



Australasian College for Emergency Medicine

OSCE Facts and FAQs

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The College often gets questions about how an OSCE station is prepared and scored. Let's clarify some OSCE procedures and correct a few misconceptions regarding the ACEM Fellowship Clinical Examination.

How do examiners score the OSCE?

Within each station of the OSCE, examiners will observe your performance and allocate a score for each of the domains assessed within that station, on a seven point scale. Usually, three domains or subdomains are assessed in a station.

Examiners determine to what extent a candidate has met the documented domain criteria for the station. This includes a defined standard for safe independent practice, as a newly graduated FACEM.

On this basis they allocate a domain score in accordance with the defined scoring guidelines. These guidelines are published in the document: *OSCE Domain Criteria* on the [Fellowship Examination Resources](#) page of ACEM's Education Resources site.

The objectivity of the scoring of the OSCE is documented in the *ACEM Procedure for Determining Minimally Competent Criteria for the FEx OSCE* on the [Fellowship Examination Resources](#) site.

What feedback will I get from the examiners?

Examiners will provide feedback on whether or not you were judged to have adequately addressed a representative sample of the domain criteria of the station. On occasion they may add additional comments.

Candidate feedback is provided to assist unsuccessful candidates in preparing for a further attempt and should be viewed as an opportunity for them to identify patterns and shortfalls in need of attention. This feedback can't be used to challenge the scoring of a station.

Where a candidate has made an error in a station that would result in a seriously adverse outcome for a patient, examiners will report an 'Area of Concern'. All candidates, whether they are successful at the OSCE or not, are notified of any Area of Concern reports that have been received.

Is it possible for an examiner to control whether I pass or fail a station by using the Global Score?

After allocating scores for each domains, from a station, examiners will allocate a Global Score on a five point scale. This score is used to calculate the station 'cut score' for all candidates in the cohort.

The global score has no impact on whether or not a particular candidate will pass a station, other than as part of the collected scores for all candidates in the cohort, that are used in the Borderline Regression standard setting process. Up to 90 candidate scores are used in the Borderline Regression calculation to determine the cut score for each station.

Historically, there has been some confusion about the role of the Global Score, with many trainees believing examiners did have pass/fail autonomy over and above the domain scoring. ACEM is working to ensure this misconception does not persist by publishing documents to clarify the OSCE marking, as in ACEM's *Procedure for Determining Minimally Competent Criteria* for the FEx OSCE on the [Fellowship Examination Resources](#) site and by presenting a session on the 'OSCE Mechanics' at the OSCE Preparation Program.

The examiner I had did not smile or look at me. What does this mean?

Whether an examiner smiles or not, isn't a helpful indicator of what mark they will allocate.

Although an examiner may not look at you throughout the whole station, this does not mean that they are not concentrating or carefully listening to what you are saying. **It is most likely that they are looking at the marking criteria for the station** to determine if you have met the required criteria or are trying to ensure the timing and sequence of the station is being followed as per the workshopping of the station.

How do examiners act during an OSCE station?

Within many stations in the OSCE, examiners might not interact directly with you but just observe how you engage with the role players as a scenario unfolds. In other stations, examiners may speak directly to you.

In a Structured Case Based Discussion station, one of the examiners will play a lead role in taking you through the station. The document, *Standardised Case Based Discussion (SCBD)* published on the [Fellowship Examination Resources](#) page describes this role more fully.

In other stations, **examiners may interact by presenting information and/or by asking questions** at certain parts of a station. Where it is planned that an examiner will participate in a station, this will be clearly stated in the Candidate Instructions, available for candidates during reading time. In addition, on rare occasions, an examiner may intervene unexpectedly during a station, such as to correct an omission or error made by a role player - this is always in your best interest.

Examiners have the responsibility to conduct the station and to standardise the experience, to ensure that all candidates have the opportunity to adequately address the assessment criteria and to avoid disadvantage to any candidate. As such, examiners who interact with candidates in SCBDs and other stations may ask questions and may 'interrupt' on occasion. This is often because the candidate has presented enough material on a particular domain, and/or there is a need to move the candidate forward to ensure they cover all domains being assessed.

The format of stations is prescribed in the station Instructions to Examiners and Role Players, and follows a similar pattern for all candidates, in the timing and structure of questioning and the presentation of information and prompts. Station workshoping and examiner calibration occurs on each day of the OSCE to reinforce consistency across stations presented in different rooms.

Does the OSCE try and model a real life ED situation?

The OSCE does not claim to be 'real', although it is 'simulated'.

Many of your assessments during FACEM training already occur in the real life situation of your Emergency Department. For example, trainees and SIMGs are required to undertake Workplace Based Assessments (WBAs).

While the OSCE is not a real life in-situ assessment as such, **it seeks to present a series of simulated clinical practice scenarios, with defined and compact tasks which do reflect important real-world FACEM competencies.** This allows you to be assessed across a range of domains that have been mapped to the curriculum outcomes.

Does the OSCE assess areas that I didn't receive training in?

The OSCE assesses domain criteria from the eight Curriculum Domains of the [ACEM Curriculum Framework](#) with the aim of reflecting competencies which are necessary for clinical practice at the standard of a new FACEM in Australasia.

The document OSCE Domain Criteria is essential reading for all candidates attempting the examination, as it lists the criteria that writers use when designing the stations and hence that may be assessed in any of the stations. This document is available on the [Fellowship Examination Resources](#) page.

The expectation that every domain assessed in the OSCE is 'taught' in a didactic way to trainees is one that may be largely unrealistic. Many of the domain criteria in domains such as Leadership and Management or Scholarship and Teaching are best learnt by observation and experience within the ED rather than being directly 'taught'. Any trainee who feels they are not experiencing exposure to the full range of the competencies that they may encounter in the OSCE, are strongly encouraged to discuss this with their DENT so that any gaps in their training may be addressed within their department. Seeking advice and feedback from FACEMs in the department on your management and approach to various patient encounters in real time, is also invaluable. If you feel that the issues regarding your training experience are still not being addressed despite discussion with your DENT, please contact ACEM via the trainee advocate on trainee.support@acem.org.au

Are the OSCE tasks designed to trick or stress me, or to cause 'cognitive overload'?

All stations are designed to be achievable in the allocated time for the station, and to allow you the opportunity to demonstrate your FACEM-level medical expertise, skills and knowledge according to the domains set for the station.

An OSCE station is never designed to 'trick' a candidate. Considerable effort is taken to make the candidate's task as clear and specific as possible.

Stations, such as the simulation stations, present time-critical resuscitation scenarios. These stations are not designed to further stress you, but are certainly aimed to reflect 'real-world' critical scenarios where assessment and management must be coordinated and prioritised under the pressure of time.

OSCEs are scripted to include 'reminders' where it is clinically appropriate to do so, or in the situation where you may have mentioned, but not adequately described, an area of importance. The assessment criteria for all stations are reviewed during station development and calibration to ensure that the criteria are consistently achievable for candidates who are at the standard of a new-FACEM.

Plan a structured approach to the required tasks during your reading time, so you don't become overwhelmed during the station.

I have done OK in my WBAs, so I must be at consultant level. So why do I find the OSCE hard to pass?

There are significant differences between workplace based assessments (WBAs) and the Fellowship OSCE, because they are designed to measure different things. WBAs are intended to monitor progress over time, and to have a significant formative component. The OSCE is a summative component designed to assess multiple skills and competencies at a single point in time.

All assessments are the result of a judgement about performance. Formative assessments such as WBAs are often associated with a favourable or positive bias.

The reasons for this are numerous. Firstly, WBA assessors are colleagues who often know the trainee well and may even be friends. As a result, they may have biases or competing interests that may influence their judgement, usually in a positive rather than negative way, or make it hard for them to give the trainee constructive honest feedback about their performance. Each WBA is also only completed by a single assessor.

In contrast, OSCE examiners have no declared conflicts of interest and usually have no prior knowledge of the candidate – so are considered well placed to make an objective assessment of performance. They examine in pairs, undergo significant ongoing calibration training and independently mark to minimise the impact or influence of one examiner over another. As such a minimum of 24 examiners independently contribute to a candidate's final overall OSCE assessment.

In WBAs the assessor may not use any formalised marking criteria and may not have a full understanding of what the standard expected for a FACEM would be if a similar encounter was assessed in an OSCE setting. They may rely on an overall gestalt 'subjective' judgement which may (for example) fail to detect a number of omissions which might be critical in demonstrating FACEM level competence in an OSCE. Topics for discussion in a WBA may be partly chosen by the candidate, therefore some candidate preparation in the relevant area prior to the assessment is possible. In the OSCE, the topics are standardised, explicit marking criteria are applied and the choice of topic and tasks are selected to be representative of the curriculum.

Finally, the workplace in which in-training assessments are conducted may not be representative of broader EM practice, so may not assess skills across a wide enough area.

Why isn't the time in quarantine more equally balanced between all candidates?

Every attempt is made to balance the total amount of quarantine experienced by candidates across the two days of the OSCE. **Candidates scheduled for a long period of quarantine on one day will usually have shorter period, or no quarantine, on the second day.**

Examination scheduling is complex as certain candidates cannot be examined by certain examiners. Doing so would give rise to conflict-of-interest and/or places-of-work issues. This means that completely equal allocation of periods of quarantine for every candidate may not be possible, despite ACEM's best intentions.

I think the confederate in my station didn't behave the same way with other candidates. What can I do?

It is impossible for every interaction between two people to be identical. Candidates, confederates and examiners might approach how they perform a task in slightly different ways. Scripting and timing of questions during a station is important in order to maintain consistency and fairness, however **some minor variation is allowed so that your interaction can be as natural as possible.** Getting that balance right can sometimes be a challenge.

Confederates are trained to give a consistent approach to all candidates, and examiners monitor this during the examination. **If a confederate does not perform as expected, examiners are trained to make appropriate adjustments to the candidate's scores to compensate for this.** Confederates are given feedback about their performance during the day, and if their performance is considered problematic, they are removed from the examination. Thankfully, this is a rare event and a trained 'stand-in' confederate is available to take over if required. The performance of confederates is monitored over time and only those who perform well are able to return for subsequent examinations.

Candidates who feel they may have suffered a particular disadvantage within a station in this regard, (i.e. one that applies to them only), may make an application under the provisions of ACEM's [Exceptional Circumstances and Special Consideration Policy: Examinations](#), and in accordance with [The Policy and Procedure for the Recording of Stations at the Fellowship Clinical Examination \(OSCE\)](#).

An application must be submitted within 72 hours of the examination.

Where can I go to get correct information about the OSCE?

The best source of up to date factual information about the OSCE remains the [Fellowship Examination Resources](#) page of the **ACEM Education Resources site**.

All trainees are expected to familiarise themselves with the materials provided by the College in relation to the OSCE and other examinations.

OSCE Preparation Programs are an excellent source of helpful advice on preparing for the OSCE. Although ACEM does not review or endorse external examination preparation programs, it publishes Good Practice Guidelines for the conduct of such programs and you may ask your external provider to tell you if they are aware of the guidelines and use them in the program.

If you become aware of advice about the OSCE that seems at odds with what a reasonable and fair assessment should look like, please contact the assessment team at ACEM at Fellowship.exam@acem.org.au

Am I judged on what I wear or how I talk?

From time to time the College receives complaints that examiners can 'judge' candidates on superficial aspects such as the clothes candidates wear, their posture, their 'acting' performance, their body language, whether or not they use standard phrases or their speech in general. While 'good presentation' including a professional approach is obviously important at the OSCE and in ED practice, these aspects are not part of the scoring processes.

Advice such as 'don't wear black scrubs,' has no basis and candidates should question the reliability of any source that offers such advice.

Are commercial OSCE preparation courses worth the money?

You should evaluate any commercially available course carefully, to ensure you will receive accurate and constructive information for your time and money. The College is the only source for the latest facts about the ACEM OSCE.

Although such programs may be well-meaning, with the intention to assist trainees, misconceptions may inadvertently be promoted.

To find out if ACEM supports a particular piece of OSCE advice you have received, contact the assessment team at Fellowship.exam@acem.org.au

Which OSCE preparation courses do you recommend?

It is not feasible for ACEM to formally endorse the many OSCE preparation programs on offer throughout Australia and New Zealand.

ACEM has developed a set of standards however that trainees can use to self-assess a program's value. Providers may also use these standards to ensure their program is delivering suitable and accurate content.

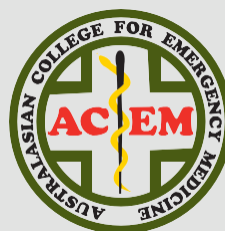
You should always evaluate any external OSCE preparation programs carefully, to ensure they contain accurate and appropriate information.

Attendance at any program whether recommended by ACEM or not, is not a guarantee that you will pass the OSCE.

Still have questions?

If there's anything else you'd like to know about the examination, or if there's something particular you've heard about what happens in an OSCE that you'd like clarified, then please ask us. We're here to answer your questions and help everyone get the right information.

Email your OSCE Questions to:
Fellowship.exam@acem.org.au



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