University of Massachusetts Boston
Global Governance and Human Security Program
PhD Qualifying Exam
August 25, 2014

Helpful advice (we hope)

Four Steps to Answering Your Comprehensive Exam Question

1. *Provide definitions, restate the question, and provide a succinct answer.*
   There are two essential tasks here. The first is to provide the clear definitions that you are going to use throughout your response. You may clarify your definitions by restating the question with those definitions in mind; however, this is not essential. The second essential task is to provide a succinct answer to the question. This is the thesis that you will defend in your response.

2. *Describe and defend your strategy for addressing the question.*
   You should give your reader a game plan telling her how you plan to answer the question. That plan should indicate why you have chosen this strategy. Different questions demand different approaches. Some questions might be answered through comparative analysis of a number of previous studies. Some require an interpretive approach, for example, explaining the historical context of different research and discussing its strengths and limitations in light of that history. In other cases, you may be criticizing some prior work due to one of more specific flaws in the relevant research. Explain briefly what your approach is and why you chose it.

3. *Follow your strategy.*
   Most of your response should be devoted to working your chosen strategy. In general, your response should be organized around the argument you are making, that is to say, the strategy that you outlined at the beginning.

4. *Draw conclusions.*
   In your conclusion, state forcefully what you established. Avoid the temptations to speculate on the future or to introduce new variables.

Remember, your goal in this examination is to demonstrate a thorough, critical understanding of the fields covered in the core courses in the Global Governance and Human Security doctoral program. Both a thorough understanding (the ability to discuss all the research and theorizing that is relevant to a particular question) and a critical understanding (the ability to identify and weigh the strengths and weakness of different approaches and of specific research studies) are essential. Demonstrating only one or the other – for example, by providing only an extensive, accurate, but uncritical bibliographic essay or by providing only an insightful commentary on some of the main arguments in the field without relating them to the work of specific authors or to the details of actual research – is insufficient.
**Additional Advice and Stylistic Considerations**

Focus. Your argument is likely to be more compelling, defensible, interesting, strong, and otherwise valuable, the narrower it is. Yes, you need to demonstrate your mastery of extensive literatures, but you can do that quite well by establishing and defending one very specific truth about the literature that you are considering in a particular response.

Be succinct. It is not only a virtue; it is a requirement. Write lengthier rough drafts. Then eliminate the non-essential.

To repeat: In your introduction, tell your reader your question, your position, and your trajectory. Your reader should not be made to feel that she does not know where you are taking her.

Encapsulate in the first sentence of each paragraph its main contribution.

Avoid weak first person claims. A sentence such as “I believe that UN peacekeepers in South Sudan cannot gain the support of the people of South Sudan” causes the reader to divide her attention between the authority of the writer and the claim being advanced. (e.g., Your reader may think “That’s an interesting claim. But I wonder why she believes that.”) Stating a claim directly usually gives it more credibility.

Distinguish between countries, states, political regimes, and governments, between nations, communities, and classes, and between member governments and the staff of intergovernmental organizations. A country is not an actor. Thus, a claim such as, “The United States has preferred economic growth to social equity,” leaves the reader wondering if this refers to the administrative apparatus (the state) or a particular government (e.g., the Reagan administration).

Check your grammar; edit thoroughly; proofread carefully.

Avoid passive voice; the use of passive voice can lead to very sloppy thinking, especially about politics and policy, because it allows a writer to avoid deciding exactly who took a specific action.

Be sure that the antecedent of every pronoun you use is the noun that you intend it to be. Pronouns always refer the immediately preceding noun of the same number (a singular pronoun to the immediately preceding singular noun, a plural pronoun to the immediately preceding plural noun).

Be sure that your subjects and verbs agree.

Avoid lists. Write prose. Avoid common metaphors. Do not use contractions.

Give complete phrases (e.g., non-governmental organizations) before using acronyms (e.g., NGOs). Do not capitalize common nouns.
Citation and Bibliography Formats

To represent another’s ideas as your own, even if paraphrasing is plagiarism. At the conclusion of every clause or sentence that reflects or reports someone else’s opinion or information, use either an in-text citation or a footnote.

An in-text citation gives the author’s last name, year of publication, and page, in parentheses. (Author year: page). Then, in an attached list of references, each source is given like this:

Last Name, First name, year, *Title of Book*, Place of Publication: Publisher.
Last Name, First name, month year, “article title,” *Title of Periodical*, (Volume: Number).
Last Name, First name, year, “chapter title,” in *Title of Edited Book*, First and Last Name of Editor, ed., Place of Publication: Publisher.

A footnote refers your reader to a complete citation at the bottom of the page.

The footnote format is:

First name Last Name, *Title of Book*, Place of Publication: Publisher, Year, Page(s).
First name Last Name, “article title,” *Title of Journal*, (Volume: Number), Month Year, Page(s).
First name Last Name, “chapter title,” in *Title of Edited Book*, First name Last Name of Editor, ed., Place of Publication: Publisher, Year, Page(s).

If you use footnotes, you do not need to attach a bibliography, unless there are sources that you consulted but did not cite and you want the reader to be aware of these.

If you use footnotes, please do use footnotes (i.e., citations at the bottom of the page) not endnotes (i.e., citations at the end of the paper). It cuts down on page turning and allows the reader to focus on your argument.

For a more complete set of examples for footnote and author-date citation, see the Chicago Manual of Style’s Citation Quick Guide. Note that there are different specific formats for citations – each is acceptable, as long as you are consistent throughout.

Acknowledgements

This handout relies on earlier handouts written for similar purposes by Professor W. Ofuatey Kodjoe of the City University of New York Graduate Center and Professor Christopher Candland of Wellesley College.