I wanted to share some of my own thoughts with you, having taken them myself (back when Philander Chase himself was still reviewing the answers!), having worked with the GBEC over several years to assess them, and having worked with eight years of students preparing to take them.

First of all, I am increasingly certain that one of your biggest tasks as you approach the GOEs is *not freaking out about the GOEs*. They can cause anxiety. But you’ve been preparing for them for years, in your classes, and even as you worship in church. **Don’t cram**. Feel free to skim through or lightly review notes or resources, but don’t think you need to sit down and read a stack of books to prepare. You’ve worked through that stack since the beginning of seminary.

The best way I’ve found to prepare is to **review previous General Ordination Exams**, which can be found online here: <http://www.episcopalgbec.org/previous-exams/index.php> . Take some time and read through them. It can be valuable to know the sorts of questions they’ll be asking. Then take some of them and sit down to think through your response to them: either time yourself writing a response, or at least outline the sorts of things you’d say. I found this very helpful in my own preparation. (Bear in mind that the exam has changed somewhat over time, so the ones from the last three years will be more like the one you’ll take.)

**Manage your stress and anxiety beforehand.** Go to a movie or hang out with friends the night before the exams begin. Make sure that friends and family know what you’re doing and how they can be present for you during the exam. Have a celebration when you’re done.

In 2019, the exam is set for January 3, 4, and 7 with the 5th and 6th as days off. Take your day off during the exams *as a day off*: go for a walk, work out, pray, sing, cook, do what you need to relax and catch your breath.

The exams will be **six essay questions**. Each is intended to be answered in around 1000 words. Each question is devised to be answered in two hours, but three and a half hours are provided for you to work.

**Responses are open resource.** This includes books and electronic media like CDs and the internet. Take some time beforehand to gather your resources – prayer book, Bible, hymnals, reference works, other books you might want to use – near where you will be writing your responses.

**General strategies for responding to the questions:**

1. Read the *entire question*. Be clear what it is asking. (It is important that you respond to the question that is being asked; take a moment to make sure you understand before beginning to think of a response.)
2. Notice the *parts of a question*: does it have only one part, two, three? Does it suggest that one part should be larger than another, or should they be about the same?
3. What *specific elements* are expected in a response? Make sure to include **all** of them.
4. Does the question ask for a *pastoral response to a particular person or group,* or just a *reasoned exploration of a topic*?
5. Take some time to think through your answer. Write an outline of your response so you have a plan of action instead of immediately jumping in. Make sure that the structure of your outline and response reflects the structure of the question.  
     
   **Some more general advice for your writing:**
6. Before beginning to write your response, read closely the rubric associated with the question: it will tell you in some detail all that is needed to provide a proficient response. (These were new for 2016 and test-takers found them very helpful. They describe *exactly* what a reader will be looking for.) ***After you finish writing, go back and re-read the question and the rubric to make sure that you have done everything expected*.**
7. If you use someone else’s words, *you must cite them*. The GBEC says that you must “cite all sources consulted whether or not directly quoted.” At the same time, do not make use of many or extensive quotations, this is to be your response not someone else’s. Don’t re-use or cut and paste from other work you’ve done previously.
8. Citations should be brief and in the flow of the text in parentheses: e.g. (Acts 4:5), (BCP), (class notes), (Coakley). Page numbers are not needed; a bibliography at the end is not necessary and does count towards your 1000 words. Internet references need the entire URL in a citation.
9. Open resource helps to ease anxiety somewhat. But be careful not to get bogged down reading a lot, searching for someone else’s answer. Instead, sit down and think through *your answer* – with an outline, #5 above – and then make use of sources that help you do your work.
10. Proofread!
11. Your response needs to show proficiency, the kind of proficiency that someone taking an MDiv ought to show. This means that it is not a scholarly paper, not a dissertation. It does not need to be overly technical and will most likely be less detailed than any term paper you’ve written in seminary. They should be written in a clear style, free of unnecessary jargon.

Here’s what the GBEC specifically says is the standard for responses (http://www.episcopalgbec.org/standards.php):

All GOE answers should show a balance of:

* *Perception and analysis* of the issues
* *Application* of resources and training
* *Demonstration* of knowledge and pastoral sensitivity
* *Articulation* of the Candidate’s view

GOE answers should be clear, concise and accurate, with appropriate extrapolation and coherent argument. The following are considered weaknesses:

* Factual error
* Irrelevant information
* Fallacious reasoning
* Unfounded opinion

*We could take the following question from the 2016 GOEs as an example:*

Write an essay of about 1,000 words offering at least two Christian theological perspectives on wealth. Cite for each perspective at least one biblical or Book of Common Prayer passage and one Christian theologian. Of the theologians cited, one must be from the Post-Reformation Anglican tradition. Conclude the essay by describing how one or more of your theological perspectives on wealth would inform your work with the members of a Vestry faced with deciding what to do with an unexpected, substantial, and undesignated financial legacy gift

1. **Read the question:** There is a “street level” practical, pastoral concern motivating the question, found in the last sentence: how to deal with a gift. This is where your response is driving – and so it is important not to get hung up only doing the biblical or theological work. It is asking you to **take a Christian perspective on wealth**, drawn from at least one theological perspective on the matter. You are not just exploring different ideas for the sake of exploration, but building a case. You are also not telling personal stories about wealth or giving your unsubstantiated opinion.
2. **Parts of the question/ specific elements:** Let’s analyze the question to notice the parts:  
     
   Write an essay of about 1,000 words offering   
   at least two Christian theological perspectives on wealth. (*Could be more, may not be less*. *Must be drawn from Christian theological perspectives, not general notions.*)  
     
   Cite for each perspective at least one biblical or Book of Common Prayer passage and one Christian theologian. (*Two perspectives: Each must have support by a theologian and Bible* ***or*** *BCP. Only one theologian needed, but may use multiple references from BCP or Bible. You will not be marked off if you do not have more than one apt reference.*)  
     
   Of the theologians cited, one must be from the Post-Reformation Anglican tradition. (*It does not say that you need to include a pre-Reformation theologian – both may be post-Reformation, but one* ***must*** *be. That one must be Anglican, the other may or may not be.*)  
     
   Conclude the essay by describing how one or more of your theological perspectives on wealth would inform your work with the members of a Vestry faced with deciding what to do with an unexpected, substantial, and undesignated financial legacy gift. (*This is important: you are* ***not*** *expected to articulate two perspectives in order to argue that one is right and the other wrong. You are bringing them to bear on the question of a gift. You may decide that only one of the perspectives you articulate will be relevant to this situation. It does not say that you must refer in this last section to all of the perspectives you set forth, but a very good answer would either show how they both bear on the matter, or else why the one that does not is not pertinent in that situation.*)
3. The question is asking for a perspective which “would inform your work with the members of a vestry…” It is **not** asking for a “pastoral response” which would be, in effect, a script you would speak directly to a vestry. *It is asking you to clarify your own thinking and articulate a perspective. It is asking you to speak about your thinking and practice.*
4. An effective response to this question will have two major sections, with the first section setting out the two perspectives, with biblical and theological support, and the second section discussing how these might relate to a pastoral situation. It would seem that the first section ought to be about twice as long as the second, giving a fair account of two perspectives. An outline might look like this:
   1. Perspectives on wealth
      1. Perspective 1 (300-350 words)
      2. Perspective 2 (300-350 words)
   2. These perspectives applied to a gifts policy in church (300-350 words)

**Some further resources:**

Some suggestions for taking the GOEs from the General Board of Examining Chaplains: <http://www.episcopalgbec.org/suggestions-tips.php>

Some information about the exam itself:  
<http://www.episcopalgbec.org/exam.php>

Some helpful general guidance for writing essay exams:  
<http://www.studygs.net/tsttak4.htm>

Some further guidance:  
<http://shell.cas.usf.edu/~thomasw/GOE%20tips.pdf>

I hope you find this helpful! I’d be happy to answer any questions at jfout@bexleyseabury.edu