OSCE history taking checklist

An OSCE history taking checklist moves from introduction and an open question through the presenting complaint, background, ideas and worries to a summary. This is our own practice list.

The checklist, step by step

1. Wash your hands if you are near the patient, introduce yourself, confirm the name and date of birth, and say how long you have.
2. Ask an open question and let the patient talk without interruption at first.
3. Explore the main symptom: where, when it started, what it is like, how bad, what makes it better or worse, and anything that goes with it.
4. Ask about the patient's own ideas, worries and what they hope for from the visit.
5. Ask the screening questions for the body system involved, then any red flag symptoms.
6. Ask about past illnesses, operations, medicines including those bought over the counter, and allergies.
7. Ask about family history, home life, work, smoking, alcohol and drugs, and how the problem affects daily life.
8. Check for anything the patient wants to add.
9. Summarise in plain words and check that you have it right.
10. Say what you would do next and ask whether the patient has questions.
11. Thank the patient.

What candidates commonly forget

- Asking about ideas, worries and expectations.
- Asking about allergies and medicines.
- Using signposting such as "I would now like to ask about your health in general".
- Summarising and checking.

- Asking about how the problem affects work and daily life.

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

How long should I spend on the open question?

Long enough to hear the patient's own account without interrupting. Then move to focused questions.

Do I need a mnemonic for pain?

They can help you remember the order. Use your own words and listen to the answers.

Is this the examiner's marking sheet?

No. It is our own list for practice.

Sources

- NICE: Patient experience in adult NHS services (CG138)
- NICE: Shared decision making (NG197)
- WHO: Hand hygiene

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