OSCE checklist for suctioning

An OSCE checklist for suctioning covers preparation, protecting yourself and the patient, short controlled passes of a clean catheter, and reassessing breathing afterwards. Say the type of suction you are doing: mouth and throat or tracheal.

OSCE checklist for suctioning: steps to practise

1. Confirm the need: noisy breathing, visible secretions, falling saturation or the patient cannot clear them.
2. Wash or rub your hands. Put on the protective equipment your policy requires.
3. Check the suction unit, tubing and collection jar.
4. Introduce yourself and explain, even if the patient is drowsy, and gain consent if they can give it.
5. Position the patient as your course teaches and check oxygen is available.
6. Choose a catheter of the right size and open it without touching the part that goes into the patient.
7. Insert gently without suction, apply suction as you withdraw, and keep each pass short.
8. Stop and reassess if the patient is distressed, the saturation falls or the heart rate changes.
9. Rinse the catheter with sterile fluid if your policy says to, and dispose of it after use.
10. Observe breathing, saturation and colour afterwards. Offer mouth care.
11. Record the amount, colour, consistency, any change in the patient and how they tolerated it.

What candidates commonly forget

- Not applying suction while inserting.
- Keeping each pass short and asking for help if the patient worsens.
- Having oxygen ready.
- Protecting yourself with the right equipment.
- Describing the secretions in the notes.

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. Pass length, catheter size, depth, and whether you use a closed system depend on the patient and your policy. Follow local guidance. 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

How long should each suction pass be?

Use the time set in your policy, and stop earlier if the patient is struggling.

Do I apply suction while inserting the catheter?

No. Insert without suction and apply it on the way out, unless your local policy says otherwise.

What do I record after suctioning?

The amount, colour and thickness of the secretions, the patient's breathing and saturation, and how they coped.

Sources

- National Tracheostomy Safety Project
- NICE QS61: Infection prevention and control
- WHO guidelines on hand hygiene in health care

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