OSCE checklist for cranial nerves

An OSCE checklist for cranial nerves takes the twelve nerves in order, testing smell, vision, eye movements, face sensation and movement, hearing, palate, shoulder and tongue. This is our own practice list.

The checklist, step by step

1. Wash your hands, introduce yourself, confirm identity, explain and gain consent.
2. Look at the face for asymmetry, drooping, eyelid position and eye position.
3. Nerve I: ask about smell. Test it only if the task calls for it.
4. Nerve II: check visual acuity, visual fields by confrontation, and look at the discs if asked.
5. Pupils: size, shape, reaction to light in both eyes, and accommodation.
6. Nerves III, IV and VI: eye movements in an H shape. Ask about double vision and watch for jerking movements.
7. Nerve V: light touch on the three areas of the face, then jaw clenching.
8. Nerve VII: raise eyebrows, close eyes tightly, smile and puff the cheeks. Note whether the forehead is spared.
9. Nerve VIII: test hearing and, if asked, Rinne and Weber tests.
10. Nerves IX and X: ask the patient to say "ahh" and watch the palate and uvula. Listen to the voice.
11. Nerve XI: shrug the shoulders and turn the head against your hand.
12. Nerve XII: ask the patient to put out the tongue, and look for wasting or deviation.
13. Thank the patient, wash your hands and summarise.

What candidates commonly forget

- Looking at the forehead when the face is weak.
- Testing each eye alone for acuity and fields.
- Asking about double vision during eye movements.

- Giving the nerve name and number when you report.
- Checking that you can see the whole palate.

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

Do I have to test smell in an OSCE?

Only if the task or the examiner's prompt asks for it. Many stations skip it. Say aloud that you have not tested it.

Why does the forehead matter in facial weakness?

It helps separate the two main patterns of facial weakness. Check what your course teaches, and say which pattern you suspect.

Is this the exam's checklist?

No. It is our own list, written for practice.

Sources

- NICE: Stroke and TIA in over 16s (NG128)
- NHS: Bell's palsy
- NHS: Symptoms of a stroke
- WHO: Hand hygiene

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