OSCE checklist for upper limb examination

An OSCE checklist for upper limb examination uses look, feel, move, then power, reflexes, sensation and function, from the neck to the hands. 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 about handedness.
2. Expose both arms to the shoulder, and ask the patient to sit comfortably.
3. Look at both arms for posture, scars, wasting, swelling, skin and nails. Compare sides.
4. Feel for warmth and tenderness along the shoulder, elbow, wrist and hand joints.
5. Move each joint actively, then passively, and watch the face for pain.
6. Test power in the main muscle groups, and compare sides.
7. Test reflexes, then sensation in the main nerve areas of the hand and forearm.
8. Check the hands: grip, pinching, and fine movements such as doing up a button.
9. Check the pulses and capillary refill at the wrist.
10. Say that you would examine the neck, and the opposite arm if you have not already.
11. Thank the patient, wash your hands and summarise your findings.

What candidates commonly forget

- Comparing with the other arm.
- Examining the neck as the source of arm symptoms.
- Testing function, such as buttons and writing, as well as power.
- Asking about pain before you move a joint.
- Checking the pulses.

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 is the order for an upper limb examination?

Look, feel, move, then power, reflexes and sensation, and finally function. Learn the order your course uses.

How is an upper limb different from a hand examination?

A hand examination is narrower. An upper limb examination also covers the shoulder, elbow and neck.

Is this a marking sheet?

No. It is our own list for practice.

Sources

- NHS: Carpal tunnel syndrome
- NHS: Rheumatoid arthritis
- NHS: Osteoarthritis
- WHO: Hand hygiene

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