OSCE checklist for mechanism of labour

An OSCE checklist for mechanism of labour usually means demonstrating, on a pelvis and a fetal doll, the movements of the baby's head in a normal birth: engagement, descent, flexion, internal rotation, extension, restitution, external rotation and expulsion.

OSCE checklist for mechanism of labour: steps to practise

1. Introduce yourself to the examiner and say what you will show, and with which presentation and position.
2. Describe the pelvis model: inlet, cavity and outlet, and the main landmarks.
3. State the presentation and position you are using, and why it is common.
4. Show engagement: the widest part of the head passes the pelvic inlet.
5. Show descent, which continues through labour with contractions.
6. Show flexion, with the chin moving towards the chest so a smaller part leads.
7. Show internal rotation, as the head turns to fit the shape of the pelvis.
8. Show extension, as the head is born under the pubic bone.
9. Show restitution, as the head turns back to line up with the shoulders.
10. Show external rotation, as the shoulders turn within the pelvis, then expulsion of the shoulders and body.
11. Say what you would observe in a real labour at each stage.

What candidates commonly forget

- Mixing up restitution and external rotation.
- Naming the presentation and position before you start.
- Doing the steps in order and not skipping one.
- Linking each movement to the pelvic shape.
- Saying what the midwife or nurse monitors.

Local policy comes first

This is our own practice checklist. Your college, hospital or country may do some steps differently. Where local policy and this list disagree, follow local policy. Some courses teach the movements with slight differences, or add other positions. Use the version you have been taught. You can practise with an AI patient, and try one station free with no sign-up. See also the general OSCE nursing checklist.

Common questions

What are the cardinal movements of labour?

Engagement, descent, flexion, internal rotation, extension, restitution, external rotation and expulsion.

Why does the head rotate?

To fit the shape of the pelvis as it moves down. Explain it with the model.

Do I need to know different positions?

Check your course. Many ask for the most common position first.

Sources

- MedlinePlus: Your baby in the birth canal (cardinal movements)
- NICE NG235: Intrapartum care
- WHO labour care guide: user's manual

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