

Understanding the ORDs

What are they?

The Ordination Examinations are part of the call process for the PC(USA). They are part of how the church tests and confirms your call to ordained ministry. God gives us our calling and the people (the church) respond collectively. These are not just another set of hoops to jump through, but rather, they are a part of the church's right and responsibility to decide and assess your readiness for ministry. Education from a Presbyterian seminary may earn you your Master of Divinity degree, but it does not automatically guarantee you will be ordained. Theological institutions monitor academic progress but Presbyteries CPMs evaluate spiritual development and have the responsibility to determine who is ordained.

What are they testing?

It is important to remember that you are to answer the questions with integrity – being true to who you are and what you believe. There is not a set, proscribed way to respond to the questions. You will respond differently from ____ who will respond differently from ____ . Answer in a way that reflects your call.

The questions are situational. They place you, the writer, in the middle of it all – giving no time to find a book, consult with session, or call up your favorite theology professor for a consultation. Each question has two parts. What you say in section A must inform your response in section B.

The questions are also practical – situations that actually occur in the church. This makes your internship and life experience crucial background for you to draw upon while answering the questions. Be sure to balance your knowledge with pastoral sensitivity. Trying to impress readers with tons of information won't work; neither will bashing them with the Book of Order. On the other hand, lack of foundational theology won't work either. The point is to show how you are able to integrate what you have learned in an academic setting and how you want to serve as a pastor.

How do I get started writing my answer?

A good way to approach answering a question is to put your pen down (or take your fingers away from the keyboard) and focus entirely on reading the question. Read the questions several times. Determine what is being asked. Only after this should you pick up your pen or get ready to type on your keyboard.

But don't start to write an answer just yet. Take time to make an outline of what you believe is an adequate response. Yes, this will take about 10 minutes, but it is worth it. It will help you to remain focused, helping you to stick to the main question at hand rather than going off on tangents. If you run out of time to finish your answer, you can staple the outline in your exam booklet to give the readers a sense of where you were headed.

Nuts & Bolts

You'll need to bring your own pens (no pencils please – any exam written in pencil will be returned ungraded). If you choose to use a laptop, make arrangements with the Placement Office in advance so that proper space and extension cords can be provided.

Bring extra paper. You may wish to use this to make notes of references from the *Book of Confessions* or the *Book of Order* that might be useful in an answer. It will also give you a place to write an outline which you can follow as you are writing your answer.

Bring post-it notes or tabs. These can be used as place markers in the *Book of Confessions* or the *Book of Order* – allowing you to evaluate which references would best fit with your answer. The *Book of Confessions* is used for the first question of the Theological Competence and Worship and Sacrament exams. You are allowed to use it for only one hour. The *Book of Order* is used for the entire three hours of the Polity exam. The Placement Office will provide clean copies of the *Book of Confessions* to be used and then returned.

Bring your own copy of the *Book of Order*. You need to have the newest edition and it needs to be clean – without notes written throughout it. These, as well as the *Book of Confessions*, can be ordered or downloaded through the PC(USA) web site (www.pcusa.org/oga/constitution.htm).