OSCE GALS exam checklist

The OSCE GALS exam is a quick screen of gait, arms, legs and spine: three questions, then look, move and walk. This is our own practice checklist.

The checklist, step by step

1. Wash your hands, introduce yourself, confirm identity, explain and gain consent.
2. Ask three screening questions: any pain, swelling or stiffness in the muscles, joints or back, any trouble dressing, any trouble on stairs.
3. Ask the patient to stand in underwear or shorts, and look from the front, side and back.
4. Gait: watch the patient walk away, turn and come back.
5. Spine: look from behind and from the side. Ask the patient to tilt the head towards each shoulder, then bend to touch the toes.
6. Arms: ask the patient to put the hands behind the head, then out in front with palms down and up.
7. Hands: make a fist, squeeze your fingers, and touch each finger to the thumb. Look for swelling and deformity, and gently squeeze across the knuckles.
8. Legs: lie the patient down. Bend and straighten each knee, turn each hip inwards with the hip and knee bent, and check each knee for fluid.
9. Feet: look at the soles, and squeeze across the base of the toes.
10. Say what you found, and say which joint you would examine in detail.
11. Thank the patient and wash your hands.

What candidates commonly forget

- Asking the three screening questions first.
- Looking from the back as well as the front.
- Examining the feet.
- Naming the joint you would examine next.

- Staying within the screen. Do not turn it into a full joint examination.

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 a general station frame, see the general OSCE checklist.

Common questions

What does GALS stand for?

Gait, arms, legs and spine. It is a screening routine for the musculoskeletal system.

How long should a GALS take in an OSCE?

It is a screen, so it is quick. Practise it until you can do it smoothly and still talk to the patient.

Is this the marking sheet?

No. It is our own list for practice.

Sources

- Arthritis UK: The musculoskeletal examination, GALS
- NICE: Osteoarthritis in over 16s (NG226)
- NHS: Rheumatoid arthritis
- NHS: Osteoarthritis

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