



Preparing for the Oral Exam: Examiners Edition

Oral examinations remain important in the ANZCVS examination process, both at membership and fellowship level. The inclusion of oral examinations is a point of difference for the College and is considered important both in assessment and in the character of the College. However, oral examinations can be susceptible to bias and may be stressful for candidates. This material has been developed to assist examiners and candidates prepare for, and undertake, consistent and fair oral examinations.

Structure and Content of the Oral Examination

College examiners workshops are invaluable

- Check the **Subject Guidelines**
 - Format
 - Structure
- Exam content is approved prior to day of examination by
 - Chapter Examinations Committee
 - Board of Examiners



Preparing for the Oral Exam

- Practice the questions
- Discuss questions and marking guides with other examiners
 - Identify problem areas
 - Pre-empt potential issues
- Be organised
 - Who is asking which question?
 - Who is changing the slides or controlling multimedia?



Marking Keys

- Discuss expectations with other examiners prior to the exam
- What could a candidate say or do that would make their answer
 - Unacceptable?
 - Satisfactory?
 - Outstanding?



Logistics

- Allow plenty of time to:
 - Locate the exam venue and room
 - Meet other examiners and the observer
 - Set up IT and other multimedia
- Consider:
 - Car parking location
 - Travel time
 - Coffee time!



Time Management

- Duration varies by discipline – refer to subject guidelines
 - Membership oral exams 45-60 minutes
 - Fellowship oral exams 60-120 minutes
- Determine time allocation per question prior to the exam
- Keep the candidate moving through content
- Monitor the time allocated
 - Wall Clock, Watch, Phone



Dealing with candidate anxiety

KEY: Open, relaxed and friendly communication

- Friendly introductions
- Brief welcome and short chat at the beginning
- Appear relaxed
- Explain the process
- Offer a drink
- Be organised and maintain an open communicative environment

Useful phrases to start with

“What started your interest in X?”

“This is a friendly discussion to understand your knowledge and ideas on some topics”

“I am just going to run through the exam procedure”

“Please don't worry about us taking notes, this is normal and does not reflect on your performance”

“Please ask questions at any time or ask us if you need further clarification”

“Take your time to answer”

“We can't provide you feedback although we would love to, so just keep answering the questions and assume all is going well”



How to guide a candidate to the question objectives

KEY: Clear, organised and consistent

- Be clear and direct
- Organised and consistent format of each question and delivery between candidates
- Avoid extraneous information or excessively long content within a single question
- Ask them to elaborate or expand their answer
- Remind them what they have already covered
- Re-direct candidate back to primary objective
- When they have answered adequately, move onto the next question

Useful phrases to help the candidate provide more information

“Could you elaborate?”

“Is there anything else published about this topic?”

“Would you like to expand on your answer?”

“Are there any other different lines of thought on this topic?”

“You have covered this subject area in detail, any thoughts on X?”

“Could you be more specific about X?”

“How would you go about X?”

“Going back to what you mentioned about X”

“I think we are ready to move onto the next question.”



How to "Unstick" the Stuck Candidate

KEY: Non-threatening and supportive dialogue

- Re-phrase the question or key point
- Ask if they need clarification
- Remind them of previous answers
- Suggest coming back to the question later, if appropriate
- Be relaxed, friendly and smile
 - And move on

Useful phrases to keep the candidate talking

"You previously mentioned X, could you elaborate your thoughts on this?"

"Would you like us to repeat the question?"

"Did you need us to clarify the question?"

"We can return to this question later if you have any further thoughts."

"In the interest of time, we will move to the next question."



When the candidate is Extremely Nervous or Stressed

KEY: Identify the problem and attempt to address with non-threatening and supportive dialogue

- Don't rush
- Repeat, rephrase and/or clarify the question
- Offer a short break
- Speak clearly and be supportive
- Return or redirect to a line of questioning that is less confrontational
- Move onto the next question and offer to revisit the current question later, if appropriate
- Refer to the other examiner

Useful phrases to relax the nervous candidate

"We can pause here for a moment for you to gather your thoughts"

"Shall we rephrase the question?"

"Why don't we return to this topic later?"

"In the interest of time, we will move to the next question"



Challenges identified by previous oral examiners

- Time commitment for preparing high quality oral exams
- Stress associated with development, delivery and marking processes
- Keeping the exam consistent between candidates
- Avoiding verbal and body cues that reflect the candidate's performance or may lead/mislead them
- Dealing with extremely nervous and/or stressed candidates
- Deliberating on anxious, difficult and/or marginal candidates
- Time restrictions within the examination process and delivering content
- Conflict regarding exam format, content and marking consistency



Advice to novice examiners

KEY: Organisation and thorough preparation

- Attend examination workshops and collaborate with more experienced examiners
- Understand and follow examination guidelines
- Be familiar with the intimate details of all the questions
- Make notes in conjunction with questions to ensure accuracy of delivery
- Be organised and conform to time allocation
- Collaborative with co-examiner(s) to determine examination format and question delivery
- Practice question delivery
- Maintain a professional, yet friendly demeanour
- Remain calm
- Try to remain supportive but neutral in your response to the delivered answer
- Try to avoid leading the candidate towards specific lines of thought or answers