

Writing Suggestions

Each exam (Theology, Worship and Sacraments, and Polity) is divided into three similarly structured sections.

- Section I of each exam contains one question and is open book. You will be able to use a *Book of Order* or *Book of Confessions* as appropriate. The book must be clean and unmarked for the Theology and Worship and Sacraments Exam. You may use an indexed *Book of Order* for the Polity Exam.
- Sections II and III: When you hand in Section I, you will be given Sections II and III. You will not be allowed to use a book for these sections. When you are given these sections, take time to look at all of the questions. Section II will have one question to answer, but Section III will have two questions from which you are to choose one to answer. After looking at all three questions, choose the one with which you are most comfortable to answer first. Answering the questions in this sequence accomplishes several goals: it helps with time management because you are not wasting time answering a question that is difficult for you; you have immediate success by first responding to a question that you can answer correctly; and you will be able to proceed to the more difficult question with confidence and time.

For each question:

- Read the question quickly for an overall idea.
- Reread the question slowly for a more detailed understanding.
- The third time you read the question, underline or number all of the parts that you should address in your answer.
- If the question contains one or more people to whom you are supposed to respond, look at the situation from each person's point of view--not just from you as the pastor. It is important to evaluate issues from different perspectives.
- Outline your response using the underlinings that you made on the third reading as a guide to your organization. Organize your response using the same structure as the question. Don't make the readers hunt for the answers.
- When you begin to write, use your outline as a guide. Organization is the key and the outline will provide this. It is better to write a short, direct, and well-organized essay than one that meanders around and never comes to a point.
- Never lose sight of the question being asked. How does every sentence and each paragraph relate to the question?
- Summarize your ideas in a short final paragraph. You can use phrases such as "in conclusion," "in response," "finally," or "in summary." A short conclusion gives the reader a sense of closure and gives you, the writer, an opportunity to demonstrate that you've answered the question completely.
- After you finish writing, reread your answer rechecking to make sure that you have completely answered the question and then correct any spelling or grammar mistakes. Just put a line through the mistake and rewrite the word above. If you see an area that you've left out, put a star where the information should go and then write that paragraph at the end of the test. Don't do this often because it makes the answer confusing to read. However, it is better to be a bit confusing than to not answer part of the question!
- Remember that these exams are testing "readiness for ministry." Try to show that readiness includes both extensive knowledge and competence in pastoral communication.
- Do not include any extraneous information. Just answer the question.

Rhetorical Issues

- When the question asks you to respond to a character, you can role-play that you are speaking directly to the congregant. If you do, be sure to use quotation marks around the dialogue. This is an interesting rhetorical device that allows the reader to become more involved and a part of the situation. Dialogue is tricky, though, so be very careful that it is easy to distinguish the speaker.
- Always use inclusive language if you are not writing about a specific person. One way to avoid gender specific language is to use the plural but often the pronoun can be omitted. One example might be: "When a student takes the Ords, he should get a good night's sleep before the exam." Only hes? There are many ways to correct this. Here are two suggestions: 1) use the plural, "When students take the Ords, they should get a good night's sleep before the exam"; 2) leave out the gender specific pronoun, "When taking the Ords, a good night's sleep is important."
- Look at the verbs used in the question; they signal what your response should be.
 - analyze-to break the problem into parts and explain how they work together
 - defend-to give specific details to support your opinion
 - define-to give the meaning, to describe the basic characteristics
 - discuss-to present details and reasons leading to a conclusion
 - evaluate/comment-to examine advantages and disadvantages and then to state your position and why you believe that way
 - identify-to give the characteristics of
 - interpret-to explain the significance or meaning
- Don't use jargon; your audience (the readers) are pastors/lay people/educators, not your theology professors. The readers' word is the congregation, not academia.
- Be as clear as possible. The reader should be able to follow your train of thought. Organization is a critical element of clarity.
- Be concise and use concrete language. Don't fill up the space with a lot of useless words. Instead of saying, "owing to the fact", write "since."
- The outlining and the prewriting suggestions may seem as if they will take too much time but that is just not true. Ten or fifteen minutes spent getting your thoughts together and organized will not only make it much easier to write your answer, but will also make your answer more understandable, clear, and complete.
- Low grades seem to be caused by several factors: the writer did not follow directions; the question was not completely answered; there was too much time spent on one part and other parts were not developed; and/or the paper was disorganized and did not come to a point.
- Support any generalizations with details. Instead of just writing that the Jewish people were persecuted under the reign of King Herod, also give specific examples of abuse.