



Preparing for the Oral Exam: Candidates 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

Membership candidate handbook contains general information about the process
Each discipline's **subject guidelines** provide specifics for the exam:

- Content
- Format
- Structure

Exam content is approved prior to the day of examination by:

- Chapter Examinations Committee
- Board of Examiners



Preparing for the oral exam

Refer to your individual subject guidelines for:

- Objectives
- Learning outcomes
- Recommended reading material

Identify resources for oral exams

Organise a study group with other candidates

Prepare answers for common and current topics



Collaborating with other candidates and identifying mentors

- Identify a mentor who has the experience to provide advice on oral exam techniques, questions and potentially deliver a mock oral exam
- Discuss topics with colleagues and friends in your discipline
- Collaborate with other exam candidates to generate exam questions and practice verbal delivery
- If possible, practice with a variety of people to adjust to individual styles of questions and delivery
- Sound out answers to yourself or friends and family members



Practicing mock oral exams

KEY: Useful but requires appropriately experienced mentor

- Important to construct an organised verbal response and gauge effectiveness/accuracy of information delivered
- Can determine your reaction to unseen questions and ability to communicate under pressure
- Helpful to practice the exam format and timing
- May be useful to record yourself to critique your practice answers



Stress and anxiety

It is normal to experience some anxiety before and during oral exams

Oral exams can be intimidating and stressful due to:

- Unfamiliar examiners and environment
- Pressure of answering questions in a limited time
- The lack of feedback, body cues or prompts from examiners
- The period of time between written and oral exams

Familiarity with the process and thorough preparation can reduce anxiety



Techniques to reduce anxiety

KEY: Remain focused and positive -recognise that some level of nervousness is normal

- Seek advice, support and mentorship from family, friends, colleagues and other candidates in both a personal and professional capacity
- When preparing, take a break and a change of scenery when required
- Having a sense that you are well prepared
- Practice as much as possible
- Access material on exam techniques and anxiety
- Remain calm during the examination process
- Seek advice from mental health professionals if required



Logistics

- Bring a photographic identification document (e.g. drivers' licence, passport) which matches the name on your ANZCVS examination application form
- Arrive well rested
- Allow plenty of time to locate the exam venue and room
- Consider:
 - Car parking location
 - Travel time
 - Coffee time!
- Look and act professionally
- Turn off your mobile phone before entering the exam



The exam room

- A standard hotel room with the beds removed and rearranged with a desk and chairs
- The examiners will be sitting on one side of the desk with a chair for you to sit on the other side
- Water and writing materials will be provided
- A computer and screen may be set up
- Paper documents or photos may also be used



The examiners

- Examiners are directed to be open and friendly but neutral in their responses and body posture to avoid giving candidates cues to direct their answers
- Do not expect or read into feedback or verbal/body cues from examiners
- The examiners will be taking notes as you speak for recording the information you provide – try not to be distracted by this or read into the amount of note taking that is being done



Answering exam questions

KEY: Remain calm, take your time, and clarify the question if required

- Listen to the question carefully and ask for clarification if required
- Make notes if necessary, which may include diagnostic trees
- Take your time to compose your thoughts before answering
- Stay focused and do not ramble
- Focus on demonstrating effective clinical reasoning rather than on the final outcome
- It may help to relate the question to a case you have had in real life
- Do not overthink the question or your answers
- Have confidence in your knowledge and ability
- Remember that each new question is a fresh start



If things go wrong...

- If you are sure you cannot answer the question, it is best to admit that and move onto the next question – you can return to that topic later, time permitting
- Remember that each new question is a fresh start
- If you do find yourself losing your composure, ask the examiners for a brief break to refocus your thoughts and/or get a drink of water
- Don't get flustered - remember that you may be unable to answer some questions as the examiners explore the limits of your knowledge



Time management

- Duration varies by discipline – refer to subject guidelines
 - Membership oral exams 45-60 minutes
 - Fellowship oral exams 60-120 minutes
- If you have sufficiently covered a topic, the examiners may move on to get through the time allocated
- Don't worry if the examiners cut short your answer in the interests of time
- Similarly, the examiners may refocus you on a different part of the question if you have covered another area of the answer sufficiently
- Although there is a maximum amount of time allocated, it may take individuals more or less time to get through the allocated content. This does not reflect on the outcome, rather individual variability in conveying information
- If it helps, you can use a watch to keep abreast of time and pace yourself accordingly



Challenges identified by previous candidates

- Stress and intimidation of the oral exam process and unfamiliar examiners
- The lack of feedback or prompts regarding answer content and volume
- Difficulty in structuring answers under pressure
- Not reading into body or verbal cues from examiners
- Lack of guidance in delivering answer content
- Unfamiliar and sterile environment
- Remembering to take the time to consider and answer questions
- Moving on from difficult questions
- The long period of time between written and oral exams