

# PLAB 1 – THE EXAMINATION

## Practicalities

Know where the examination centre is, when you are expected to arrive, how you will travel and what you will wear. What will you carry in your bag ...*and don't forget your ID!*

## Structure

200 questions in 3 hours, ie just under a minute for each question on average.

You will have on your desk a question booklet, which you can write on but will not be allowed to take out of the examination hall. This will contain the 200 questions, all Single Best Answer (SBA) also known as Best of Five (BOF).

Details about the question style are found on [this GMC website page](#). A few example questions are posted on [this GMC website page](#).

Note that each question has:

1. a number from 1 to 200,
2. a paragraph with clinical information +/- investigation results +/- a picture
3. a one sentence question, eg "What is the SINGLE most likely diagnosis." *Read this carefully and process exactly what question is being asked*
4. five statements listed A to E from which to choose ONE answer. *There may be only one correct statement or there may be several correct statements from which to choose the MOST LIKELY (or least likely – read the question!)*

You will also have a one-page double-sided answer sheet (see GMC website for example) which will be marked by a computer that reads your pencil mark answers. For each answer you have to shade in one of the boxes marked A to E. You can use a pencil eraser to make a correction. *Remember that your sheet will be read by a machine!*

## Content

See <http://www.gmc-uk.org/doctors/plab/23448.asp>

- Diagnosis, investigation and management of common diseases in UK
- All specialities
- Health promotion and monitoring
- Basic science: anatomy, physiology, pathology, pharmacology
- Legal and ethical matters

It is designed to test whether a doctor can apply his/her knowledge to patient care at the level equivalent to completing FY1 year of training and including chronic conditions seen in general practice – and not simply to memorise facts.

## Technique

Set a time-keeping strategy and check your progress at least every hour:

- Example 1: Answer at least 35 questions every half hour, ie 70 questions every hour ie leaving 8 minutes at the end.
- Example 2: Answer at least 25 questions every 20 minutes, ie 75 questions every hour, leaving 20 minutes at the end.

Set an answer sheet strategy – transfer your answers one by one. Or after every 25 questions for example. Answer every question don't leave blanks – a best guess is still more likely to get you a point than a blank answer. Leaving blanks also risks you getting muddled with which answer goes where... You could mark the question book so if you have time at the end you know which questions to revisit but plan as if you will not have time.

Read the stem carefully – try to understand what they are testing.

Don't miss negatives – words like *no, not, none, never* or prefixes like *il-* as in *illegal* and *un-* as in *unnecessary*. When nervous it is easy to overlook these and it changes the meaning completely!

Focus on the meaning of qualifiers – words like *all, some, most, none, always, usually, sometimes, never, more, less, good, bad, better, best...* Be particularly careful with *always* and *never* – it is rare that statements with such absolute qualifiers are correct.

- It *always* rains in Manchester
- It *often* rains in Manchester

Where possible come up with an answer before looking through the choices available – this way the listed answers help you reach your final answer rather than unhelpful distractions that make suggestions that set you off course. Often the right answer is the **MOST LIKELY** statement out of a selection of statements that are all true.

Apply basic principles – Be safe (ABC resuscitation, etc). Think of guidelines (what would be the first step? Good Medical Practice and ethical principles). For investigations think of guidelines (what would be the first/next step?) and cost efficiency. Consider routine investigations first with special tests later, unless they ask for the **SINGLE BEST** investigation to make a diagnosis, when you have to ask, “*even if another test is recommended first, which test will distinguish between the main differential diagnoses?*”

If you are stuck, become a detective – think what are they trying to test? Are there any clues in the grammar of the stem (ie the answer needs to be in the singular not plural). Cross off the options you know to be incorrect. And remember tip number 1: don't waste too much time!

For preparation resources see the [Reache North West](#) and GMC websites.

Sam Campbell, May 2014

*Two example questions from the GMC website:*

**10. A 38 year old man has disturbing thoughts about his house being infected by germs. He is anxious about safety and checks the locks of his doors repeatedly before going to bed. For the last eight weeks he has been washing his hands every time he touches the lock, 20-30 times a day.**

**What is the SINGLE most appropriate management?**

- A Antidepressant
- B Antipsychotic
- C Anxiolytic
- D Cognitive behaviour therapy
- E Psychodynamic psychotherapy

**11. A two year old boy fell off his tricycle, hurting his arm. He got up and started to cry but before there was any sound he went pale, unconscious and rigid. He recovered after 1-2 minutes but remained pale. After an hour he was back to normal. His mother says she was afraid he was going to die and that he had a similar episode three months previously after he fell down some steps.**

**What SINGLE investigation is indicated?**

- A Computed tomography scan of the head
- B Electroencephalogram
- C Full blood count
- D None
- E Skeletal survey

# General Medical Council

Full Name

City/Date

- Use pencil only.
- Make heavy marks that fill the lozenge completely.
- Write your GMC reference number in the top row of the box to the right **AND** fill in the appropriate lozenge below each number.
- Give **ONE** answer only for each question.

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