OSCE checklist for shoulder examination

An OSCE checklist for shoulder examination follows look, feel, move, then the strength and special tests, and always includes the neck. This is our own practice list.

The checklist, step by step

1. Wash your hands, introduce yourself, confirm identity, explain and gain consent. Ask about pain and which hand is dominant.
2. Expose both shoulders and look from the front, side and back.
3. Look for wasting, swelling, scars and shoulder position.
4. Feel the joints and bony points for warmth and tenderness, starting away from pain.
5. Move actively first: lifting forward, lifting to the side, rotation, and reaching up the back. Note any painful arc.
6. Move passively and compare the range with the active range.
7. Test the strength of the rotator cuff muscles against resistance.
8. Use the special tests for impingement and instability that your course teaches.
9. Examine the neck and check the nerves and pulses in the arm.
10. Thank the patient, wash your hands and say what you think is wrong.

What candidates commonly forget

- Looking at the neck.
- Comparing active with passive movement.
- Checking both shoulders.
- Asking about pain before each movement.
- Naming a cause, such as impingement, a frozen shoulder or a dislocation.

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

Why does the active and passive difference matter?

In some shoulder problems movement is limited the same way both ways, and in others only when the patient moves it. Your course will explain what each pattern suggests.

Do I have to do every special test?

Do the tests the task and your course call for. Say which others you would do.

Is this a marking sheet?

No. It is our own list for practice.

Sources

- NHS: Shoulder pain
- NHS: Frozen shoulder
- NHS: Shoulder impingement
- WHO: Hand hygiene

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