

REGULAR

ANAESTHETISTS IN TRAINING

TIPS FOR THE FINAL EXAM

Dr Vida Viliunas (FANZCA) is a specialist anaesthetist currently working in both public and private practice in Canberra. She is also an examiner for the final fellowship exam. Here, Vida offers some advice to candidates facing the challenge of the final exam.

WHAT DO EXAM CANDIDATES WANT?

Trainees ask questions regarding examination structure, preparation and performance.

In the absence of the actual detail of the next exam ... here are the answers to such questions from trainees.

EXAM STRUCTURE

The ANZCA website contains information regarding the structure and mark allocation of all exam options—whether you are sitting the full exam or only certain sections (for international medical graduate specialists [IMGS]). It also describes the venue, what you can/cannot bring to the exam, and what is provided—make that your first stop!

PREPARATION

There are a number of suggested resources:

1. The ANZCA website contains the curriculum, past exam reports, college documents and podcasts. Study these in detail.
2. Take advantage of every day at work: most examiners are full-time clinicians and most questions are developed

from our professional lives. A day in the operating theatre is not a day away from study—it is a great way to add a clinical dimension to your preparation. Take advantage of this great opportunity to learn from your consultants, from your patients and from your peers. Question your every step and decision, and plan and evaluate these formally in an evidence-based way.

3. Study groups and exam preparation courses ensure that you have other candidates with whom to compare the depth and breadth of your preparation.
4. International medical graduate specialists will find the OTSAN organisation a great place to start (<http://www.otsan.org>). It offers support and specialised information for the needs of IMGs.
5. The GASACT final exam workshop at this year's National Scientific Congress will be run by a current examiner—all candidates are welcome! Saturday 28 September, National Convention Centre, 8:30–10am (there will be a concurrent session for the first part exam).
6. An interactive webinar is conducted by a current examiner on the subject of exam preparation twice a year in February and June. All candidates are welcome to participate; please register via the ANZCA website (www.anzca.edu.au).

PERFORMANCE

MCQ

There is no substitute for practice with previous papers and other MCQ banks.

All questions are of equal value and there is no negative marking ... answer every question!

SAQ

Writing questions to time and having them marked by a third party is the secret to success in this section. Strict observance of time is vital. You are unlikely to improve your score by spending more than ten minutes on a question; you are very likely to score poorly in a question if you spend less than ten minutes on it (unless it is a topic on which you are very knowledgeable).

Construct your answer to reflect the reasoning and knowledge you are imparting.

Write legibly! If the examiner cannot read your response, it will not attract marks.

Medical vivas

The aim of this section is to test the ability of candidates to assess medical (not anaesthetic) conditions.

The exam reports contain lists of the conditions with which patients present for this section. Read them.

Taking a targeted history and performing an examination within the allocated time takes a lot of practice. It is important not to just repeat the history given by the patient: your job is to synthesise that history and package it in a way that stratifies the disease, assesses the effects of treatments and places it in an appropriate context for the patient. It

helps to add which investigations might confirm diagnoses, determine effects of treatment, categorise the longitudinal progress or prognosis for the patient, or a threshold for a further intervention.

Anaesthetic vivas

The anaesthesia vivas test communication, knowledge, judgement and decision-making skills.

Spend the two minutes of reading time composing a specific response to the question asked.

During the viva, justify decisions and investigations and relate them to the particular patient and context. When it is appropriate, collaborate/organise/mobilise and delegate. If you make a significant intervention (giving fluids or a drug), define the goal and endpoint that you are aiming to achieve. Acknowledge

when a situation is difficult or unexpected (as opposed to a crisis, which is our role to anticipate and manage).

Remember: you are an expert in anaesthesia—when you have reached the limits of your excellent knowledge, seek clarification with directed consultation and questioning.

WHY SHOULD YOU KNOW ANYTHING IF YOU CAN GOOGLE IT?

No machine can deliver the integration of content and context, and deliver a judgement of the sort that is demanded of an anaesthetist. It can house the pharmacokinetic and pharmacodynamic data regarding the drugs that we use, but it cannot give an anaesthetist.

Samuel Parr said, "It's always better to know a thing than not to know it".

I cannot remember the attribution, but it is also true that, "the harder you work the luckier you get".

The final examinations team works hard to create an exam that runs smoothly—do not hesitate to direct questions regarding the logistics of the exam to them by telephone or by email: finalexam@anzca.edu.au

LIFE AFTER THE EXAMS

The exams are an enormous hurdle. After the pressure of the exams and a successful performance, you will have time to enjoy the pleasure of learning and improving your skills without having to conform to a ten-minute written question or a 15-minute viva.

Best wishes for every success in the exams.

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