

Passing the Primary FRCA SOE

A Practical Guide

Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-107-54580-9 — Passing the Primary FRCA SOE
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A Practical Guide

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Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
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103 Penang Road, #05–06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

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www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107545809

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First published 2016

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication data

Names: Blandford, Claire M., 1982–, editor.

Title: Passing the primary FRCA SOE : a practical guide / edited by Claire M. Blandford.

Description: Cambridge, United Kingdom ; New York : Cambridge University Press, 2016. |

Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2015048882 | ISBN 9781107545809 (pbk. : alk. paper)

Subjects: | MESH: Anesthesiology | Examination Questions

Classification: LCC RD82.3 | NLM WO 218.2 | DDC 617.9/6076 – dc23 LC record available at <http://lcn.loc.gov/2015048882>

ISBN 978-1-107-54580-9 Paperback

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To my wonderful parents, for all their love and support

Contents

<i>List of contributors</i>	<i>page viii</i>
<i>Foreword by Dr John Carlisle</i>	<i>ix</i>
<i>Preface</i>	<i>xi</i>
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>xiii</i>

Introduction	1
Dr Claire M. Blandford	
Exam 1	12
Dr Claire M. Blandford	
SOE 1	12
SOE 2	29
Exam 2	44
Dr Cathryn Matthews	
SOE 1	44
SOE 2	65
Exam 3	86
Dr Theresa Hinde	
SOE 1	86
SOE 2	106

Exam 4	123
Dr Thomas Bradley	
SOE 1	123
SOE 2	144
Question bank	163
Dr Claire M. Blandford, Dr Cathryn Matthews, Dr Theresa Hinde, and Dr Thomas Bradley	
Questions on Physiology and Biochemistry	163
Questions on Pharmacology	166
Questions on Clinical Topics	168
Questions on Physics, Clinical Measurement, Equipment and Safety	172

<i>Index</i>	175
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Foreword

Like you, dear reader, I have never tasted the ambrosia that accompanies success at the Structured Oral Examination. How might I pass, should fate dictate that I must in order to pursue my ambitions as an anaesthetist? Help is at hand.

My friends Claire, Cathryn, Theresa and Tom have written this book. They have given you the knowledge, skill and wisdom that they have honed running their successful ‘SWIPED’ course – the South West Intensive Primary Examination Day. As you would expect, this book teaches you through questions that will be familiar to anaesthetists who have taken oral examinations over the past five decades, even if those discussions roamed more freely than they do nowadays. The key to passing is structure: practise structuring your answers and your brain will become more accustomed to succinctly delivering those facts that will lead you through to examination triumph.

You will not only be in receipt of good practice material, you will also have handy tips from how to maintain your composure to how to present a professional impression. The exam may be structured, but every opportunity to boost your marks should be sought in the goal to reach and hopefully exceed that threshold of success – the magical 37 marks.

When you practise the material in this book also practice structured, composed professionalism.

I wish you good luck: the more you practise with this book, the luckier you’ll get!

John

*Dr John Carlisle, Consultant in Anaesthesia, Intensive Care and
Perioperative Medicine, Torbay Hospital, Devon*

Preface

The Fellowship of The Royal College of Anaesthetists (FRCA) examinations are important professional milestones in your anaesthetic career. They are often considered daunting prospects as it is recognised that substantial amounts of hard work, time, dedication and preparation will be required for you to gain the knowledge, skills and understanding you will need to demonstrate in the examinations.

Within the FRCA examinations the Structured Oral Examinations (SOEs) are often viewed by candidates as the most intimidating. This is because it is probably the examination style with which you are least familiar. As medical school examinations have changed over the years, less and less now use oral/viva voce type examinations, so the primary FRCA SOEs might very well be the first time you are facing this examination style and you might well feel you are entering a bit of a 'voyage into the unknown', especially in how to prepare for this examination.

This book has been aimed at providing you with a practical guide. It is very much targeted at the SOE section of the primary FRCA but may equally provide some useful material for candidates taking their final FRCA SOEs.

Over the next few pages I will present some background information on the primary FRCA SOE examination structure and marking scheme before moving onto some exam strategy 'hints and tips'. These hints and tips are drawn from my personal experiences and are also a distillation of experience/observation in my role as Course Director for our region's primary FRCA SOE preparation course (SWIPED – South West Intensive Primary Examination Day).

The question material that then follows through Chapters 1–4 is laid out as worked mock exam questions and answers. The aim is to provide you with examples of how you might actually phrase and develop your answers. This book is not intended as a reference textbook to take you back and explain core principles de novo, but very much a practical guide – an 'examiner in your pocket' perhaps!

Each chapter is laid out as a complete practice exam (i.e. contains one each of SOE 1 and SOE 2). A total of four full exams, comprising 48 questions, are therefore presented. The book also contains 'notes' (development of further knowledge points/clarifications) and 'tips' (suggestions of ways to phrase things/pitfalls to avoid) along the way.

At the rear of the book you will find the same questions are presented in a different format. Instead of being laid out as full exams the questions are subdivided totally by section, e.g. all Physiology questions together and are presented as a list of sequential questions without the answer expansions. You can therefore choose to use the book in one of two ways, or dip between the two layouts, either using the book as guided worked answers for you to self check or for your 'examiner' to review your answers against or by using the rear of the book to target specific sections or as a question bank of material to fuel SOE practice sessions.

I have had the pleasure of being assisted in preparing this book by three colleagues who have each written individual chapters of exam material; Dr Cathryn Matthews (Chapter 2), Dr Theresa Hinde (Chapter 3) and Dr Thomas Bradley (Chapter 4).

Considerable time has gone into preparing and developing these questions and I apologise now for any errors and omissions that remain; they are my responsibility. The question

material in this book should be viewed as mock questions, they are not directly drawn from the college’s question bank but have been developed by the chapter authors. They are, however, good examples of the type and range of material that might be expected to be covered and will certainly provide a useful practice resource for you.

We all wish you all the very best for your examinations.

Dr Claire M. Blandford
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SWIPED Course Director

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr John Carlisle, Dr Robert Rowland and Dr Mary Stocker for their advice and assistance with some of the material within this book.