

An insider's guide to exam prep

How to be confident before you step inside the examination room

Whether it's the scent of rosemary, plenty of caffeine, a good night's sleep or your own system of mind maps and flash cards, you all have your own way of getting through revision – and the big day. Here, the lovely examiners at the NEBDN share their top tips on how to nail those exams with confidence and success.

But before they do, just what does it take to become an examiner? And why should you consider getting involved.

Why become an examiner?

Dental nurse education is expanding and it can be a great way to stay abreast of developments and giving back to the profession in a helpful and informative way. The expectation upon examiners to be fair and considered transfers seamlessly to skills required in everyday life and clinical practice. The NEBDN has an extensive panel of trained and experienced examiners all of whom are GDC registered dental professionals and all work on a voluntary basis. Examiner Ann Marie Saxton says: 'I have been an examiner for three years. I wanted to become more involved in training and expand my knowledge of what is expected from trainee dental nurses, as the training is always evolving and progressing. It keeps you current with dental nursing practice and you get to work with great people.'

'I think it has been an exciting time for dental nurses since the GDC registration came into force. New areas are being included in training, which weren't previously, so the role is always changing with new legislation. The opportunities and career pathways for dental nurses are always expanding and nurses are acknowledged for the high standard of care they provide. It excites me to play a small part in ensuring new nurses provide excellent, safe patient care.'

Fellow examiner, Hayley O'Brien, agrees. She says: 'I am very passionate when it comes to dental nurse education, training and helping people reach their full potential. I wanted to give something back to the profession that I have loved being a part of for the last seventeen years. 2017 will be my second year examining for NEBDN. I think as



exam formats change many opportunities for dental nurse examiners will be available, this could possibly involve more exams being held throughout the year, as the number of dental nurses joining the profession is rising. Also, I could see more responsibilities for examiners, as the different qualifications available for dental nurses require different examination techniques. It is a really exciting time to be an examiner with new challenges to look forward to in the future.'

Jonathan Worton has been an examiner for just over a year. He believes that the benefits of taking part even include meeting before the exams – 'a chance to catch up with new ideas and what is going on in the dental industry'.

He says: 'Being an examiner brings a range of challenges; the need to be fair and consistent, to assess students on the criteria at hand and to be objective while being consistent. I can help student nurses towards their final stage of their educational journey to qualification and registration. By seeing how others approach a task, you can undergo some self-reflection with the intention of

improving on enhancing what you already know.'

Katy Amber is in her fourth year of examining and previously worked as a helper for the National Diploma. She jokes: 'Having taken my fair share of primary and secondary dental nursing examinations, I felt that I had the necessary experience (and empathy!) to assist with the examination process.'

'I enjoy it when candidates really shine during the examination process, you can see all of their hard work and commitment paying off. Interacting with examiners and helpers from across the country, and from different backgrounds, is another part of the role, which I relish. It's a great opportunity to be a part of candidates achieving their goals, and a very rewarding, positive process.'

And, finally, for Karen Suarez, who has also been examining for four years now, it has been a great way to remain involved 'at the coalface'.

She explains: 'I have always had a passion for nursing and oral health education. My day-to-day role was taking

me further away from this, so I thought it would be a good way to keep involved at the cutting edge. It was also a great career development move.'

'The best part is working with likeminded colleagues who have the utmost respect for the candidates and a passion for nursing. As part of the NEBDN examiner team, we are at the forefront of any future changes. The whole process is a team effort, with the presiding, supervising and examiners along with the actors and all-important helpers. Examiners need excellent knowledge of nursing and the clinical environment, as well as professionalism and integrity. Examining has certainly helped with my professional experience.'

Ann Marie Saxton

Five useful tips on approaching exams:

1 Be time aware. Plan and get organised in advance. Sometimes the amount you need to know can be overwhelming – relax, take a breath and break down into smaller manageable sections and plan your time leading up to the exam

2 Find a quiet space with no distractions. If you can, have a dedicated work space with no TV on in the background and no interruptions – and tell family and friends you are revising

3 Use your support network and practise. Whether it is friends and family helping to test you from text books or work colleagues, mentors and teachers helping explain anything you're unsure about or give you tasks to practise or past papers, use those around you

4 Find a revision style that suits you; not everyone learns the same. Some people like to read, others make notes, use colour coding to link topics or diagrams to help them remember. Find the best technique for you. If you learn from note taking, make your notes personal so when you reread them they make sense to you

5 Think positive and remember to take breaks. By planning in advance you should be able to give yourself time to cover all the areas you need to and this way you can make sure you take these breaks, look after yourself and avoid unnecessary stress.

Five useful tips for just before – and on – exam days:

Jonathan Worton

Examination top tips:

Exams are always stressful. They are the culmination of months, if not years, of work leading up to this one final hurdle. You should 'know your stuff' by now. You have passed the written exam and have been working as a dental nurse while you gain your practical skills. What can you do to make the exam go as smoothly as possible?

One thing to remember is the exam isn't there to catch you out. The exam is there to allow examiners to check you are competent – and for you to show your professionalism and skills. As an examiner, I want you all to do well and have a positive examination experience. Here are my top tips for getting through the exam.

Know what you are letting yourself in for. The NEBDN produces an examination document which lets you know how the exam runs, how long it is and what you can expect when you get there. This should remove as much uncertainty as possible from the day ahead

Time management. You have one minute to read the instruction and five minutes to perform the task given. Practise talking for five minutes to give you a better appreciation for how long it is. This will allow you to judge when to move on in tasks where there are two parts, e.g. please explain to the patient what an acute dental abscess is and then why they need antibiotics – there are two parts which you must cover

Study early. There is a lot of information you will need to know and the earlier you start revising, the deeper that knowledge is when you get to the exam, making it less likely to disappear when you need it most

Practise communication with colleagues. This is something I make my year four dental students do to improve their communication skills, as it doesn't always come naturally. You may well be familiar with the topic and can write down all the causes of acid erosion but it doesn't necessarily help you take a detailed social history from a patient or explain to them why their new diet of fruit is having a damaging effect on their teeth

Make the most of your mentor/trainer. If there is anything you are not sure about, ask! Some dentists may prefer certain instruments for tasks or lower trays for upper crown impressions; discuss this with them so you know what to do in the exam. Some dentists prefer to load alginate trays themselves but you will need to be proficient at this skill if working with other dentists

Be fresh. Get an early night before the exam – chances are you will be up early and trying to cram information last minute never worked for me. I used to read my notes once the evening before and try to relax

Answer the question. There have been instances in exams where the students misread the question or go off on a tangent. However good the answer, if it's not on topic it cannot score well. Take time to be read the question, then reread the question before starting the station

Don't panic. Try to stay calm. If you do something wrong, go back and change it if there is time. If not, put that station behind you. There are many stations in the exam and, if one turns out to be a nightmare, move on and focus on the remaining stations. You don't need to pass every single one.

1 Prepare your journey route in advance and check for traffic updates. Get anything you need ready the night before. Exams can be daunting to some people so take away any unnecessary stress

2 Look after yourself – get a good night's sleep and eat a healthy breakfast on the morning of the exam.

3 At the start of the exam, take your time to read the question, reread it make sure you haven't misread it. Are you doing

what has been asked of you? Think about your answer.

4 Go with what you have learnt, what you know to be the correct and have confidence in yourself and not a preferred method of your place of work

5 At the end of the day, don't spend time going over everything. Remember, you've done your best. Resist temptation to compare notes with other candidates.

Katy Amber

1. Create and stick to a revision plan
2. Get your friends and family on board for valuable support
3. Take regular revision breaks
4. Steer clear of social media or other distractions when revising
5. Ask your tutor and colleagues for help if needed
6. Eat healthily
7. Arrange study sessions with other students
8. Examiners are not the enemy! We've all been through exam stress
9. Keep calm and read the instructions/questions carefully
10. Don't forget to sleep!

Karen Suarez

- 1 Be time aware. You have one minute to read the instructions and five minutes in the OSCE station. Therefore, get straight to it
- 2 Read any instructions in the OSCE station; they are there to help you
- 3 If you feel you have not done your best in a station, leave it at that station. It is only one and you have all the others. Sometimes, if a candidate feels a station went badly for them, they get upset and carry it through to the other stations. Start afresh for each
- 4 Don't forget to put your name and candidate number on any stations, where you need to fill out paperwork
- 5 Stay focused, deep breaths, be confident

The NEBDN is recruiting for new examiners. Do you fancy joining the team?

The NEBDN has an extensive panel of trained and experienced examiners all of whom are GDC registered dental professionals. All examiners work with NEBDN on a voluntary basis and are committed to having an active involvement in the training and qualification of dental nurses. On appointment to NEBDN, examiners are required to undergo an induction and training programme before examining. All examiners also engage in continuous training and development events. For further information on how to apply, please visit www.nebdn.org/examiner, telephone 01772 429917 or email info@nebdn.org. **Applications close Friday 28 July 2017.**

Sweet smell of success

Health food retailers saw sales of rosemary double during exam season after a scientific study suggested it boosts brain power.

Holland & Barrett said its sales of Rosemary Essential Oil increased by 270% the week after the Northumbria University study was published, and by 187% compared with the same time last year.

The research from Northumbria University, presented at the British Psychological Society's annual conference last month, backed up historical associations between rosemary and memory.

It suggested that pupils who worked in a classroom with the aroma of rosemary oil achieved better results in memory tests.

Ann Marie Saxton



Katy Amber



Hayley O'Brien



Karen Suarez



Jonathan Worton



Are you ready for exams?