

To those who must yet suffer through ...um, I mean, ...*take* the General Ordination Exam, here are some GOE practice tips, from one who survived. I know this is a pretty voluminous piece, but I threw in thoughts on everything that seemed even possibly useful, including some things which had proven to be pitfalls for me. I hope at least some of these thoughts are useful.

### **Pre-GOE planning:**

You know those rumors you hear that you can't cram for GOEs? They're true -- because you have not a *clue* what the questions will be. So don't even try. On the other hand, there are some things you can do to help prepare for the experience.

1. **Go over your notebooks and syllabi from the classes you've taken.** This will refresh your memory on the topics you covered. I found my class notes invaluable in drafting answers, and it helped a lot that I had at least a vague recollection of what I'd covered during those earlier years.
2. **Know what books you have.** Your personal library will be the core of your research capability during the tests, so you need to know what you already have (I thought it was amazing how quickly I'd forgotten texts from junior year classes, especially).
3. **Make sure you have a basic reference library.** I wouldn't suggest running out and buying a lot of new, very specific books (for example, a book on a particular theological issue) right before the GOEs. You won't know what's in them, you won't have time to read them without ruining your holiday, and Murphy's Law says that the GOEs won't touch those subjects anyway! However, there *are* books you should have handy. I recommend including in your library the basic Westminster dictionaries (Christian Ethics, Theology, Liturgy, etc.). You should also have at least two commentaries (I used *New Jerome* and *HarperCollins*) and at least one Bible dictionary. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* was incredibly useful to me. You should also have at least one book on Christian history, and a history of the Church of England (I'm assuming you already have Dr. Prichard's book on the history of the ECUSA). If you don't already have Marion Hatchett's book on the 1979 BCP, it's worth buying and not just for GOEs. (BCPs, Bibles, Hymnal 1982 etc. should be obvious, but just make sure you remember to pack them if you're moving on-campus!)
4. **Read, mark, learn and inwardly digest the summary of the ECUSA's social policies.** You might have received a brochure containing them. You can also look at them online at: [www.episcopalchurch.org/peace-justice/resolutions/Topic.cfm](http://www.episcopalchurch.org/peace-justice/resolutions/Topic.cfm). The resolutions are not exactly scintillating reading, but they do give an overview of the positions the Church has taken over time on a variety of social policy issues.
5. **Get a copy of the National Canons.** Read them. They can be ordered from Church Publishing if Cokesbury doesn't have them. The canons that have been particularly important on past GOEs have been those dealing with parish life (marriage, licensing chalice, etc.) but it helps to have a passing familiarity with the canons overall. You can also read them online at:  
[www.churchpublishing.org/general\\_convention/index.cfm](http://www.churchpublishing.org/general_convention/index.cfm)

6. **Refresh your knowledge of the BCP.** Look especially at the more arcane parts of the book, such as the Catechism. Be familiar with such basics as our Baptismal Covenant and the various pastoral offices.
7. **Organize your library.** By library, I include class notes, papers, etc. During the test, you won't have time to go hunting for that book you just *know* covered the second part of the second set. When I moved on to campus before the GOEs, I took literally every book I owned that was even marginally related to religion. During the week prior to the move, I organized them in Rubbermaid bins by subject: history, theology, Scripture, contemporary issues, general reference, and miscellaneous. Carrying all those books did two important things for me (and for me they were *equally* important): 1) I used more of the books than I'd expected; and 2) I had tangible evidence spread around me that, yes, I had taken and passed some classes on the subject that had just thrown me into a panic when I opened the question.
8. **Make sure *everything* is ready before the GOEs start**--that includes computer, internet connection, printer, paper, paper clips, pens, yellow stickies, aspirin, coffee, chocolate...anything that will reduce the moments of crisis during the tests.
9. **Know your tools.** If you're going to get a new laptop or printer, or use a resource like Bibleworks, be familiar with it BEFORE the test. Don't presume you'll have time to figure it out if it turns out you need it on a particular set. Unless you're way smarter and calmer than most of us, you won't.
10. **Plan to avoid distractions during the test.** If you're a parent of kids who are at home, I STRONGLY encourage you to take the GOEs on campus. You will need every bit of your focus for them. Your kids will understand...eventually.
11. **Be physically ready.** Eat decent meals and get enough sleep in the days leading up to the exams. Sounds obvious, but remember that the exams take place right after the holidays...watch out for screwing up your sleeping and eating habits as you celebrate.

### **During the Test:**

1. **Eat regularly and eat a lot.** If the new middlers and juniors take care of you as well as you all took care of my class, you'll have lots of offerings. I was amazed at how much energy taking the exams took. Don't skip meals and don't worry about your weight. GOEs is not the time! You'll burn it off taking the exams, and if you don't, you deserve to pamper yourself anyway.
2. **Don't get dehydrated.** It's easy to get so focused on the tests that you forget such basics, but it's a great way to give yourself a headache. Keep a water bottle handy...but not too near your computer! I nearly knocked mine off onto my printer which was sitting on a bin next to my desk. Talk about an adrenalin rush!
3. **Use the GOE Hospitality resources.** The folks who are there (as many of you might know from prior participation) are offering their services because they want to support you. Let them. One of the great blessings of taking the exams was seeing the compassionate faces of the people who took time from their holiday to support us. No

cup of coffee ever tasted as good as the one that was brought to me by a concerned and caring middler as I was slogging my way through a really tough set.

4. **Use alarm clocks...**and yes, the plural is intentional. I set 3 alarms for most sets: an alarm to tell me to stop researching (if open book) or outlining (if closed book), an alarm to tell me to stop typing and begin to wrap things up, and an alarm to tell me to print the stupid thing and get down to Addison. The alarms were of particular importance to me because I tend to get so immersed with whatever phase of a project I'm in, I lose track of time. And time is of ultimate importance in taking these tests. You'll have to determine when to set the alarms based on your own skills. I tend to like to do research and I type fast, so I gave myself more time to research and less to type. My printer was quite slow, however, so I had to allow for that.

5. **Wait to open the set.** When you get the envelope with each set, don't tear it open immediately. Go back to your room and pray first. It helped me to reconnect with the God that had brought me to this path, and to calm some of the panic.

6. **Panic is okay.** Even after you've prayed, expect that your first response when you do open the set will most likely be: "I have no \*&^%\$! clue and why on earth are they asking this question??" When that reaction sets in, remember two things: more likely than not, you probably *do* have a clue. And, it will adversely affect your progress toward ordination if you threaten to hunt down and smack senseless the chaplains who wrote the question.

7. **READ THE QUESTION!!** That was the advice I got over and over, including in the GOE letters. And that is *so* true. Read the whole set more than once before you even consider beginning to answer it. Make sure you've caught all the various subparts and EXACTLY what the set is looking for.

8. **Organize your thoughts.** The sets I did best on were the ones that were the most organized. The readers don't want scattershot information...they need to see how you develop your ideas. That's where outlining comes in handy. But also as you write, make sure to at least try to connect one thought to the next. Doing so not only makes the answer easier for the readers to understand, it helps you avoid the dangers of inadvertently undermining your own argument or failing to support leaps of logic.

9. **Try outlining.** Virtually all of the questions, read closely, gave the framework for the answers. I found it helpful to briefly sketch out an outline of the question. My outline for the CH set was (more or less): Introduction w/thesis statement (thank you, Stephen Edmondson :-). First subtopic-identify it then answer each of the set's subquestions in order, and so on. That outline turned into the outline of the answer itself. When I actually wrote the set, I included a brief closing summary/conclusion at the end of all the subtopics--it was sort of a text reminder that, "hey, reader, I really did answer all the parts, just in case you missed that."

10. **Distinguish between the parts of the set that are looking for academic answers and those that want personal responses.** For those that were academic ("give the history of...") I took a final exam approach. In the answers to the more personal questions, however, I used the first person when it seemed appropriate. The examiners

really did seem to want to know what I *thought* about something, and how I personally would address an issue. They did not want a repeat of what others had done, with a simple expression of endorsement or opposition.

11. **Watch out for traps.** One of our sets (on racism) used a definition that seemed to be rather offensive on first reading. It's my suspicion --and purely speculative--that the question was designed in part to see if we would fall into the trap of addressing the issue on a purely emotional basis. If something in a set triggers real antipathy in you as you read it, step back and take a close look at what the set as a whole seems to be asking. Don't draft your answer out of that first emotional response.

12. **Use what you know, but only if it answers the question.** That old adage, "if you don't know the answer, tell them what you do know"? Forget it.

13. **Don't give up!** If you really don't know the answer, this is where your familiarity with your library will prove invaluable. For example, on the Church History question we got, my first feeling was that I was pretty clueless about what they wanted. However, the key timeframe was the Reformation period and -- yes! -- we did the Reformation in CH class. So, I flipped through my class notes, Gonzalez, and the other texts we used. I pulled the paper I'd done on John Jewel (okay, so that wasn't much help). Believe it or not, *Not Angels But Anglicans* was one of the best sources to point me in helpful directions. The *History of the Church of England* by Moorman added to the sources, and so on. So start with what you know.

14. **Get at least something in writing on all the parts.** Remember, time is precious, and you have to answer all parts of the set. So, once you've got your answer framed, try to make sure you have coherent--even if brief--responses in writing to all parts. These answers should be in complete sentences, some connection of thought, etc., but without the depth that you might want to add if you have time. You can flesh out your answers after you've covered the basics. If you run out of time, at least you have a complete overview of an answer, even if it doesn't have all the detail you'd like.

15. **Short is okay.** Don't feel you have to fill up every line of every allotted page. Comprehensive, succinct answers seemed to be better received than answers that rambled.

16. **Scriptural and BCP references are good.** Anytime it seemed appropriate, I referred to the Bible and to the BCP. We are a denomination based on the Word and Common Prayer, and I found that such references seemed to make my answers richer.

17. **The Internet is your friend.** Even if you're not particularly net-literate, there are some sites that can still help. For example, The Christian Church Ethereal Library ([www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org)) has online versions of virtually all the patristics, and nearly all the important medieval theologians. The *Summa Theologica* is online in searchable hypertext. How cool is that? Okay, so it's not terribly cool, but it was very useful in researching just war. It's helpful to know how to do basic searches and to have bookmarked the main ECUSA websites. Sites like [www.otgateway.com](http://www.otgateway.com) and [www.ntgateway.com](http://www.ntgateway.com) have wonderful resources for Scripture.

18. **Don't forget to cite your sources.** How you do that is largely up to you, unless the powers that be change the rules. Of course, if you paraphrase or directly quote, you must provide a full citation, including page number. I was deathly afraid of misquoting or missing a citation...so (with the exception of the BCP and Bible), I neither paraphrased nor quoted any source. Thus, all I had to provide was a bibliography for the set. This approach simplified my life substantially. As I used a source in preparing my response, I typed its information under the "bibliography" heading. (I added each additional source in alphabetical order, but that probably says more about my sense of order than anything required by the examining chaplains.) If you use class notes, make sure to specify that fact...but all you need to say in your bibliography is "Class notes."

#### **After Each Set:**

1. **Once you turn in a set, let it go.** Don't reread your answers and don't talk to others about their answers. You're not supposed to talk to other test-takers, and not doing so really helps to avoid that gut-clenching, "oh, \*\*\*\*, I should have said that!" feeling.
2. **Stay organized.** If your room looks like a tornado hit it after a set, get it reorganized before the next set. The last thing you want is to begin the next set and have no clue where anything is.
3. **At the end of the day, take care of yourself.** I don't recommend drinking any alcohol until the whole exam is done because you can't afford a hangover. Again, if you're like the majority of folks with whom I've spoken, the test will take an enormous amount of energy. Try to avoid depleting it.
4. **Don't add stressors to your life, even after a test day is done.** I made the mistake of thinking I could go to a candidacy interview on Monday night, on the theory that I'd have plenty of time to get back to campus and get some sleep. Ha! I was still exhausted the next morning, and it was reflected in my marks.
5. **Keep trying, through the last question of the last set.** This one, I botched. On the last day of the exam, I fell prey to the overwhelming feeling (which many of us had) that all I wanted to do was to get the exam behind me. Partially, this was a reflection of the degree of exhaustion I was feeling. I was tired, cranky, and done was good enough. But my answers were noticeably less detailed than on prior days. If you're not a great test-taker to begin with, you won't be able to afford a lapse on the final day.

And finally, remember that this is just one step in a very long process toward ordination and service to God. You're blessed with all sorts of skills, knowledge, and spiritual gifts, or you wouldn't be here in the first place.

In Christ,

Julie.

