

## **Words of Advice on Taking (and Passing) Ordination Exams**

From an Elder who's graded them

1. **Make sure you follow the directions.** I had to flunk one exam because the student wrote their name on each page of the exam. I had to flunk another because the paper only answered 5 of the 6 exegesis questions.
  
2. **If at all possible, use a computer to write your answers.** These papers are much easier to read, so the reader has a better chance of understanding your intent and what you're trying to say. Hopefully, you'll be able to better organize your thoughts – even if you have to edit and move things around.
  
3. **Organize your thoughts, then write.** When citing references from the Book of Confessions or the Book of Order, it may be helpful to just jot down the references you wish to use first. You can see if you have a variety from different creeds or different parts of the Book of Order. And you can more thematically present your thoughts rather than just writing down a lot of citations without much exposition.
  
4. **Explain and justify your responses.** Merely citing references, and perhaps even quoting them, does not make for a passing score. You must explain why these references are pertinent to the question. Don't assume that your reader knows what's in your mind.
  
5. **Use common language, not a lot of theological terminology.** Remember that about half of your readers are Elders who don't necessarily know what transubstantiation, eschatology or other theological terms mean. Write as if you're speaking to someone in a congregation.
  
6. **To pass the Exegesis exam, I recommend that you answer both Question A1 and A2.** We are grading you on your ability to demonstrate your working knowledge of either Hebrew or Greek. The other questions allow very little ability to show your knowledge of the language. These questions are your best opportunity. A2 provides even less of a chance to show your knowledge than A1, but answering both questions provides you more of a chance to convince your reader that you do know what you're talking about.

**7. Explain the grammar of your chosen translation, more difficult issues related to translating this passage, and nuances that influenced you.** Your answer is limited to 600 words, so you must be concise, but explain as much as possible, particularly about the major phrases that hold the contextual meaning of the passage. Justify your translation. Show your command of the language. Although I know neither Greek nor Hebrew, we are provided very thorough briefing sheets that parse the entire passage and give us special issues to look for, allowing us to make sense of a well-constructed response.

**8. Make sure that your Exegesis paper flows like an hourglass from Section I through your 100-word synopsis to your lesson plan or sermon outline in Section III.**

**9. In questions asking for issue identification, concisely write what each issue is before you explain further.** This helps guide your reader through your response and allows better understanding. Plus, it is being responsive to the question asked.

**10. Remember that while serving as Session Moderator, you are to be neutral, allowing the Holy Spirit to help guide your congregation's Elders in God's way.** In questions on Worship and Sacraments and Polity (I've never graded Theology yet), you are asked to provide responses to examples of pastoral situations. Please don't dictate things to the Session or to the congregation. Provide them with the tools they need to make a decision.