacrament to serve as readers. Examinations should be written in jargon-free language. Technical language should be used only where the task requires it or where it is appropriate.

The nine-hour examination is divided into three required sections:

> Section I is a question about Reformed liturgical heritage. You will be required to consult a copy of *The Book of Confessions*.
>
> Section II is a question calling for a constructive theological reflection on Reformed worship.
>
> Section III deals with application to ministry.

Specific Instructions for the Worship and Sacraments Exam

Technology and Online Administration: The Worship and Sacraments exam is given using computers actively accessing an Internet-based testing program. It is the test taker's responsibility to be prepared to comply with the technological requirements necessary to access the exam online and to have become familiar with the testing system before the examination period begins. Mid Council Ministries of the Office of the General Assembly provide a range of online resources in both text and video formats to assist with this preparation (see the "Taking the Senior Examinations" chapter of this handbook, and visit http://www.pcusa.org/prep4min and click on "Online Training Opportunities").

Languages: The Worship and Sacraments exam is available in English, Korean, and Spanish. The choice between these language options is made during registration and may not be changed at the time of the examination. Please be aware that while the questions themselves will be displayed by the online testing system in Spanish or Korean in accord with the registration, all instructions and testing system prompts appear only in English.

Form: Examinations are not evaluated on the basis of writing style. However, the evaluation of responses may be affected if they cannot be understood because of poor syntax, grammar, or spelling errors.

Honesty: Each test taker must do his or her own work, without receiving aid from or giving aid to anyone during the Worship and Sacraments examination period. During the initial login for the exam they will be asked to affirm that they will abide by the Presbyteries' Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates (PCC) "Affirmation of Compliance with Examination Procedures in the Area of Worship and Sacraments." That online affirmation has the same force and expectation as the test taker's signature on a page presenting the honor statement.

The specific wording of the "Affirmation" used with the Worship exam is as follows:

Affirmation of Compliance with Examination Procedures in the Area of Worship and Sacraments

I recognize and affirm the high standard of conduct expected of anyone called to and engaging in the preparation and practice of ordered ministry. As such, I hereby acknowledge the following with regard to submission of my standard ordination exam in Worship and Sacraments:

1) I attest that while writing and submitting my standard ordination exams I will use only resources authorized by the exam instructions and will acknowledge any use of print or digital resources through proper, academic-style citation.

2) I attest that while writing and submitting my standard ordination exams I will *not*:

   a. discuss the examination questions or my responses with anyone;

   b. include in my responses or citations material that would identify either myself or institutions where I am or have been a student (e.g., "course notes from class with Professor Smith," "lecture at Princeton Seminary," weblinks that include any form of a personal name relating to my digital file storage [e.g., https://my.sharepoint.com/:p/:g/personal/jess_demo/...], etc.).

3) I have not received and I will not share information that discloses the content of examination questions or my responses by any means of personal or remote communications (telephone, email, social media, etc.) during the testing dates for particular examination areas. I understand that this requirement does not preclude seeking pastoral or mental health support during the exam period provided no material assistance is given in answering the exam questions themselves.

4) I understand that once submitted my responses will be reviewed by a program that will compare them to all other submitted responses and materials available on the Internet.

> In the writing of the ordination examinations I will follow appropriate conduct as expected by scripture, the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA), and the Standards of Ethical Conduct.

Time of the Examination: Test takers are eligible to take the Worship and Sacraments exam only during the 60-hour period from 8:00 a.m. US Eastern Time on the announced Thursday of the testing period to 8:00 p.m. US Eastern Time on the Saturday of the testing period. It is the test takers' responsibility to begin the exam sufficiently in advance of 8:00 p.m. on Saturday for the full nine-hour allotted time to be available. The testing system will also keep track of the time elapsed since the first section is displayed, and will strictly enforce the nine-hour time limit. *Test takers are not permitted further access to the exam after their allotted time has expired or the testing period has ended, whichever comes first.*

Candidates who may also be taking the Theological Competence and Church Polity exams need to be aware that the same 60-hour testing period applies to all three of these areas of examination. It is each candidate's responsibility to manage her or his time to assure that any of these three areas of examination for which they are registered have been completed by the 8:00 p.m. close of testing on the announced Saturday of the examination period.

Test takers are strongly encouraged to compose their responses using the word processing features of the examination website response box. They may copy and paste responses from another word processing program to the exam website, but may not do so once their allotted time has ended.

Accessing the Examination: Test takers must have the login information associated with their exam registration profile in order to access the Worship and Sacraments exam. If they need assistance recovering or resetting their password, please contact the Associate Director for Ministry Leadership Development before the testing date. Staff availability to assist with these matters outside of normal business hours of the Presbyterian Center cannot be guaranteed. The examinations will be available from the candidate's "My Profile" page on the examinations website (http://exams.pcusa.org) during the 60-hour testing period.

Internet Connection Issues: Should the test taker lose connection to the testing system for any reason during the exam, she or he should log back into the test site once the Internet connection is re-established. The test will resume at the beginning, but test takers may use the "Next" or "Go to Page" buttons on the question pages to proceed past work already saved to the system to reach the point where they left off. *Time offline is included in the nine hours allotted for the exam.*

Resource Material: A printed copy and/or a PDF version of *The Book of Confessions* (copyright 2014 or later) will be needed for Section I and may be used as a resource for Section II and Section III of the examination. (*The Shorter Catechism* and *The Larger Catechism* of the Westminster Standards will be considered one document for the purposes of this examination.) All sections of the test are open book. Citations from the *The Book of Confessions* and the *Book of Order* must be cited in the customary format for Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) constitutional documents (for example, "The 'chief end' of human existence 'is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever' (Westminster Shorter Catechism, 7.001)."). Candidates may use whatever other resources they have available, but they must give credit for any resources using proper "in-text" citation formats and include proper bibliographical information at the end of the response where the citation appears. Lecture materials and personal conversations do not require citation. In formulating citations, candidates are reminded that disclosing seminaries they attend or have attended or professors with whom they have studied will result in disqualification of the examination and a mandatory "Unsatisfactory" evaluation.

Reminders for Formulating Responses:

1. Each question of the exam will have specific response boxes on the exam administration website. Test takers should be sure that their answers are entered in the proper response box for each question. Submissions that supply answers in the incorrect response boxes will be evaluated as "Unsatisfactory."

2. Test takers must provide original answers to the exam questions. When using written material from other sources, they must identify the author and page number. They must also identify electronic sources, either software or on-line. They must use parenthetical citations within the text of their answers since the system will not accept endnotes or footnotes. Since there is not a separate "Works Cited" section in the Worship and Sacraments exam, *full bibliographical information should be included at the end of the response for each section.*

3. All sections of this examination apply a word-count limit of 1,500 words to the responses. Any words in a response used to provide bibliographical information in support of reference citations are not counted as part of this 1,500-word limit. Because browser settings, the amount of formatting, inclusion of reference bibliography, etc. impact automated word counts, the system does not limit what can be submitted for each section. It is unlikely a reader will assign an "Unsatisfactory" evaluation solely on the basis of exceeding the limit of a section by a few words. You should be aware, however, that disregarding word limits has been identified as a factor in "Unsatisfactory" evaluations on past exams. The system's word count for a test taker's answer is displayed in the lower right corner of the response box (next to the resizing control).

4. The exam must be completed before the conclusion of the allotted time limit or the close of the 60-hour examination period. The testing system will deny access to the exam after either of those limits is reached.

5. Maintaining the candidate's anonymity is of fundamental importance to assure fair evaluation of examination papers. **Failure to comply with any of the following instructions will result in an unsatisfactory exam:**

   - Do not include the test taker's name.

   - Do not include the name of the test taker's congregation or presbytery.

   - Do not identify the seminary the test taker attends or has attended.

- Do not include a web address that includes any form of a personal name relating to your digital file storage (e.g., https://my.sharepoint.com/:p/:g/personal/jess_demo/...).
- Do not identify professors with whom the test taker has studied, except in citations of their published works in references (responses must not indicate personal relationships between the test taker and authors whose work is cited).
- Do not indicate whether the test taker has taken this or other ordination exams before.
- Do not indicate whether the test taker is writing this exam in his or her primary language (for example, “English is not my primary language.”).

6. *Important:* Read the entire question before beginning to write your response.

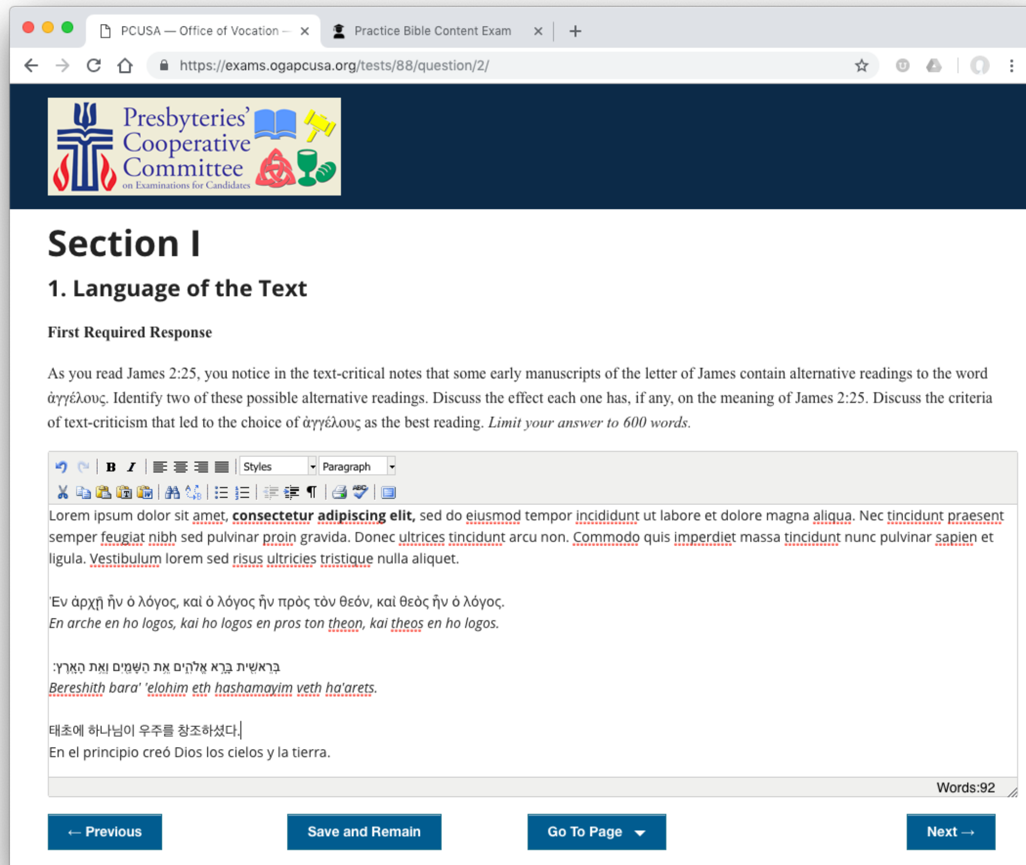
Standards for Satisfying the Worship and Sacraments Requirement

The examination consists of three sections. Three possible evaluations are available to the readers: “Satisfactory” (S); “Unsatisfactory” (U); and “Disqualified” (D, used when candidates fail to maintain their anonymity by disclosing any of the prohibited information listed in the “Specific Instructions”). Each section of the examination will receive its own evaluation, and the agreement between the evaluations of at least two out of the three sections determines the reader’s overall evaluation of the exam. However, if any section receives the “Disqualified” evaluation, then the examination receives a mandatory overall evaluation of “Unsatisfactory.”

Each examination will be evaluated independently by two readers. If both overall evaluations are “S,” a final evaluation of “Satisfactory” will be recorded for the exam. If both readers evaluate the exam overall as “U,” the exam receives a final evaluation of “Unsatisfactory.” If the two readers disagree in their overall evaluations, the exam will be assigned to a third reader. The final evaluation of the exam will be determined by the two concurring overall evaluations.

Each reader’s comments represent his or her considered appraisal of the paper. These comments are read by the candidate and the presbytery committee responsible for oversight of the candidate’s preparation for ministry.

TAKING THE SENIOR EXAMS



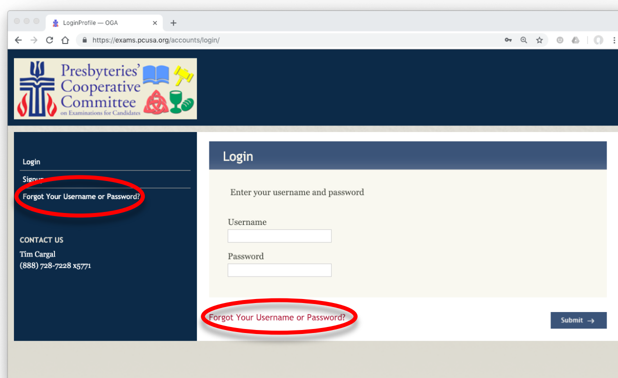
The Online Examination Process

This chapter is designed as a guided tour of the online system for taking the Polity, Theology, and Worship and Sacraments examinations of the Presbyterian Church (USA). A separate section within the chapter deals with some particular issues unique to the Exegesis exam. These materials focus on just the process for using the Internet-based testing platform. They do not go over all the instructions or information you need to know about taking these examinations. For that, you will need to review the sections of this *Handbook* for each particular exam. A "Frequently Asked Questions" (FAQ) section is included at the end of this chapter for quick reference. Icons at various points in the text of this section identify video demonstrations are provided as part of the "Senior Ordination Exam Preparation" course on the "Equip" training website (see the example at left for the "Overview of Taking Exams").


Overview of Taking Exams

The *Most* Important Thing ...

Everything related to the senior ordination examinations—whether registering for an exam, taking it at the scheduled time, or reviewing results once they are released—begins at the same website: https://exams.pcusa.org. ***The week before the exam, test takers should go to that website and login to their account to view their profiles.*** Office staff will be much more available to assist those having problems several days before the exam than during the testing period. Additionally, ***staff will not be available outside the business hours of the Presbyterian Center (8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Eastern time, Monday to Friday).***




Reset Password

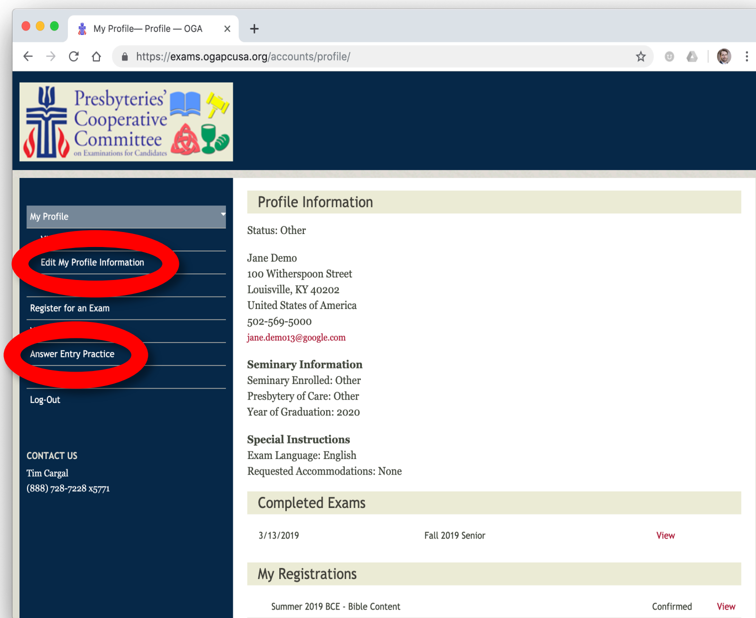
Test takers who do not remember their password and who can access their email from the computer they are using can click on either "Forgot your password?" link that appears on the "Account" login screen (see the sample screen shot above) to have an automated message sent with a customized link that enables resetting the password. They must use the same email address that is in their profile because that is how the system associates the password with the appropriate account. The email will also include their username in case that has been forgotten as well.

As emphasized elsewhere in this handbook, ***it is very important that inquirers and candidates not create multiple user accounts in the exam system***. If a person has more than one "Username," it is very possible that the exam will be associated with an account other than the one that the test taker used at login; in such cases, the exam will not be available to the candidate. Other issues arise from multiple accounts as well. All of the candidate's exam results will not be consolidated into a single report. Additionally, if a single email address is associated with more than one user account it will not be possible to reset the password through the automated message process. Test takers who cannot remember their account information and are unable to recover it using the "Forgot your password?" link should contact the Associate Director for Ministry Leadership Development for assistance.

Update Profile

Answer Entry Practice Area

Once logged in, the test taker's "Profile Information" page will be displayed. This page may be visited at any time to update basic personal information ("Edit My Profile …" under the "My Profile" options in the left-side menu), check the status of exams or registrations, review past exam results, or even practice entering responses into the exam system. Test takers are strongly encouraged to use the "Answer Entry Practice" utility to familiarize themselves with the testing environment before the exams.



Acceptable Computing Devices

A major advantage of the exam system having been built on World Wide Web technology is that it works on any widely available operating system and in any standards-based Internet browser (such as Explorer, Safari, Firefox, or Chrome). The system does require that the browser permit Java scripts. This feature is used by many Internet sites, and so most likely this will be a default setting for the browser. If the computer administrator has disabled this function, however, it will need to be activated to navigate the examinations site.

Tablet Devices

Test takers do need to be aware that browsers that run on so-called "mobile" or "tablet" devices (like the iPad) do have some differences from their computer operating system-based siblings. Test takers planning to use a tablet device for taking the exams are strongly encouraged to be very comfortable with its use in web-based applications and to have a physical keyboard. Test takers do not want to be experimenting with new computing devices or applications while under the stress of the exams and the pressure of the time constraints. Those wishing to use these types of devices are strongly encouraged to try out the exact hardware configuration with the "Answer Entry Practice" option on their "My Profile" page well before the examination to be sure everything is working correctly so that alternative arrangements can be made if necessary.

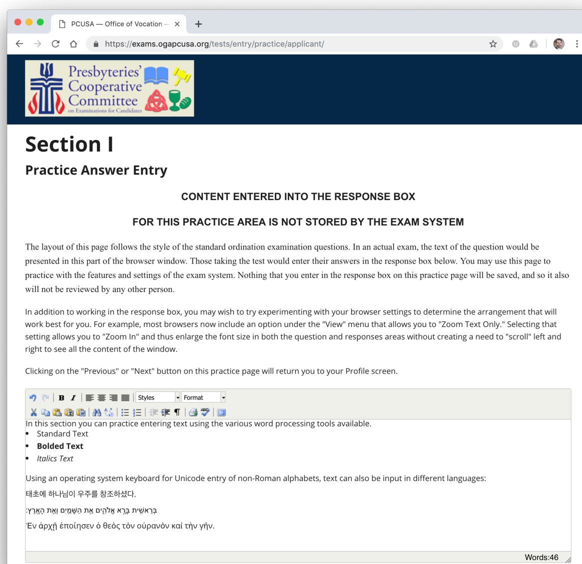
Adjusting Text Size

Depending on their web browser's preference settings, test takers may find the size of the display type too small. Most recent browsers provide an option in the "View" menus to "Zoom Text Only." By selecting that option, test takers may then use the "Zoom In" to enlarge the display size of the text (or "Zoom Out" to decrease the size) to where it is comfortable without creating a display situation where they must "scroll" left and right to see everything in the browser window.

Use of non-English Alphabets

Non-English Alphabets

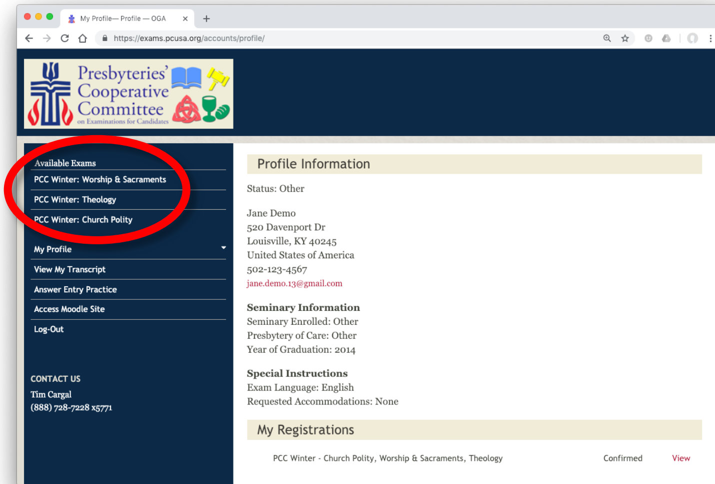
If test takers need to include characters from a "non-Roman" alphabet such as Korean, Greek, or Hebrew, they need to be aware that the online exam system is Internet-based and operates on World Wide Web standards. The good news is that means it can handle any "non-Roman" alphabet whether or not other users (for example, readers and presbytery representatives who will review the exam) have the same fonts installed on their computers as the test takers. But this compatibility requires that such text must be entered as Unicode. If the computer on which the exam is being taken has an activated operating system keyboard for one of these languages, it will almost certainly use Unicode in conjunction with that keyboard. Test takers who will be using "non-Roman" system keyboards are strongly encouraged to use the "Answer Entry Practice" option from your account's "My Profile" page to confirm that your system configuration is functioning properly within the online exams environment.



Accessing an Examination

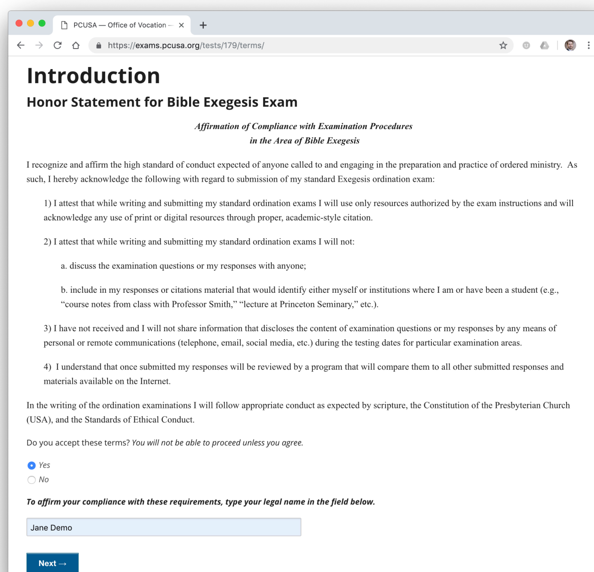
During the scheduled testing window for senior exams (see the description of the timing of these exams on p. 10), test takers should open their web browsers and go to https://exams.pcusa.org. That page will display general information about registering for exams since most days of the year that is why people visit the site. Test takers should scroll down to the "Login to Your Account" button and click on it. When the "Account" login screen is displayed, they will enter the "Username" and "Password" used to register for the exams.

After login, the test taker will see the “Profile” page associated with the user account. During the scheduled testing window for each senior exam, the heading, “Available Exams” will be displayed at the top of the left-side menu options. If the test taker has registered for more than one senior exam, any exams in the active testing window that have not yet been submitted will be listed. Test takers are permitted to begin work on the available exams in any order they wish. To take a test, click on the subject area title for that exam. Keep in mind that the available time for completion of a Polity, Theology, or Worship and Sacraments exam begins when its first question is displayed; *test takers should not open any of those exams until they are ready to work on it all the way through to its completion.* If you open more than one exam at a time, the time periods for those exams will run simultaneously.



Introductory Screens

The first page displayed is the “honor statement” related to the exam about to be taken. After reading this material, test takers must click the button next to the word “Yes” in response to the question concerning whether they will abide by these requirements. They must type their legal name in the response field provided, which serves as their signature in this online testing platform. Finally, they will click on the “Next” button at the bottom of the page. If they have not completed these steps, the system will display an error message and will not permit them to proceed further until they indicate in this way that they understand and will abide by these requirements.



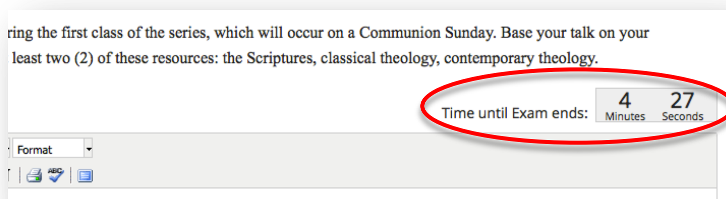
The second introductory page provides a summary of the most important instructions for taking the exam. Test takers receive a full statement of the instructions with the confirmation of their exam registration—and the instructions are also available in the corresponding sections of this *Handbook*. What are displayed at the beginning of the exam are simply some quick reminders of things that, if not followed, could result in a mandatory "Unsatisfactory" evaluation of the exam.

One of the most important instructions is the last one on the list: "***You should only use the 'Previous,' 'Go To Page,' or 'Next' buttons below the response box on each page to move between pages of this exam.*** Using your browser's "Back" or "Forward" button could result in the loss of information entered in the question response boxes." (See sample screen below.)

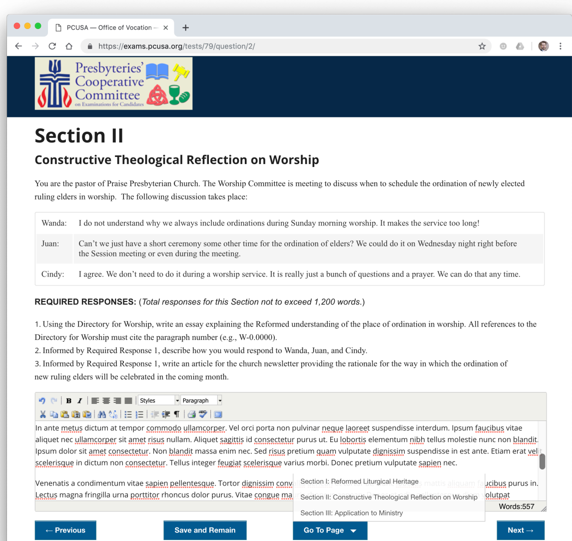
The Examination Itself

The clock that tracks the time permitted to complete the examination begins when the first question page is displayed on the computer. The exam system will strictly enforce the time limit for each particular test taker; *once time has expired or the end of the testing window is reached, the test will be closed automatically and no further changes can be made to the answers*. Although the screen will not display the time remaining throughout the entire exam, a warning clock may be displayed on the screen between the question and the response area to countdown the final five minutes of the particular candidate's exam time. *Please be aware that certain browser security settings can prevent the count down time from being displayed or updated.* If test takers see that timer, they need to quickly wrap-up work on their exam. Remember: the time begins when the first question is displayed, and the system strictly enforces the time limit.

Time Limits



Because the system cannot control the device's browser settings to make it display the final timer, *it is the test taker's responsibility to make note of when they began the exam and to submit their work before the time limit is reached.*



Each question appears on its own page of the examination website (see the sample screen from a past Worship and Sacraments at left). The scenario is presented at the top of the page along with the related "Required Responses." Just below that is the response box for the test taker's answer to the question. It is like a basic word processor. The functions performed by the different formatting buttons are discussed later in this chapter in the "Style Guide for Online Exams" section.

The final button in the second row can be used to enlarge the response box to fill the browser window to provide more editing space. It will also, however, prevent the test taker from scrolling back to review the question or seeing the warning timer as the end of the test period approaches. A better way to increase workspace is by using the sizing tool in the bottom right corner of the response box. "Click and drag" that corner to shape the box as desired.

"Saving" Work to Servers


Saving Work

The exam system performs an automatic background "save" of whatever is in the response box every three minutes and at any time when a navigation button at the bottom of the page ("Previous", "Go To Page", or "Next") is clicked. If at any point test takers want to be sure what they have just written has been transferred to the exam system, they can click the "Save and Remain" button to send it to the servers. The screen displaying the current page will be refreshed, which indicates to the test taker that the transfer was successfully completed.

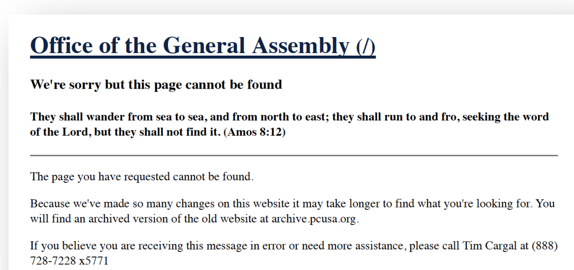
Moving between Sections of an Exam


Moving to Pages within the Exam

When test takers have finished work on each question, they should click on "Next" to move on to the next question, or the "Go To Page" button to select a specific page within the exam. When the "Go To Page" button is clicked, a selection list displays showing each section of the exam; simply click on the name for the section to which you wish to move. This option is especially helpful for moving between the many portions of the Exegesis examination. At the bottom of the second and subsequent question pages there will be displayed a "Previous" button to move back to an earlier question.

Test takers should always use the "Previous", "Go To Page", or "Next" buttons in the exam question and response window; their browser's "Back" and "Forward" buttons in the menu bar do not send answers to the system servers. *Using the browser's "Back" or "Forward" button could result in the loss of information entered into the question response boxes.*

There is only one circumstance when test takers will want to use the browser's "Back" button, but it is an important one. Should they lose their Internet connection while working on the exam, when they click either "Previous," "Save and Remain," "Go to Page," or "Next," they will get an error screen like the one shown at the right. Before doing anything else they must click on their browser's "Back" button. That will recover from their computer's cache what was in the


Office of the General Assembly (/)

We're sorry but this page cannot be found

They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; they shall run to and fro, seeking the word of the Lord, but they shall not find it. (Amos 8:12)

The page you have requested cannot be found.

Because we've made so many changes on this website it may take longer to find what you're looking for. You will find an archived version of the old website at archive.pcusa.org.

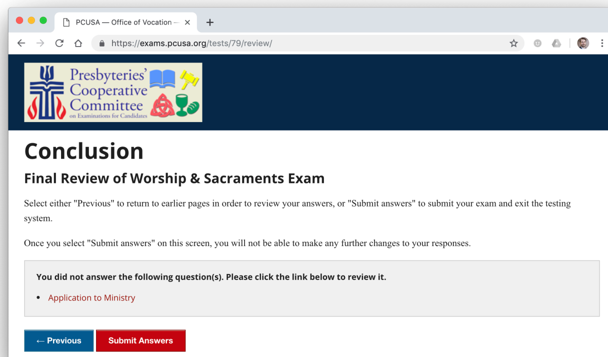
If you believe you are receiving this message in error or need more assistance, please call Tim Cargal at (888) 728-7228 x5771 response box. Then, without closing the browser, they should re-establish their Internet connection. Once back online, can click "Save and Remain" to transfer the answer to the servers.

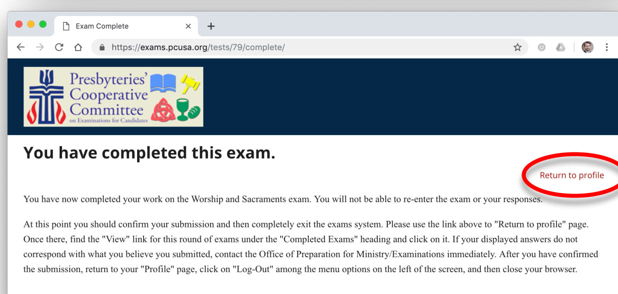
Completing an Examination

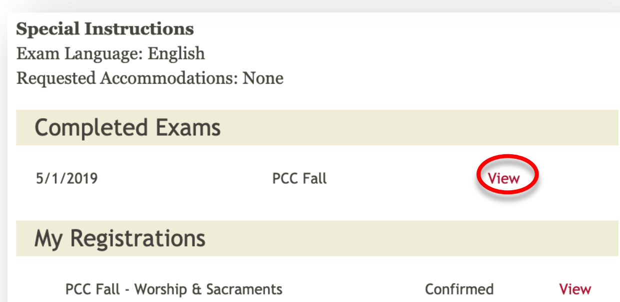
Submitting the Exam

Once a test taker clicks on the "Next" button at the bottom of the last question page, a "Final Review" screen is displayed. If any required response boxes are blank, there will be warning notices asking if the test taker would like to go back and correct those problems (see sample screen below). They may simply click the warning notice to go to the page that needs attention. If no warning notices appear, the "Previous" button will return the test taker to the last section of the exam. Once there, the "Go To Page" button can facilitate moving easily between sections of the test. However, the "Final Review" page can only be reached by using the "Next" button on the last question page of the exam.

The review page does not have a "Next" button; instead, it has a bright red "Submit Answers" button. That button is a visual reminder of a very important point: *once test takers click on "Submit Answers" their exams are closed, and they can no longer make changes to their responses*—even if they have not yet reached the end of their allotted time for the exam. The "Submit Answers" button is a 'point of no return'; it must only be clicked when test takers are certain they have finished work on the exam.







After clicking "Submit Answers," test takers will see a final page indicating, "You have completed this exam." At this point they should confirm their submission and then completely exit the exams system. Using the link in the upper right portion of the window to "Return to profile" page, they will now find the "Completed Exams" heading with a link to "View" exams from the current testing period. Clicking on that link will display the questions and answers for the current exams. If the answers displayed do not correspond with what they believe were submitted, they should contact the Associate

Director for Ministry Leadership Development immediately.

The Associate Director for Ministry Leadership Development is able to review an archive of all transfers to the examination servers. If for any reason a less complete response has overwritten a more complete response, the fuller answer can be recovered from the archive. *Under the PCC established guidelines for the exams, the Associate Director for Ministry Leadership Development is only permitted to restore material already submitted to the servers.* The manager cannot upload answers from word processors or other sources that had not been transferred to the servers during the period when the test taker was logged in to the exam.

After test takers have confirmed the answer submissions, they should return to their “Profile” page, click on “Log-Out” from among the menu options on the left of the screen, and then close their browser. Leaving the browser open (or having multiple exam sessions open in browser tabs/windows) may cause problems with previously submitted work.

Guide to Key Terms Commonly Used in Exam Questions

A standard format for most sections of the Polity, Theology, and Worship and Sacraments exams consists of three components:

- A setup for the question, usually either in the form of a description of a scenario in a ministry setting that serves as a brief case study or a quotation from a source presented for consideration in that section of the exam
- A “Required Response 1” (“RR1”) in which the test taker writes directly for the exam readers in a format designed to demonstrate an understanding of key issues raised in the setup as they relate to the subject area of the exam and the particular focus of that section within the respective exam
- A “Required Response 2” (“RR2”) which requests a specific form of ministry work product that applies the information in “Required Response 1” in response to the scenario

Although the Bible Exegesis exam has a unified structure (rather than three discrete and independent sections), it follows a very similar pattern.

- It opens with a “Ministry Context” that describes a ministry scenario for which a designated scriptural passage is to be interpreted and applied
- An understanding of the passage is to be demonstrated by response to four exegetical questions presented in the exam and a critical, interpretative essay presenting the results of the test taker’s broader study of the passage

- An application of the passage to the scenario presented in the "Ministry Context" through the development of a specified ministry work product (usually either a bible study or a sermon)

This guide presents information about some key terms that the Presbyteries' Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates (PCC) consistently uses in the exams to indicate either how information is to be presented in the "required responses" or to identify a particular type of ministry work product that is to be provided. The goal is to create a shared understanding between test takers and exam readers as to what is, or is not, expected in order to satisfy the requirements for the response.

RR1: Writing for the Exam Reader

Very often the RR1 requested in response to the section's setup is designed to assist the test takers in identifying both for themselves and for the readers who will evaluate the exam what are some of the most essential issues that arise from the case study or quotation. These "issues" might be either problems to be addressed or positive points to be lifted up and commended. In all cases, the exam question will direct that this information be presented in a specific format. Some of the key terms that may be used in these directions are:

- Cite
- Compare
- Discuss
- Essay
- Identify
- Points of Polity
- Quote

These terms may be used either separately (for example, "Cite ...") or in combination with one another (for example, "Cite and discuss ...") to set out the expectations for how the requested information should be presented.

This list of terms is not exhaustive of all the ways test takers may be asked to provide information key to responding to the scenario. They are, however, among the most commonly used by the PCC. In all cases, it is the responsibility of the test taker to carefully read the prompt in RR1 to determine whether it follows the customary pattern and what information is being requested in the particular question.

CITE

The Polity, Theology, and Worship and Sacraments exams may require a specified number of references to the constitutional documents of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (either the *Book* *of Order* or *The Book of Confessions*) be "cited" within the response. In all cases, a "citation" of the constitutional documents will require the appropriate paragraph designation for the material being referenced.

- For *Book of Order* citations, the appropriate form is the letter for the part of the *Book of Order* where the material is found followed by a hyphen ("-"), then the chapter number, a period ("."), and finally the paragraph number (for example, G-2.0607d). The letter designations for each part of the *Book of Order* are:
    - F – The Foundations of Presbyterian Polity
    - G – Form of Government
    - W – Directory for Worship
    - D – Church Discipline
- For *The Book of Confessions*, the appropriate form is the chapter number for the confessional document, a period ("."), and the paragraph number (for example, 7.001).

If citations are being incorporated into the body of a paragraph, it is usually helpful to name for the readers either the part of the *Book of Order* or the confessional document within the sentence/paragraph at least on the first reference rather than relying only on the paragraph designation (for example, "Westminster Shorter Catechism, 7.001," or "in the Form of Government, G-2.06"). In lists of citations, the paragraph designation is sufficient.

In some portions of the constitutional documents a "paragraph designation" may actually cover more than a single paragraph of text (see for example, W-3.0403). If the paragraph being referenced is lengthy or presents several ideas or issues, in addition to the paragraph designation test takers should quote a sufficient portion of the text to make it clear to the readers why that particular citation is relevant to the requested information.

COMPARE

The instructions for a required response may direct the test taker to "compare" two or more items either provided within the question itself or which are to be identified by the test takers as part of their response in the section. A comparison should consider both similarities and differences between these items, as they are present. In most instances the PCC will use the general instruction "compare" rather than the more specific "compare and contrast" in order to provide the test taker the most discretion in deciding how to respond. When the instruction is only "compare," the test taker is *not* required to provide *both* similarities *and* differences, but rather to focus on the similarities and differences that are *most relevant and important in the matter under consideration*. If only similarities are relevant, then the comparison may include only similarities. If the differences are most important, then the comparison may include only differences. If both similarities and differences are relevant and important, then the comparison should include both. If, however, the instruction is the more specific "compare and contrast," then a satisfactory response must include at least one point of similarity and at least one point of difference.

DISCUSS

In many cases, the instruction to "cite" reference materials will be combined with an instruction to "discuss" the citations as well. Such discussion must go beyond simply summarizing or restating the content of the cited reference. Depending on the overall directions within the required response, the discussion might emphasize the reason for why the particular citation was chosen and why it is relevant to the scenario. In other situations, the discussion might provide clarification about the meaning of the cited reference.

In some cases, there may not be a requirement for any explanation of why particular references have been chosen as relevant to the scenario presented or information requested. Usually this will be because there is another "Required Response" for that section of the exam or another portion of the instructions in the current "Required Response" that will direct the test taker to provide some explanation of the reference or its relevance to the scenario. For example, RR1 might require the test taker to "identify" three points of polity raised by the scenario and to "cite" a *Book of Order* reference for each one, but not request any discussion because RR2 will require as a ministry work product the preparation of a section of a manual explaining these polity points in light of the paired *Book of Order* provisions.

ESSAY

An essay response is a common form of written response used in examinations and other assignments in educational systems. The term "essay" is used by the PCC in exam questions in its most general sense. The information should be presented in complete sentences and paragraphs rather than simply as a series of individual phrases in a list format. It should have an introduction, a discussion with a singular purpose or argument, and a conclusion. The ordering of paragraphs within the essay should either build a clearly presented argument or follow the sequence of information as requested by the RR1 prompt. It will generally assist the reader to determine whether all the required elements of the response have been provided if key words from the prompt are used as appropriate.

IDENTIFY

When the word "identify" is used in isolation from the word "essay," it may be appropriate to provide the required information in the form of a list of points describing the type of concerns requested by the prompt. If the descriptions can be communicated in a few words or brief phrases, complete sentences may not be necessary. However, the test taker needs to provide sufficient detail for the reader to have a clear understanding of the issue being identified. If the prompt requires a specified number of concerns to be identified, the test taker needs to be clear that the descriptions communicate how each individual element in the response is distinct from the others being presented.

POINTS OF POLITY

Polity exams consistently use the phrase “point(s) of polity” rather than “polity issue(s)” to reinforce the understanding that the aspects of polity identified in a scenario may be either problematic or commendable. Thus, “points” may relate to things that either should be avoided because they are not permitted under constitutional provisions or other policies, or they may be things required by constitutional provisions or policies. The term is used to remind test takers to be looking for what is being done right or well and not just things that are wrong.

QUOTE

When the required response directs the test taker to “quote” from a constitutional document, it is not sufficient to provide only the paragraph designation. Similarly, requests for references to scripture should include direct quotation from the selected verse(s) to assist the readers in recalling the passage. The candidate must include a portion taken word-for-word from the source that makes clear the relationship between the reference material and the point of the question. As always when any direct use of material that is not the test taker’s own original work is included in a response, every “quote” must be accompanied by a citation in the form appropriate for that particular type of material.

RR2: Ministry Work Products

The fundamental purpose of the standard ordination exams is to assess the ability of candidates to apply their graduate theological education together with their gifts, talents, and experience from field education to common tasks of ministry. In order to make these assessments, the PCC builds into the questions directions to produce various types of ministry work products. Among the most common are:

- (Annotated) Outlines
- “Based on” / “Building on”
- Blogs / Newsletter Articles
- (Direct) Responses
- Lesson Plans
- Letters
- Liturgical Pieces
- Manuals
- Narrative Presentations / Scripts
- Sermons

This list is not exhaustive of all of types of ministry work products test takers may be asked to develop in responding to the setup. They are, however, among the most commonly used by the PCC. In all cases, it is the responsibility of the test taker to carefully read the prompt in RR2 to determine whether it follows the customary pattern of requesting a ministry work product and the specific type of work product being requested.

(ANNOTATED) OUTLINE

Test takers may be directed to develop a presentation that will be presented to a group specified by the directions in the required response. Because of the word count constraints in the exams, any attempt to submit such a presentation verbatim would quickly exceed the limits. Consequently, required responses will typically request an "outline" or "summary of themes" that would be offered in the presentation.

Often the question will specifically call for an "annotated outline," with a parenthetical note that "an annotated outline is an outline with explanatory notes." The annotations should expand upon the content of the information that would be presented beyond what can be communicated in the short phrases typically used in writing outlines. While a test taker might include other types of annotations (for example, relating to how some of the content may be presented), if there are not annotations that communicate substantive content relating to the information requested then the response will be "Unsatisfactory."

As is explained in the Exams Handbook, the automated outline formatting (controlling numbering, indentation, etc.) generated by some word processors will not transfer to the web browser constraints of the online testing system. Test takers can use the block indentation tool in the exam system answer entry box to create some of these format styles. However, both test takers and readers are reminded that the PCC does not require any specific outline format for "(annotated) outline" responses. Clearly communicating the relationships between points in the presentation is what is important, not how the outline looks on the screen.

BASED ON / BUILDING ON

When an exam question/directive relating to a ministry work product explicitly states "Building on" or "Based on your response" to an earlier portion of the section (or, in the case of Exegesis exams, possibly other sections of the exam) there must be clear use of ideas or content from that previous response. That does not mean, however, that portions from the earlier response should simply be repeated verbatim. Stronger responses will be able to relate those ideas or content in ways that more directly relate to the ministry context presented in the exam. For example, "Required Response 1" may have called for direct citations from constitutional documents, but a stronger response "based" or "building on" those previous citations might be a summary or explanation of those citations to persons in the scenario rather than a suggestion the relevant constitutional provisions would simply be read or quoted to them.

BLOGS / NEWSLETTER ARTICLES

While strictly speaking a “blog” is a type of writing posted online and “newsletter articles” have traditionally been printed and mailed to the homes of congregation members or other ministry constituents, as used by the PCC these ministry work products are essentially synonymous. They are generally essays, with an informal tone and style, that are directed to a broad audience rather than a specific individual or small group of individuals. Unless a specific audience for the “blog” or “newsletter article” is specified (for example, “Write an article for the congregation’s youth newsletter ...”), test takers should assume an adult audience as the readers of such materials.

A characteristic of many “blogs” is that their authors are highly self-referential, disclosing detailed information about themselves and their experiences. Examinees are reminded that the procedures for the ordination exams require that they do not include in their responses information that would identify themselves or institutions with which they are or have been affiliated. So, while a “blog” ministry work product submitted as part of an exam response should be informal and personal in tone, it must avoid disclosing personal information about the examinee or the examinee’s background.

Because the exam procedures prohibit the use of test taker names in exam responses, neither “blogs” nor “newsletter articles” within the ordination exams should be signed with a name. Do not even create a fake or “pen” name to use as a signature. Readers will have no way of knowing whether it is the test taker’s actual name, and so they will assign a “Disqualified” evaluation to that exam section if it includes any name for the writer.

(DIRECT) RESPONSES

Test takers may be directed to respond directly to one or more persons in the scenario. They should give particular attention to whether the required response instructions direct them to simply “Respond to ...” or rather direct the test taker to “Describe how you would respond to ....” In the first case, the test taker should write out verbatim (“word for word”) what they would say in response to the person(s). If directed to “describe” how they would respond, then a summary of the kinds of things they would say is sufficient. In almost all cases, what is being sought in these types of work products is how the test taker would respond “in the moment.” While the information should be relevant and correct, the style generally should be more conversational. Responses should be appropriate to the age and other factors provided in the scenario about the person(s) to whom the response is being given.

LESSON PLANS

“Lesson plans” or more specifically “bible studies” are ministry products specifically prepared for an educational or faith formational setting. They should give specific attention to the designated audience for the lesson identified in the question scenario and be appropriately designed for the intellectual and faith development stage typical of persons in the designated audience. For example, readers will expect a very different type of lesson plan for a confirmation class of early-teen students as compared to one on a similar topic that would be presented to ruling elders attending a session retreat.

Test takers who have had courses in either Christian education and faith formation or more general educational courses may have been trained in specific forms of lesson planning that might include statements of overall objectives, specific learning outcomes, formative experiences, etc. However, the PCC does not require any particular lesson plan format in exam responses. That being said, there is an expectation that a "lesson plan" or "bible study" will incorporate active student engagement and interaction appropriate to the audience and not be exclusively a lecture. It should begin in a way that will assist the audience to engage with the subject. It will present content leading to a deeper understanding of the topic by the participants rather than only providing an opportunity for them to share with one another. The lesson plan should include information about an appropriate conclusion relating to the purposes of the lesson.

LETTERS

Unlike "blogs," when the PCC directs presentation of a "letter" as a ministry work product in response to a question scenario there is an expectation that its content and style will be tailored to the designated recipient(s) of the letter in the directions for the required response. The point of a "letter" as a specified ministry work product in the ordination exams is to provide the examinee an opportunity to demonstrate the ability to prepare a response to the individual(s) that would be more detailed than would be possible during a conversation or meeting setting. Consequently, a "letter" response should give more attention to finer points while still being appropriate for the recipients based on information supplied in the scenario.

Like "blogs," however, "letters" within the ordination exams should not be signed with a name. Do not even create a fake or "pen" name to use as a signature. Readers will have no way of knowing whether it is the test taker's actual name, and so they will assign a "Disqualified" evaluation to that exam section.

LITURGICAL PIECES

Test takers may be asked to present "prayers," "litanies," or even complete "orders of worship" for use in specific types of services as described in the section scenario or the required response directions. In such questions, special care needs to be taken by the test taker to carefully read the instructions and have a clear understanding regarding whether the response requires an "original" liturgical element, that is one written personally by the test taker rather than drawn from a resource. If the requirement is for an "original Great Prayer of Thanksgiving," for example, then a eucharistic prayer from *The Book of Common Worship* even if properly referenced would result in an "Unsatisfactory" evaluation. In all cases, liturgical pieces will be evaluated in terms of their appropriateness to the occasion and audience identified in the scenario and required response directions and not simply whether they correspond to the requested liturgical form.

MANUALS

An exam may request that the test taker produce a section of a “manual” or a “policy” statement regarding a topic relating to the scenario and designated in the required response directions. In these ministry work products, readers will be looking for specific attention to detail and the more technical aspects of the content. Manuals and policy statements should usually be written in a more formal style that is also clear and concise. They should emphasize principles applicable to a range of circumstances relating to the topic and should avoid reference to individuals who may have been included in the scenario.

Because there are many different ways of formatting manuals and policy statements to ease reference to specific sections within them, the PCC does not require the use of a specific format, whether the paragraph designation system used in the PC(USA)’s constitutional documents or a more traditional roman numeral outline system.

NARRATIVE PRESENTATIONS / SCRIPTS

In some cases, a required response will call for the preparation of a presentation to a group that will be brief enough (roughly the 500-600 words in five minutes of speaking) that it can be scripted out in full and still be within the word count limits for an exam response. Often in exam questions of this type, the required response will direct the test taker to write a “narrative presentation” or a “script” rather than an outline for the presentation. The circumstances presented in some of these kinds of scenarios may require a series of steps to be completed in a prescribed order. Rather than simply present the necessary steps as descriptive phrases in a numbered or bulleted list, a “narrative presentation” should be formulated in complete sentences and paragraphs.

SERMONS

Because of word count limits on responses, test takers will not be asked to provide full sermon manuscripts. The instructions in the required response will usually be along the lines of, “Provide an outline or summary of themes for your sermon.” However the test taker chooses to format the response, there must be a clear progression of the theme as it is developed in the sermon. There are a number of different homiletical approaches to and theories about preaching, and so the readers will not be looking for any particular sermon structure. They will be looking for evidence that the test taker understands the difference between the proclamation task of preaching as distinct from the instructional task of leading a bible study. Although mindful of the considerable range in practice across the PC(USA) in terms of how much time in the worship service is dedicated to the sermon, readers will evaluate whether the amount and type of content is appropriate for a sermon. Specific attention will be given to whether the sermon is a proclamation of the scriptural passage to the particular concerns identified in the ministry context, or whether the sermon seems to be broadly general and disconnected from the ministry context.

Use of Proper Names and Pronouns

Proper names used in the exam questions will not always clearly indicate pronouns that would be appropriate for referring to the individual. Personal names can be gender-neutral (such as Pat or Jess in American English), not conform to broad cultural practice (e.g., Reformed theologian Shirley Guthrie was a man), or may derive from a culture for which the candidate is unfamiliar with customary naming practices. Persons may also express a preference for what pronouns should be used for reference to them when they are not referred to by name. Following emerging practice in American English, questions may for this reason specify with the first use of a personal name specific pronouns for referring to the individual (e.g., John [he, him]; Jane [she, her]; or Sally [they, them]). When such pronouns are provided, respectful and pastoral practice would direct that the specified pronouns be used within exam responses and evaluation comments. Where such guidance is not provided, longstanding English-language usage permits the use of “they” as a singular, non-gender-specific pronoun either for a singular person in general or a specific individual for whom the writer/speaker does not have gender information. Neither candidates nor readers should draw inferences about the gender identity of persons based upon patterns of personal names and pronouns paired with them.

Should an exam question response ever expect that gender identity will be a material factor in how the candidate is expected to respond, the question will indicate the gender identity of the person in a manner that goes beyond the personal name or any designated pronoun preference (e.g., “a transgender man”).

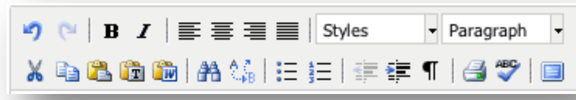
Style Guide for Online Exams

After more than three decades of life with the Internet, a number of conventions have developed for presenting text information online that are slightly different than those for printed materials. For example, most “typescript” material has by convention used “double-spaced” lines to make the reading process easier; on the limited space of many computer monitors having that much space between lines of text is a hindrance rather than help. Because the ordination exams will be both prepared and reviewed online, test takers will want to use the styles appropriate to presentation in web browsers rather than printed to 8.5 x 11 inch sheets of paper.

This section will review some of these stylistic differences and how to use the response box features provided in the online testing environment. Test takers are reminded that they can practice these procedures by logging in to their “My Profile” page and choosing the menu option for “Answer Entry Practice.” Indeed, it may be helpful to have that practice area open while reviewing the following materials to personally try out the functions.

Using the Response Box Formatting Functions

The top of the answer response box resembles the row of formatting function icons used in a simple word processing program. Just like with a word processing program, you select the different functions by clicking on these icons. Taking them from the top and working left to right, the buttons in the response box will allow you to:



- "Undo" (the left-looping arrow) or
  "redo" (the right-looping arrow) your last action
- Place text in bold (**B**), italics (*I*), or bolded italics type (by selecting both icons)
- Justify the text to the left margin, center, or right margin, or apply both left and right justification (the four groupings of lines respectively showing those arrangements)
- Apply a "Style" for "hanging indent" (select it from the drop-down menu)—in this case, to indent the first line of a paragraph a slight bit to the right with subsequent lines of the paragraph being against the margin
- Apply a "Format" for either a basic "Paragraph" or one of several heading formats (selected from among options in the drop-down menu)
- "Cut" (scissors), "Copy" (two sheets of paper), or "Paste" either from a "clipboard" within the response box itself (with blank sheet) or from external text editors (sheet with letter "T") or the Microsoft Word program (sheet with the letter "W")
- Perform "search" (binoculars) and "replace" (dotted arrow from A to B) functions within the response box
- Create bulleted (blocks next to lines) or numbered lists (numbers next to lines) within the response box
- Increase (right pointing arrow next to lines) or decrease (left pointing arrow next to lines) the amount of left margin indentation of a paragraph
- Show/hide visual characters for formatting codes (¶)
- Print (printer) a copy of all the material inside the text box by clicking on the printer icon.

Depending on the configuration of their computer and its browser settings, test takers may have the benefit of a basic English "spell checker" within the response box (ABC over a check mark). When active, the spell checker will underline with a dashed red line unrecognized words and may make automatic corrections for some commonly misspelled words. As when using all automated spelling programs, test takers need to be careful that the "spell checker" does not substitute a different word than the one intended when making corrections.

Using Word Processors with the Response Box

The question is often asked about whether test takers may use their own word processor and simply "cut and paste" their responses into the system. While it is possible to do this, it is not as simple as a "cut and paste" operation within or between documents in the same word processor.

Remember that all the work in the online exam system will be displayed within a web browser. That means all the formatting must be done according to web standards, known as HTML. Word processing programs usually have their own, program specific formatting codes that include many more options than are available in HTML. Consequently, when material is "cut and pasted" into the exam response box the word processor's codes must be replaced by HTML. That translation is accomplished by using either the "Text" or "Word" clipboard icon when "pasting" the copied material into the exam system. After "copying" the material, click on the appropriate "clipboard"; a special window will open into which the test taker will "paste" the "copied" material. When the "Insert" button is clicked in that special window, the program will replace the word processor's formatting codes with the corresponding HTML codes and place the resulting formatted text in the response box.

So when a test taker is deciding whether to use a full-feature word processor or the exam system's response box, there are a couple of important things to keep in mind. First, even though there are special "clipboards" for this purpose there is some formatting that simply does not transfer from word processors to the response boxes (because there are not HTML codes for that formatting). Second, just as when the "full window" response box is active, if candidates are working in separate word processors they may not see the warning timer. Any text that is only in the word processor cannot be automatically saved to the exam system every three minutes and cannot be "pasted" in if time has expired. Working in the response box assures at least a partial answer will be saved for the readers.

Style for Online Exam Responses

Most websites present paragraphs in what is termed "block" format: each line flush to the left margin, with no indentation of first lines, single-spacing of the lines, and some extra space between the last line of one paragraph and the first line of the next (the same style used in this *Handbook*). By default, this style is used for paragraphs in the exam response boxes. It is the style used for displaying the exam questions, and it is perfectly acceptable for the submission of exam answers. Simply select the "Paragraph" style in the first row of formatting functions, and only use the "Enter/Return" key at the end of the paragraph (not each line in the response box).

When quoting materials from other sources of more than one or two lines in length, it is customary even on websites to "block indent" the quote as a separate paragraph. This style is achieved in the response box by beginning a new paragraph and clicking the "Increase indent" button. At the end of the quotation, end the paragraph with the "Enter/Return" key, and then click on the "decrease indent" button.

Some test takers may prefer to have the first line of each paragraph slightly indented to the right from the left margin. To achieve this formatting, the test taker will need to select "hanging indent" from the drop-down "Style" menu. Using the "Tab" key will not work for this function within the answer response box (web browsers usually interpret the "Tab" key as a command to move to the next field on the web page).

One thing that is consistent between the old paper based exams and the online exams is that test takers should clearly indicate the different parts of their answers when the question has more than one "Required Response." Since most answers will include more than one paragraph in each "Required Response," it is generally not a good idea to use the "Numbered List" function to distinguish “Required Response 1” and “2.” Test takers can either simply type “1.” or “2.” as appropriate, or they may choose one of the “headings” from the drop-down “Format” menu.

Citing Resources Used in the Polity, Theology, & Worship Exams

All the Senior Ordination Examinations are now completely “open book”; test takers are permitted to use any resources available to them while taking the examinations. But they must also be mindful of the time limits for the Church Polity, Theological Competence, and Worship and Sacraments exams. The questions on these exams are designed to be answered with only direct reference to the constitutional documents of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and recall from memory of other scriptural and theological resources. This point is stressed to the readers in their training as well: The Polity, Theology, and Worship exams are not expected to provide evidence of general research.

These three exams do, however, require specific citations from the *Book of Order* and *The Book of Confessions.* Test takers will be *expected to provide citations from the editions of those constitutional documents that are current at the time of the examination.* References to constitutional materials may be provided in the formats customarily used in the church:

- The “chief end” of human existence “is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever” (Westminster Shorter Catechism, 7.001).”
- The Presbyterian Church draws its name from the principle that it is to “be governed by presbyters, that is, ruling elders and teaching elders (also known as ministers of the Word and Sacrament)” (F-3.0202).

Candidates may use whatever other resources they have available (including print, software, and online materials), but they must give credit for any resources using proper academic-style citation. Because the online system cannot display footnotes or endnotes, test takers must use the “reference-list” style for both citations and bibliography (sometimes referred to as the “MLA” [Modern Language Association] or “inline citation” style). Presenting a full explanation of all the details for this style goes beyond the purposes of this guide; test takers unfamiliar with it should consult a style guide for writing academic papers. In brief, direct quotes or references to published material used are cited by placing the author’s name, date of publication, and page number(s) inside parentheses within the sentence where the quotation or reference is made—for example, “(McKnight 2011, 275).” These parenthetical references are then paired with a “Works Cited” list at the end of the response where the citations are made. The words in the “Works Cited” list are not included within the word count limit for the response (see next subsection).

When using digital resources whether through online portals (such as “Open Access Digital Theological Library,” https://oadtl.org) or by software packages (such as Logos Bible Software), it is important to remember that simply providing the portal’s website link or the name of the software package for where you accessed the material does not meet the requirement for proper academic citation. As with references to individual author contributions in multi-author works like reference dictionaries or encyclopedias, proper citation requires inclusion of the name of the author of the particular material being used along with title and original publication data for the article or book where the author's work was originally published.

In formulating citations, candidates are reminded that disclosing seminaries they attend or have attended or professors with whom they have studied will result in disqualification of the examination and a mandatory "Unsatisfactory" evaluation. They must, therefore, avoid references along the lines of, "Lecture by Professor Smith at Princeton Theological Seminary." Also, if you use an online resource that includes a seminary library or commercial bibliographic database that is available only through subscription or library account (e.g., https://ezproxy.presbysem.edu/), you should not include that link in your "Works Cited" list. Simply include the author's name and original publication information.

Word Limits in the Polity, Theology & Worship Exams

All sections of these examinations apply a word-count limit of 1,500 words to the responses (any words that appear as part of bibliographical information in support of reference citations are not counted as part of this 1,500-word limit). Because browser settings, the amount of formatting, etc. impact automated word counts, the system does not currently place a hard limit on what can be submitted for each section. It is unlikely a reader would assign an "Unsatisfactory" evaluation solely on the basis of exceeding the limit of a section by a few words. You should be aware, however, that disregarding word limits has been identified as a factor in "Unsatisfactory" evaluations on past exams. The system's word count for a test taker's answer is displayed in the lower right corner of the response box (next to the resizing control).

Issues Specific to the Exegesis Exam

There are a variety of issues when taking the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) ordination examination in Open Book Bible Exegesis using the online testing system that make it different than completing a term paper for an exegesis class in seminary or even online ordination exams in other subject areas. Because responses must be submitted on a secure Internet site, test takers will not have many of the options for formatting and displaying text that are available when using their preferred word processor and printing to paper. Because they will have several days rather than several hours to do their work, they will need to interact with the online system in slightly different ways.

The material in this section is designed to identify issues particular to this testing environment for the Exegesis exam and to provide information for how test takers should handle stylistic issues within that exam. It should be used in conjunction with the formal instructions for the exam that are sent with the registration confirmation notice and included in this *Handbook* and with the general procedures for these online exams already reviewed in this chapter.

Using Greek and Hebrew

Test takers who are familiar with the use of Unicode and who have Greek and/or Hebrew Unicode keyboards enabled on their computers will be able to use that system for entering words in those languages as part of their responses in the online exam administration system (see the section, "Use of non-English Alphabets," earlier in this chapter). Those unfamiliar with this system should transliterate any Greek or Hebrew words using the italics feature included in the response boxes. Be aware that any Greek or Hebrew display/printing system that depends on a particular font will likely produce only gibberish when displayed on other computers that do not have that system or font. Candidates who do use Unicode Greek or Hebrew are encouraged to also include transliterations of words in those languages for the benefit of ruling elder readers and presbytery committee members who do not have formal training in those languages (a good practice for ministry settings). Because inclusion of certain accent and diacritical marks also requires Unicode, candidates should use the Society of Biblical Literature "general purpose" transliteration schemes (these transliteration tables for both languages are included below).

Hebrew:

Hebrew vowel points can be difficult to read even when entered in Unicode. Test takers, therefore, are encouraged to follow the Society of Biblical Literature's publication guideline that vowel pointing and Masoretic accents should only be included when essential to the argument being made. At other times simply use the Hebrew letters without pointing or accents.

SBL General Purpose Hebrew Transliteration

Character	Transliteration	Character	Transliteration
א *alef*	' or omit	מ / ם *mem*	*m*
בּ / ב *bet*	*b* / *v* (spirant)	נ / ן *nun*	*n*
גּ / ג *gimel*	*g* / *gh* (spirant)	ס *samek*	*s*
דּ / ד *dalet*	*d* / *dh* (spirant)	ע *ayin*	` or omit
ה *he*	*h*	פּ / פ / ף *pe*	*p* / *f* (spirant)
ו *vav*	*v* or *w*	צ / ץ *tsade*	*ts*
ז *zayin*	*z*	ק *qof*	*q*
ח *khet*	*h* or *kh*	ר *resh*	*r*
ט *tet*	*t*	שׂ *sin*	*s*
י *yod*	*y*	שׁ *shin*	*sh*
כּ / כ / ך *kaf*	*k* / *kh* (spirant)	תּ / ת *tav*	*t* / *th* (spirant)
ל *lamed*	*l*		

Character	Transliteration	Character	Transliteration
מַ *patakh*	*a*	מִי *hireq yod*	*i*
חַ furtive *patakh*	*a*	מָ *qamets khatuf*	*o*
מָ *qamets*	*a*	מֹ *holem*	*o*
מָה final *qamets he*	*ah*	וֹ full *holem*	*o*
מָיו 3d masc. sg. suf.	*ayv*	מֻ short *qibbuts*	*u*
מֶ *segol*	*e*	מֻ long *qibbuts*	*u*
מֵ *tsere*	*e*	וּ *shureq*	*u*
מֵי *tsere yod*	*e*	מֳ *khatef qamets*	*o*
מֶי *segol yod*	*e*	מֲ *khatef patakh*	*a*
מִ short *hireq*	*i*	מֱ *khatef segol*	*e*
מִ long *hireq*	*i*	מְ vocal *sheva*	*e*

SBL General Purpose Greek Transliteration

Α, α	= *A, a*	Γ, γ	= *G, g*
Β, β	= *B, b*	γ	= *n* (before γ, κ, ξ, χ)
Δ, δ	= *D, d*	Π, π	= *P, p*
Ε, ε	= *E, e*	Ρ, ρ	= *R, r*
Ζ, ζ	= *Z, z*	ῥ	= *rh*
Η, η	= *E, e* (or *Ē, ē*)	Σ, σ, ς	=*S, s, s* (at end of word)
Θ, θ	= *Th, th*	Τ, τ	= *T, t*
Ι, ι	= *I, i*	Υ, υ	= *Y, y* (not in diphthong)
Κ, κ	= *K, k*	υ	= *u* (in dipthongs *au, eu, ou, ui*)
Λ, λ	= *L, l*	Φ, φ	= *Ph, ph*
Μ, μ	= *M, m*	Χ, χ	= *Ch, ch*
Ν, ν	= *N, n*	Ψ, ψ	= *Ps, ps*
Ξ, ξ	= *X, x*	Ω, ω	= *O, o* (or *Ō, ō*)
Ο, ο	= *O, o*	῾	= *h* (with vowel or diphthong)

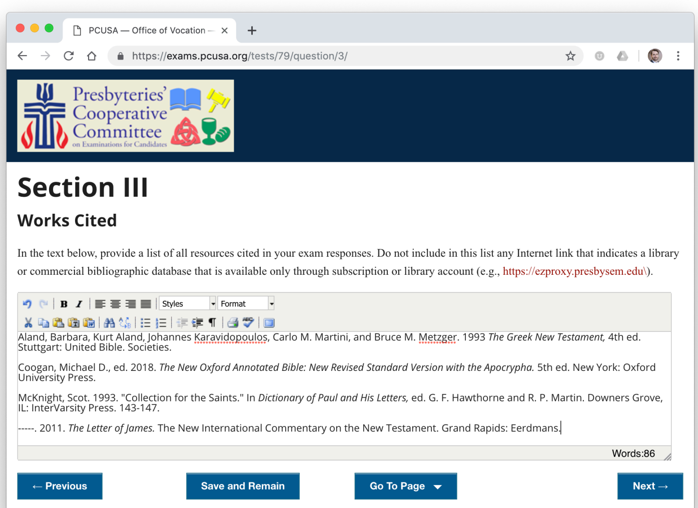
If it is necessary in making an argument to distinguish between ε *(epsilon)* and η *(ēta)* or ο *(omicron)* or ω *(ōmega)*, respectively, then you will need to spell out the name of the letter as in this sentence if you do not know how to insert the Unicode for the accented vowel.

Citing Reference Materials in the Exegesis Exam

The Open Book Bible Exegesis examination requires test takers to "demonstrate attention to the original language of the text, an understanding of the text's historical and literary context, and an ability to relate the text effectively to the contemporary life of the church in the world" through use of "Hebrew and Greek texts, translations, commentaries, and other exegetical tools" in producing the "interpretation" and "application" called for in the examination (see the description of the exam approved by the General Assembly). The online testing system presents two related issues for providing the necessary citations related to the use of these materials.

First, the online system cannot display footnotes or endnotes. Therefore, test takers must use the "reference-list" style for both citations and bibliography (sometimes referred to as the "MLA" [Modern Language Association] or "inline citation" style). Presenting a full explanation of all the details for this style goes beyond the purposes of this guide; test takers unfamiliar with it should consult a style guide for writing academic papers. In brief, direct quotes or references to published material used are cited by placing the author's name, date of publication, and page number(s) inside parentheses within the sentence where the quotation or reference is made—for example, "(McKnight 2011, 275)."

These parenthetical references are then paired with a "Works Cited" list at the end of the paper. In the online exam system, a response box for this purpose is included as the final "question" in Section III of the exam (see the sample screen at right). Since you can move freely back and forth through the test using the "Next," "Previous," and "Go To Page" buttons, there is no need to wait until you reach the end of the exam to begin entering the "Works Cited" information.



Most reference-list styles call for the bibliographic material to be presented in "hanging indent" paragraphs (first line flush to the left margin and subsequent lines indented). However, this type of "hanging indent" is not one of the formatting styles available in the online exam system. Test takers should simply provide the appropriate publication information in "left justified" paragraphs (as shown here in the sample screen). Do not try to mimic the "hanging indent" format by placing part of the publication data on one line and adding the rest as a separate indented paragraph. Because not all readers will have their system windows set to the same size, trying to mimic "hanging indent" in that way will likely result in very jumbled text.

When using digital resources whether through online portals (such as "Open Access Digital Theological Library," https://oadtl.org) or by software packages (such as Logos Bible Software), it is important to remember that simply providing the portal's website link or the name of the software package for where you accessed the material does not meet the requirement for proper academic citation. As with references to individual author contributions in multi-author works like reference dictionaries or encyclopedias, proper citation requires inclusion of the name of the author of the particular material being used along with title and original publication data for the article or book where the author's work was originally published.

In formulating citations, candidates are reminded that disclosing seminaries they attend or have attended or professors with whom they have studied will result in disqualification of the examination and a mandatory "Unsatisfactory" evaluation. They must, therefore, avoid references along the lines of "Lecture by Professor Smith at Princeton Theological Seminary." If you have stored any references on your personal device or in your "cloud storage" accounts, do not include a web address that includes any form of a personal name relating to your digital file storage (e.g., https://mysharepoint.com/:p/g/personal/jess)demo?...).

Word Limits to Responses in the Exegesis Exam

All responses in the Exegesis exam ***except*** the "Works Cited" list have specific word count limits. Responses to all questions in Section I are limited to 600 words. In Section II the "Focus Statement" is limited to 50 words and the "Supporting the Interpretation" essay to 1,200 words. The "Application" in Section III is limited to 600 words. Because browser settings, the amount of formatting, etc. can impact automated word counts, the system does not currently place a hard limit on what can be submitted for each response. When readers evaluate the Exegesis exam, they give it a single "Satisfactory" or "Unsatisfactory" evaluation on the submission as a whole, so it is unlikely a reader would assign an "Unsatisfactory" evaluation solely on the basis of exceeding the limit by a few words on one or two of the questions. Test takers should be aware, however, that disregard for the word limits has been identified as a factor in "Unsatisfactory" evaluations on past exams. The system's word count for a test taker's answer is displayed in the lower righthand corner of the response box (next to the resizing corner).

Returning to the Exegesis Exam during the Testing Period

Because the Exegesis exam is given over a period of days, it is the only exam test takers will certainly have to leave and then return to. There is no required process for logging out of the exam. However, ***before leaving your work for any reason,*** *be sure to click the "Save and Remain" button so that your response is saved to the examination system servers.* Test takers should then close their browser window. To resume work at a later time, simply follow the process for logging into the exam system and selecting the Exegesis exam.

FAQs for Quick Reference

The following pages offer short responses to some of the most "frequently asked questions" about the process for using the Internet-based testing platform. The responses do not go over all the instructions or information you need to know about taking these examinations. For that, you will need to review the appropriate sections of this *Handbook*.

These FAQs are also included in a section of the "Senior Ordination Exams Preparation" resource on the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)'s "Equip" site (sometimes referred to as the "Moodle" site from the learning management system it utilizes). That online version of this material includes video demonstrations of some of this information.

How can I recover my "Username" or reset my password?

Most importantly, do not create a new account if you forget your username or password. Having multiple accounts will mean your results will not be consolidated and you may not be able to access exams at the time for them to be administered.

To recover a "Username" or reset a password, go to http://exams.pcusa.org and click on the "Login to Your Account" button. When the "Login" page loads, click on either "Forgot your username or password?" link (one in the column at the left, the other immediately below the login fields). You will then be asked to provide the email address associated with your account. Once you "submit" the email address, a message will be automatically sent that will include your "Username" and provide a coded link to a page where you can setup a new password.

What if I no longer have access to the email account in my user profile?

You must have access to the email account associated with your profile in order to use the "Forgot your password?" link. If you no longer have access to that email account, you will need to contact the Preparation for Ministry staff in the Office of the General Assembly for assistance in updating your profile.

How can I update my email address or other personal information?

After you have logged in, you will see your "Profile Information" page. In the column at the left you will find at the top of available options the heading "My Profile"; clicking on that heading will display three additional options including "Edit My Profile Information." You can visit that page at any time to update mailing or email addresses as well as some personal information. (Some of the information in your profile, such as your status as either an inquirer or candidate, can only be edited by your presbytery.) Once you have entered the changes in the appropriate fields, you must click on the "Submit" button at the bottom of the page to forward the updated information to the servers.

Can I try out the exam system before the testing date?

From the “Profile Information” page, clicking on the “Answer Entry Practice” option from the list in the left-side column will open a special page with the response entry field. This page runs on exactly the same program that is used to administer the tests; the only difference is that it does not “save” information to the servers. You are encouraged to test out your computer’s settings and familiarize yourself with the editing options before your scheduled exam date.

What types of computing devices may be used for taking the exams?

An advantage of the exam system being built on web technology is that it works on any widely available operating system and in any standards-based Internet browser (such as Edge, Explorer, Safari, Firefox, or Chrome). You do need to be aware, however, that browsers that run on so-called “mobile” or “tablet” devices (like the iPad) do have some differences from their computer operating system-based siblings. If you plan to use a tablet device for taking the exams, we strongly suggest that you use it with a physical keyboard.

Does the online exam system provide a “spell check” function?

Depending on the configuration of your computer and its browser settings, you may have the benefit of a basic “spell checker” within the response box. When active, the spell checker will underline with a dashed red line unrecognized words and may offer or make automatic corrections for some commonly misspelled words. On some computer configurations “spell check” will default to being turned on, for others the user would have to activate it in each window by clicking on the icon (a checkmark with the letters “ABC” just above it) among the editing tools, and on yet others spell checking may not be available at all (so the icon will not even be displayed). But again, all these things depend on the specifics of how your browser interacts with other settings on your computer. Try them out in the “Answer Entry Practice” area before the exam date.

Can I use my own word processing program and upload my responses to the system?

While it is possible to use other word processers, it is not as simple as a “cut and paste” operation within or between documents in the same word processor. Since all the work in the online exam system is displayed within a web browser, all the formatting must be done according to web standards. Word processing programs usually have their own, program specific formatting codes that include many options that are not available on the web. Consequently, when material is “cut and pasted” into the exam response box the word processor’s codes must be replaced with web formatting codes. That translation is accomplished by clicking on the “Word” clipboard icon when “pasting” the copied material into the exam system. A special window will open into which you “paste” the copied material and then click the “Insert” button.

When deciding whether to use a full-feature word processor or the exam system's response box, there are a couple of important things to keep in mind. First, even though there is a special "clipboard" for this purpose there is some formatting that simply does not transfer from word processors to the response boxes. Second, any text that is only in the word processor cannot be automatically transferred to the exam system every three minutes and cannot be "pasted" in if time has expired. Working only in the response box assures at least a partial answer will be saved for the readers.

Can I use non-English alphabets in my responses?

If for any reason you need to include characters from a "non-Roman" alphabet such as Greek, Hebrew, or Korean, you need to remember that the online exam system is Internet-based and operates on World Wide Web standards. The good news is that means it can handle "non-Roman" alphabets whether or not another user (say, a reader) has the same fonts installed on her or his computer that you do. But this requires that such text must be entered as Unicode. If you have activated an operating system keyboard for one of these languages on your computer (and your computer is no more than a few years old), it will almost certainly use Unicode in conjunction with that keyboard. If you will be using "non-Roman" system keyboards, you are strongly encouraged to use the "Answer Entry Practice" option from your account's "Profile Information" page to confirm that your system configuration is functioning properly within the online exams environment before the scheduled time for your exams.

How can I "save" my work while working on an exam?

The exam system performs an automatic background "save" of whatever is in the response box every three minutes and at any time when a navigation button at the bottom of the page ("Previous", "Next", or "Go To Page") is clicked. If at any point you want to be sure what you have just written is saved, you can click the "Save and Remain" button to transfer your work from your computer to the exam servers. The screen will be refreshed, which is your indication that your work was saved.

How can I move between the different pages of an examination?

You should only use the "Previous," "Next," or "Go To Page" buttons at the bottom of each page to move between pages of an exam. Using your browser's "Back" or "Forward" button could result in the loss of information entered in the question response boxes. When you click the "Go To Page" button, a selection list displays showing each section of the exam; simply click on the name for the section to which you wish to move. This option is especially helpful for moving between the many portions of the Exegesis examination.

How are time limits for the exams controlled?

The exam system itself strictly enforces the time limit for all tests. Although the screen will not display the time remaining throughout the entire exam, a warning clock may be displayed on the screen between the question and the response box to countdown the final five minutes of your particular exam period. Depending on your browser settings, this timer may either be blocked from displaying or may not continually update. If you see that timer, you need to quickly wrap-up work on your exam. Once time has expired the test will be automatically submitted and you will not be able to make any further changes to your responses.

How are the time limits enforced by the system for the Polity, Theology, and Worship and Sacraments exams?

When the first question for the Polity, Theology, and Worship and Sacraments exams is displayed, the system automatically "starts the clock" for the time permitted for you to complete the test. Any breaks taken during the exam period are counted as part of the overall time permitted.

How do the time requirements work for the multi-day Exegesis exam?

Access to the exam becomes available at 3:00 p.m. Eastern time on the Saturday the test begins for everyone taking the test (regardless of the particular time zone where they are located), and all work must be submitted by 12:00 noon Eastern time the following Thursday. The start and end times are determined by the exam server's clock, not by your computer's system clock.

What should I do if I lose my Internet connection during an exam?

Should you lose your Internet connection while working on the exam, when you click on any of the navigation buttons at the bottom of the question page you will get an error message. Before doing anything else you must click on your browser's "Back" button (this is the only circumstance when you should use your browser's "Back" button). That will recover from your own computer's local memory what was in the response box. Then, without closing the browser, re-establish your Internet connection. Once back online, click "Save and Remain" to transfer the answer to the servers.

How do I submit my completed exam?

When you click on the "Next" button at the bottom of the last question page, you will be taken to a Final Review screen. If you have left any required responses blank, you will see warning notices asking if you would like to go back and correct those problems. Simply click on the link to go back to the page you need to work on.

You will notice that the review page does not have a "Next" button; instead, it has a bright red "Submit answers" button. That button is a visual reminder to you of a very important point: once you click on "Submit" your responses are closed and you can no longer make changes to your answers—even if you have not yet reached the end of your allotted time for the exam. The "Submit" button is a 'point of no return'; only click on it when you are certain you have finished work on the exam.

After you have clicked “Submit,” you will see a page indicating, “You have completed this exam.” Using the link in the upper right portion of the window to “Return to profile” page, click on “Log-Out” from among the menu options on the left of the screen. Finally, close your browser. Leaving the browser open (or having multiple exam sessions open in browser tabs or windows) may cause problems with previously submitted work.

How can I confirm that the system has received my finished exam?

After you have “submitted” any exam, you will find a “Completed Exams” heading on your “Profile Information” page with a link to “View” those exams. Clicking on those links will display the questions and answers for the current exams. If the answers displayed do not correspond with what you believe were submitted, you should contact the Associate Director for Ministry Leadership Development immediately. Material previously transferred to the servers can be restored, but answers from word processors or other sources that had not been uploaded during the period when the test taker was logged in to the exam cannot be added.

How will I receive my examination results?

Once the readers have finished evaluating all examinations for a particular testing period you will receive an email notice letting you know that results are available. Login to the exams site and go to the “Completed Exams” section. Click on the “View” link for the exams you want to review. The readers’ evaluations and comments will be displayed along with the exam questions and your submitted responses. You can also receive a report of your exam history at any time by clicking on the “View My Transcript” option in the left-side column of the “Profile Information” page.

EVALUATION OF SENIOR EXAMS

Exams Transcript

Bible Content

2012-02-03	91% / S

Bible Exegesis

2012-01-28	S

Theology

2012-01-27	S

Worship & Sacraments

2012-01-27	S

Church Polity

2012-01-28	S

Standards of Evaluation

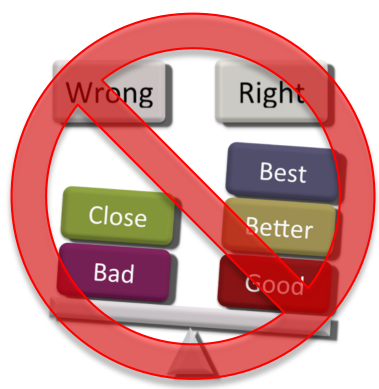
As we begin to think about the standards used in assessing the senior ordination exams, it is important that we consider that word "standard" itself. For many people, referring to "standard ordination exams" or the "standards of evaluation" creates an association with "standardized tests." That association is not surprising given the role of standardized tests like the SAT, ACT, GRE, and even high school core-subject examinations in the modern American educational system. Unfortunately, associating these types of "standardized" tests with the "standard ordination exams" creates some misconceptions.

"Standard," but not "standardized"

The development of a "standardized" test involves a number of considerations. Such tests need to be written in such a way that the results from one year can be easily and directly correlated with test results from over a number of years. Since it is almost impossible to assure that the questions will always have the same relative degrees of difficulty, standardizing results usually involves application of "scales" to "raw scores" to arrive at "results" that can be compared with previous tests. Standardized tests that involve human evaluations of "constructed responses"—think essays as compared to multiple choice answers—will have carefully established "rubrics" that are rigidly applied so that a broad range of readers would evaluate the response within some narrow range of scores. And again, even those scores would have to be scaled to achieve the final result. All of this is accomplished through some very sophisticated statistical analysis of a large sample of questions, responses, and evaluations. And even then, there is disagreement among experts about just how objective and standardized the results can truly be because of all the factors that cannot be accounted for in developing the tests.

For many reasons—including costs, the sample sizes available, and perhaps most importantly the nature of the competencies they seek to assess—none of those considerations directly applies to the ordination exams. Yes, the PCC does try to make the relative difficulty of one exam to the next about the same, but they do not have opportunity to try out questions in advance to test their own sense of how difficult any particular question will be. And even if they did, the resources necessary to assure true standardization are not available.

Assessing "readiness," not comparing candidates



But even more importantly, these exams serve a very different purpose. They are not and have never been intended as a means of comparing the relative strengths and weaknesses between different candidates for ministry. In that way they are different even from academic course evaluations that rank students relative to one another by the grades assigned for course work. Because they present ministry scenarios, there is no expectation that there is some limited range of "correct" answers. Sure, some responses will demonstrate more gifts and competencies for ministry than others, but no one could develop a rubric that could anticipate every conceivable response and place it not only on the appropriate side of a line separating "right" and "wrong" answers, but also rank it as "more right" or "more wrong" than other responses.

Basic considerations

Just because the exams are not "standardized" does not mean, however, that the results are then completely "subjective." The PCC policies developed for evaluating the exams emphasize three basic considerations.

1) Does the response address all the elements required by the questions?
2) Does the response demonstrate sufficient understanding of the issues presented in the exam that provides the basis for the questions?
3) Does the response provide evidence of an ability to combine that understanding with personal gifts and experience in ministry into a practical application such as would be expected of someone beginning in the ministry of the Word and Sacrament?

To see how these standards of evaluation work, it is useful to think about the nature of the questions that appear on the senior ordination exams. In all areas—including Exegesis—the exams are essentially case studies. Drawing upon actual experiences from the life of the church, the questions call upon the candidates to integrate what they have learned in their academic preparation in seminary with experience gained through the use of their gifts in the supervised practice of ministry. Questions asked about these case studies generally require candidates first to identify and explain the pertinent issues that arise in the scenario and then to describe how they would respond using their gifts and skills for ministry.

The first standard—Does the response address all the elements required by the questions?—assesses whether the candidate can identify the pertinent issues in the situation. Does the response focus on key issues, or does it venture down side roads that diverge from what is really important? Does the answer respond to all parts of the question, or are some aspects of what is being asked for overlooked? The abilities to listen carefully to what is set before you and to respond completely to what is required in a given situation are key pastoral skills.

The second standard—Does the answer show sufficient understanding of the issues identified?—looks at how well the answer demonstrates an ability to apply academic training to the situation described in the question. Is the response theologically sound and does it provide evidence that the candidate has broader knowledge relevant to the situation than might be expected of a general church member or person in the broader community? Does the answer demonstrate an ability to choose appropriate resources and to engage types of resources that require graduate-level education in their subject area? And of course, any sources used or directly quoted must be cited in appropriate academic fashion.

The third and final standard—Does the answer combine theological training with personal gifts for ministry into a practical response?—looks specifically for an ability to respond in pastorally appropriate ways in the ministry context created by the question. Is the response expressed in a way accessible to the people in the scenario, considering such factors as whether they are adults, youth or children, and what is explained of their cultural backgrounds? Does the answer demonstrate an ability to use resources in effective ways? Simply linking together citations from either constitutional documents or other sources does not truly demonstrate competency for ministry. Competency is demonstrated through the ability to summarize, restate, explain, and apply in a ministry context one's preparation (whether generally through seminary training or specifically in researching the particulars in the question scenario). This work must be done with appropriate pastoral sensitivity and consideration of the life stage and setting of the persons in the ministry context. Unless the specific required responses call for just listing or citing resources, discussions within the response should for the most part be the candidate's words rather than those of sources.

As readers reflect on the questions raised by these evaluative standards, they are not comparing the specific answers either to models of ideal and less than ideal responses or even to answers given by others taking the same exam. Rather, calling upon their own experience as ruling elders and ministers of the Word and Sacrament and the training received from the PCC about the particular test, they are asking themselves, "Do these examination responses provide evidence that the person who wrote them can apply the intellectual background developed in seminary to pastoral situations with 'energy, intelligence, imagination, and love'?" as expressed in one of the Constitutional Questions put to all those ordained to ministry in the church (W-4.0404h).

"Satisfactory" or "Unsatisfactory"

If in the reader's assessment the response meets these standards of completeness and appropriateness to the degree that would be expected of someone beginning in ministry, then the reader will evaluate the exam as "Satisfactory." That label in this particular context really means that the exam "satisfies the *Book of Order* requirement for demonstrating competency in the specific area of preparation covered by the exam." Thus, an "Unsatisfactory" evaluation would mean that the exam does not demonstrate the expected level of competency.

While the assignment of an "S" or "U" to the exam will determine whether or not the assessment will be repeated, the most important and valuable aspects of the process should be the reader's comments in support of that evaluation. It is in the comments that both the candidates and those who work with them from the congregations and presbyteries will gain insight into aspects of both strengths for ministry and areas that may need further development.

Taking all these things into consideration, one can see why having ruling elders and ministers of the Word and Sacrament—future colleagues in ministry—evaluate the exams is so important.

The PCC can and does provide training for readers so that they can understand technical issues that may be necessary in evaluating some questions, say the nuances of a particular Greek verb tense in a verse covered by an Exegesis exam. But the point of these exams is not to see simply whether a candidate recognizes the gnomic use of the aorist tense. It is to see whether they can recognize that use of the aorist tense for expressing a timeless truth and to explain its significance for understanding the particular verse in a way accessible to those who have never studied Greek (and those who may have but have forgotten what a gnomic aorist is).

Knowing how the standard ordination exams differ from "standardized" and academic course exams helps to assure readers as they go about their work that they have the experience and skills necessary to do this work well. Colleagues in ministry in their presbyteries recognize these qualities in those they elect as readers, which is why they entrusted this task to them. It will also help readers to prepare better evaluative comments of the exam responses that will help both candidates under care and those working with them on behalf of a session or presbytery to understand why submitted responses either do or do not demonstrate the competencies required to begin service as a minister of the Word and Sacrament.

The Evaluation Process

The senior ordination examinations are evaluated by representatives of the presbyteries under the supervision of the Presbyteries' Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates (PCC). The involvement of ruling elders and ministers of the Word and Sacrament from across the church is an important component in the standardization of these exams as a church-wide assessment of an individual's readiness to assume the functions of ministry of the Word and Sacrament on behalf of the church.

The fundamental value of these examinations derives from the fact that they are "blind" assessments (in that the test taker's identity is unknown to the readers) made by future colleagues in ministry who have not previously formed opinions—either negatively or positively—about the candidate. Readers can only form their assessments based on the content of what is presented in the responses to the scenarios raised in the exams.

The purpose of these exams is to assess one's entry-level *readiness for ministry* in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The examinations present pastoral challenges whereby candidates can demonstrate how they integrate faith and theological education in ministry. Readers receive assistance in understanding both what the questions require and the issues they raise from resources prepared by the task group of the PCC responsible for developing the particular exam. They are not provided, however, with "answer keys" or descriptions of what "correct" responses should include. Rather, they base their assessment on their preparations for reading the exams and experience in ministry as ruling elders and ministers of the Word and Sacrament.

Reader Selection: Presbyteries elect the readers of the senior ordination exams. All readers are ordained as either ruling elders or ministers of the Word and Sacrament within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). They are generally elected on the basis of such qualifications as: familiarity with the candidacy process; ability to discern gifts for ministry; readiness to accept a diversity of points of view within the ministry of the church; continuing intellectual vitality; a vital, inquiring pilgrimage of faith; commitment to the "Historic Principles of Church Order" found in the *Book of Order* (F-3.01); and the ability to be constructively critical.

Reading Schedule: Readers convene three times each year to evaluate exams, working remotely from their own ministry settings. They access exam responses using an integrated component of the online exam administration system. Evaluation periods are scheduled to begin on Monday of the week following the submission deadline for the Open Book Bible Exegesis exam.

Reading Process: Every exam response is coded with the candidate's I.D. number, thereby guaranteeing anonymity. Each exam is read by at least two readers from presbyteries other than the one where the inquirer/candidate is under care. They write comments explaining their respective evaluations of the responses to the exam questions. If the two readers agree in their overall evaluation that the exam is either "Satisfactory" or "Unsatisfactory" that evaluation stands. If the two readers are not in agreement, a third reader evaluates the responses. The two readers whose evaluations are in agreement provide the final evaluation of the exam. No single reader determines whether a particular examination is either "Satisfactory" or "Unsatisfactory." Readers are not informed whether their evaluation is a third reading. Over the years and across the subject areas of the exams it has been quite consistent that about one-third of the exam responses receive a third reading because the first two evaluations did not agree on whether the exam satisfied the requirements.

Members of the PCC review all reader comments for clarity, support and explanation of the evaluation given, and unintentional errors. Readers are encouraged to be *pastoral* in their comments. The comments are for the benefit of those taking the exams to assist them in their preparation for ministry and discernment of their call. A reader's primary concern is for the building up of the body of Christ. Readers strive to reflect care and wisdom in representing the spirit of PC(USA). (See the Preamble to Church Discipline [D-1.000] as a parallel statement of the spirit, principles, and purposes of their work.)

Results Notification: Readers begin evaluating exams the week following the submission deadline for the Open Book Bible Exegesis exam, and the reading period extends over about five days. Results are made available only after all exams from that cycle have been evaluated and system validation checks have been completed. *The Associate Director for Ministry Leadership Development does not release results to inquirers or candidates, moderators of presbytery committees, or seminary contact persons prior to the official release of all results.* An individual's exam results are not released to anyone other than the inquirer/candidate, the committee moderator of the presbytery of care, and the PC(USA) theological contact person at her or his seminary without prior written consent. The Associate Director for Ministry Leadership Development and the predecessor offices have maintained candidate records since 1967.

Exam result notifications will be released via email. Both inquirers/candidates and their presbyteries of care are strongly encouraged to make copies of both the exam responses and the readers' evaluations and to secure the safekeeping of those copies. The exams and readers' evaluations become part of the candidate's file and are to be shared with any presbytery considering whether to validate a call for that candidate to ordination as a minister of the Word and Sacrament.

Review of Exams and Evaluations

In all five areas of examinations, the value of the process for both the inquirer/candidate and the presbytery resides in a joint review of the results. Simply noting whether or not the constitutional requirement has been fulfilled (see G-2.0607d) does a disservice first and foremost to the effort of the test taker, but also to those who shared their gifts in the development and evaluation of the exams. The purpose of the exams is to provide both inquirers/candidates and presbyteries (whether "presbyteries of care" or potential "presbyteries of call") with information to help in discerning "fitness and readiness for a call to ministry requiring ordination" as a minister of the Word and Sacrament (G-2.0604).

As discussed earlier in this *Handbook,* results of the Bible Content Examination are reported in a way to provide information about the test taker's familiarity with particular sections of the scriptural canon. By reviewing these results, the inquirer/candidate and the presbytery committee can make decisions about course selections during theological studies that can help to deepen and expand knowledge about portions of the Bible with which the inquirer/candidate is less familiar. It is for that reason that the PCC recommends this exam be taken at the beginning of the second year of full-time seminary studies.

In contrast to the BCE, the senior examinations in the areas of Bible Exegesis, Church Polity, Theological Competence, and Worship and Sacraments are like capstone experiences. As discussed earlier, they are "integrative" exercises that call upon candidates to apply their theological education and experience gained through the supervised practice of ministry to what are essentially case study scenarios. Through the test takers' work in writing the exams and the evaluations of the responses by experienced ruling elders and ministers of the Word and Sacrament in other presbyteries, committees overseeing the candidates are given invaluable insight into whether they are ready to proceed to "final assessment" (G-2.0607).

For these reasons and because the exams are evaluated as assessments of readiness to begin ministry, the PCC now advises presbyteries that in its judgment exam results can only provide meaningful information about a candidate's current "readiness" for a period of no more than five years. Depending on what a particular candidate does in the period after writing exams, some will be even more ready after several years have passed whereas others who have been less involved in continued supervised ministry practice may be considerably less ready.

Appeals

Although test takers themselves cannot directly appeal "Unsatisfactory" evaluations of an examination, the presbytery's committee responsible for the care of a particular inquirer or candidate may file appeals. If after reviewing the exam responses and both readers' evaluations the committee concludes that a mistake was made in the computation of the grade for an exam or that the evaluation given did not accurately represent the quality of the work reflected in the exam, then the committee may initiate an appeal. All appeals must be submitted in writing to the Associate Director for Ministry Leadership Development. The appeal must identify specific grounds for the appeal of the "Unsatisfactory" evaluation.

The member of the Presbyteries' Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates (PCC) chairing the task group responsible for the particular subject area will review the presbytery's statement of appeal together with the candidate's exam responses and the readers' evaluations. If the task group moderator concurs with the presbytery's appeal, the "Unsatisfactory" grade will be overturned, and a "Satisfactory" evaluation will be assigned to the exam. If the appeal is not sustained, the original evaluation(s) assigned to the exam will stand. The decision of the member of the PCC reviewing the appeal is final.

There are two grounds for appeal of an "Unsatisfactory" evaluation:

> ***Correctable error:*** Occasionally, evaluations of a paper will be improperly reported (e.g., evaluations were incorrectly recorded by the readers), or there may be other aberrations that call for corrective measures. Proctors, candidates, and appropriate presbytery representatives may request that the presbytery of care bring such concerns as an appeal to the PCC, which will rule on the issue.
>
> ***Evaluation issues:*** If the appropriate committee of presbytery believes that the quality of an exam is not properly reflected in the evaluation(s) assigned to the paper, the committee may make an appeal of the final evaluation. The statement of appeal should provide specific references to both the examination paper and the readers' comments along with the reasons the committee disagrees with the assessment by the reader(s).

Requests for an appeal must be filed with the Associate Director for Ministry Leadership Development by:

> **April 15** for **January** exams
>
> **July 15** for **April** exams
>
> **December 15** for **September** exams

Reflections from a Reader

For more than 10 years I have read the fall ordination exams. I return each fall for a variety of reasons, both personal and corporate.

What drew me to read the first time was my own experience with the exams in the 1970s. During the fall of my senior year at seminary, I approached the exams with fear and trembling, with a sense of "one more hurdle – one more hoop." My preparation to take the exams amounted to worry and also a sense of blame. Worry that I would fail and blame for those who said if I wanted to be ordained in the Presbyterian Church I needed to pass all four exams. Hadn't all my classes and study and papers and field work prepared me for ministry? Hadn't my sense of call convinced me that ministry was where God wanted me? My fears were often echoed by my classmates.

Yet, between me and the goal of ordination lay four exams—exams I didn't know how to study for, exams that would be graded by some nameless person somewhere. Not only did that person not know me, I felt I had no way to tell them of my hopes and dreams, no way to convince them that no matter how I did on the exams I needed to be ordained, for I felt the certainty of God's call upon my life.

All went well and my ordination took place later that summer, and since then I have had the chance to serve the church in several different settings.

So, when the opportunity to read exams came to me through my presbytery, I jumped at the chance. Now, more than a decade later, I return each fall, believing what we do, as students and readers, is important and valuable to our church.

As you might know, ordained elders and pastors gather in Reading Groups around the country in October. For three, sometimes four days these men and women spend up to fourteen hours a day reading and grading and praying over the exams that are presented to them. Before each day begins, we gather for worship, and the exams and students who wrote them are always in the forefront of our approach to God. Before we begin to grade the different exams, sessions are held in which the readers talk about what we believe makes a good exam, reflecting on the preparatory work we have done in the weeks before we gather as a Reading Group.

While all four of the exams are different, calling upon different, yet interrelated and overlapping disciplines, as a reader, generally, I look for, evidence of at least three cognitive elements: knowledge, pastoral skills, and professionalism. Just as importantly, I also look for a sense of consistency between what is written in the opening sections of the exam and the practical application which follows.

Quite simply, by knowledge, I try to determine, if the exam adequately answers the question placed before it. For example, in the Worship and Sacraments examination I expect that the answer to any question will show a working knowledge of the *Book of Confessions* and the Directory for Worship. If the question calls for "citing by number specific passages (e.g., 0.0000)", I hope to see more than one related citation. A better exam presents citations from a variety of Confessions rather than several from one, or worse yet, from one chapter. The *Book of Confessions* and the Directory for Worship are rich documents, filled with words of historical faith, and an understanding of their width and breadth will strengthen any answer.

By pastoral skill, I look to see if the exam is able to take theological concepts and translate them into answers and ideas that speak to today's Church. Again, using the Worship and Sacraments examination as an example, if we are not able to take the words from the opening chapters of the Second Helvetic Confession and use them to help us form our own view of Scripture and

Worship, then we might as well relegate the *Book of Confessions* to a box in the cupboard rather than keep it near our desk.

Finally, this reader looks for professionalism in all responses. By professionalism I mean pastoral sensitivity to people and their needs, joys, wants and hurts. Our Reformed theology cannot be separated from the people who sit in the pews, gather for session meetings and lay in hospital beds. In a scenario dealing with baptism in the Worship and Sacraments exam, one which expressed a reluctance on the part of parents to have their child baptized, it would be my hope that the response would deal not only with the *Book of Confessions* and the Directory for Worship but also with the parents as people of God who come to their church searching for answers.

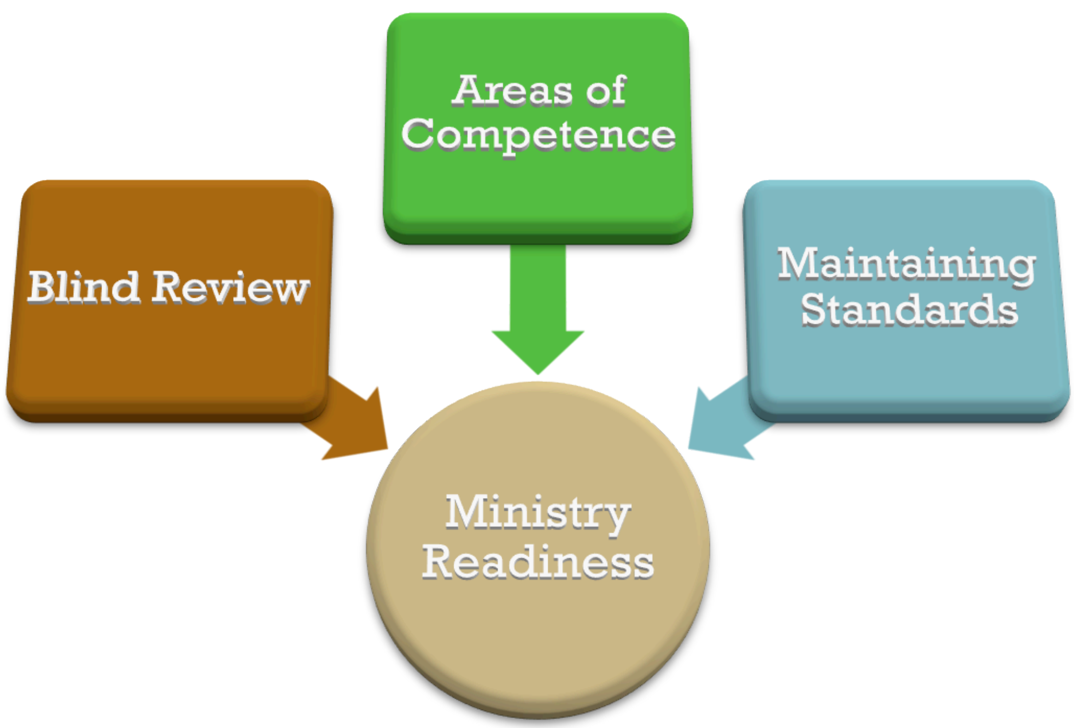
In the other three exams, Church Polity, Theology, and Exegesis, I usually look for the same elements. But as the exams differ, so do my expectations concerning a good response.

In the Church Polity exam, I look for consistency between the *Book of Order* citations (e.g., X-0.0000) called for and the practical application. The answers need to show the ability to take the constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and clearly relate it to issues in the local church, presbytery, community.

In the Theology exam, as in the others exams, I grade on the exam's ability to present theological concepts in a clear and concise manner and to use those concepts to inform the scenario presented. A good paper presents more than one source, and a great paper recognizes the historical and contemporary applications of Reformed theology.

As I stated in the beginning of this letter, for more than 10 years I have read the fall ordination exams. I return each fall for a variety of reasons, both personal and corporate. We are the church, related, in communion with each other, teaching a commonality of faith, celebrating through the church a Risen Savior.

CONCLUSION


Areas of Competence
Blind Review
Maintaining Standards
Ministry Readiness

The hallmark of these exams is the situational nature of the questions. Field education is going to be very important on these exams. The exams put you in a situation that is possible, probable, and even likely to happen in a congregational setting. The more you have been around, talked to people, and had experiences in the life of the church the better equipped you are to respond, because it will be an experiential response—you can identify with and relate to the situation.

Situational experiences very often present a "dilemma." There is an "on-the-one-hand-and-then-on-the-other-hand" quality to the scenarios in the exams. The one thing you do *not* want to do is to deny the "dilemma." Point out the good things in the situation and where there needs to be some correction, and gently offer direction—that is what being a pastor is all about. It takes discipline to move God's people in faith. Respond with heart *and* head—that combination is the hallmark of Presbyterian ministry.

Remember that these exams are not being evaluated by seminary professors who know you, but by ruling elders and ministers of the Word and Sacrament who do not know you. In assessing your readiness for ministry, they will rely solely upon the contents of your examination papers. They are your colleagues, and they know all too well that you will not get very far in ministry by denying the complexities of life. We work very hard with readers to help them see that they are engaged in ministry as they read and evaluate your written responses on these exams.

May God's richest blessings be with you as you prepare for the ordination examinations as one part of your broader process of discernment and preparation related to the ministry of the Word and Sacrament.

Presbyteries' Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates and

Rev. Timothy B. Cargal, Ph.D.

Assistant Stated Clerk and Associate Director for Ministry Leadership Development

Mid Council Ministries, the Office of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

tim.cargal@pcusa.org

100 Witherspoon Street

Louisville, KY 40202-1396

(888) 728-7228 Ext. 5771