OSCE checklist for cardiovascular examination

An OSCE checklist for cardiovascular examination covers general inspection, hands and pulse, face and neck, the chest, heart sounds and signs of heart failure, in that order. This is our own practice list.

The checklist, step by step

1. Wash your hands, introduce yourself, confirm identity, explain, gain consent and offer a chaperone.
2. Sit the patient at about 45 degrees and expose the chest, respecting dignity.
3. Inspect from the end of the bed: breathlessness, colour, scars, visible pulsation, oedema, devices.
4. Hands: temperature, clubbing, splinter haemorrhages, capillary refill.
5. Feel the radial pulse for rate and rhythm. Say you would check for a radio-femoral delay and take blood pressure in both arms.
6. Face: eyes for signs of cholesterol or anaemia, and the mouth for colour of the tongue.
7. Neck: look for the venous pulse, and feel one carotid at a time.
8. Chest: inspect, feel the apex beat, then feel for heaves and thrills.
9. Listen over the mitral, tricuspid, pulmonary and aortic areas while feeling the carotid to time any murmur.
10. Reposition for the extra manoeuvres your course teaches, such as leaning forward and lying on the left side.
11. Listen to the lung bases, then check the sacrum and ankles for oedema and the peripheral pulses.
12. Cover the patient, thank them, wash your hands and suggest an ECG, blood pressure and next tests.

What candidates commonly forget

- Feeling only one carotid at a time.

- Timing murmurs against the pulse.
- Checking the sacrum for oedema in a patient who lies back.
- Listening to the lung bases and checking the ankles.
- Saying what you think is wrong before you are asked.

How to use this list

This is our own practice checklist. Exam bodies mark in their own way. Use it to build a routine, then say each step aloud as you do it. You can also practise with an AI patient on this site, and try one station free with no sign-up. For original examination stations, see the PLAB 2 stations list.

Common questions

Where do you listen in a cardiovascular examination?

Over the mitral, tricuspid, pulmonary and aortic areas, plus the carotids if asked. Your course will teach the exact landmarks.

How do I check the pulse in an OSCE?

Feel the radial pulse for rate and rhythm. If it feels irregular, say so and say you would confirm the rhythm with a 12-lead ECG. NICE advises checking for an irregular pulse when atrial fibrillation is suspected.

Do I need to measure blood pressure?

Say you would, and do it if the task allows. Name the arm you used.

Sources

- NICE: Atrial fibrillation (NG196)
- NICE: Hypertension in adults (NG136)
- NICE: Chronic heart failure in adults (NG106)
- NHS: Heart failure

Checked 2026-11-13. Fees and rules change, so confirm them with the regulator before you book.