Essay exam tip sheet

The American College of Medical Practice Executives (ACMPE) essay exam will assess your knowledge of medical practice management principles and issues, problem-solving and decision-making skills, and your ability to communicate in writing. The essay exam consists of three questions based on critical incidents that require assessment of a situation and a prescribed course of action. Questions are open-ended, allowing for multiple approaches to solving a problem, and are drawn from the four competencies and eight domains in *The Body of Knowledge for Medical Practice Management, 2nd Edition*. Examinees have one hour and 30 minutes to complete the essay exam.

**Tips for answering essay questions**

- Read each question carefully to make sure you understand what you’re being asked and process all important information. Use a pen or highlighter to mark key elements in the question.
- If a question has multiple parts, be sure to answer each one.
- Develop a quick outline before writing your response. Don’t include it with your essay; use it to ensure that you demonstrate your depth of knowledge and problem-solving and decision-making skills.
- Frame your answers by including pertinent assumptions that you’ve made about environmental, organizational or other factors.
- Write your response in formal essay style, using complete sentences and paragraphs. Your response should have an introduction, body and conclusion. Avoid spelling, grammar and punctuation mistakes.
- Include enough detail for the grader to be able to assess the depth of your knowledge.

**Exam preparation**

**Gain insight:** Sign up for the ACMPE Board Certification Network in the Member Community on mgma.org. ACMPE Fellows and Certified Members are available to answer your questions and otherwise support you in your exam preparation.

**Get some practice:** Tackle the sample essay questions found on the back of this tip sheet. Timed practice is the best way to prepare for the essay exam. Give yourself approximately 30 minutes to answer each question or allot one hour and 30 minutes to tackle three questions. Use the Board Certification Network in the Member Community if you’d like feedback on your approach.

**Know the grading criteria:** Review the essay grading criteria found on the back of this tip sheet. Samples of passing essay answers are also available in the Certification Resources Library.

Using the conventional letter grade scale of A+ to C-, each essay examiner will evaluate the adequacy of your response. Teams comprised of three ACMPE Fellows each evaluate one of your three essay responses; i.e., a total of nine individuals are involved in grading your entire essay examination. While there is the possibility of an absolutely incorrect response for some
questions, most questions have several correct responses. Your final score is calculated by averaging all nine of the examiners’ grades. You must earn a composite score of B or better to pass the essay exam. With the assistance of a psychometric testing consultant, all essay exam grades are statistically analyzed to ensure the reliability of the examination.

**Essay grading criteria**

**In-depth knowledge:**
- The response displays depth of knowledge.
- The response displays insight into the topic.

**Problem-solving and decision-making skills:**
- The approach is logical and effective.
- The approach is rational and realistic.
- The approach is systematic, which may include defining the problem, gathering data and considering alternatives.

**Completeness:**
- The response answers the question(s) asked.
- The response is comprehensive and includes sufficient detail.
- The response provides relevant information.
- The response addresses most critical elements.

**Organization:**
- The response displays a logical flow of information.
- The response is easy to follow.

**Written communication skills:**
- The response effectively communicates its message.
- The response is clear and concise.
- The response is written in formal essay style. (Formal essay style refers to complete sentences and paragraphs. Headings, subheadings and minimal use of bullets or numbering are acceptable.)
- The response has minimal spelling and grammar issues.

**Sample questions**

1. You are the administrator of a medical practice. The practice has been functioning primarily on a “We’ll cross that bridge when we get to it” basis. In light of increasing competition and a declining patient base, you believe a formal strategic planning retreat is critical. None of the physicians have ever participated in a strategic planning process and may resist devoting their time to it.

   *Describe how you would handle this situation.*

2. You are the administrator of a four-physician orthopedic practice in a rural area. The physicians travel to 15 satellite clinics to meet the needs of referring physicians and patients. Several physicians feel that they are not seeing a sufficient number of patients to justify their travel time and are considering the elimination of some sites.

   *Discuss how you would help the physicians arrive at a decision.*

3. You are the chief executive officer of a large, multispecialty group practice that has resulted from the recent merger and consolidation of three smaller practices. The group formed an executive committee that consists of a physician from each of the former practices. Conflict among the members of the executive committee has arisen over expense allocations.

   *Discuss how you would work with the physician leaders to manage the conflict.*