



Examination Tips from the Officers of the Board of Examiners

(July 2026)

Multiple Choice Question (MCQ) Paper

- There are 75 questions, each with a 'stem' and 5 'completions'
- You will have 2.5 hours (150 minutes) to complete the paper, giving you approximately 2 minutes per question
- Each completion is independent of all other completions and is either 'True' or 'False'
- There may be any combination of 'True' and 'False' completions to a question, including all five completions being 'True', or all five completions being 'False'
- Each correct completion is worth 1 mark and each incorrect completion is worth 0
- There are no trick questions, so try not to 'overthink' your responses
- There is no negative marking, so provide a response to every completion, even if you have to guess!

Short Answer Question (SAQ) Paper

- There are 10 questions, each one typically sub-divided into several parts
- You have 2.5 hours to complete the paper, giving you approximately 15 minutes per question
- Each question is worth a total of 10 marks and the number of marks available for each part is indicated on the paper
- The total of 10 marks may comprise half marks for some correct responses, in which case this will be obvious from the paper – there are no smaller divisions than a half-mark
- You can answer the questions in any order you like – you may wish to start with the questions on those topics with which you are most familiar



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- In order to pass, you must score marks on at least 8 questions (i.e., you cannot score zero on more than 2 questions, even if you do very well on the others), so you are strongly advised to attempt all 10 questions

Critical Appraisal Paper (CAP)

- The paper to be appraised is a scientific publication that could encompass any part of the syllabus – this includes, but is not limited to, clinical trials, non-interventional studies, meta-analyses, systematic reviews, and economic evaluations
- Some parts of the scientific paper may be redacted, e.g., where authors discuss limitations of the paper and/or future studies, and these discussions could form part of the answers to a question
- You have 2.5 hours to complete the examination – this includes the time needed to read the scientific paper and write your responses
- The total number of questions will vary from year-to-year, according to the content of the scientific paper, but will typically be around 14 to 16 – some of the questions may be sub-divided into several parts
- The total number of marks available is 50, and the mark allocation for each question or part is included on the question paper
- There are three broad types of question in the CAP:
 - **Descriptive** – these require you to summarise information or data that is given in the scientific paper
 - **Critique** – these require you to comment in a critical way on information within the scientific paper and may call on knowledge from any part of the syllabus, i.e., questions may reflect any aspect of the drug discovery and development lifecycle through to commercialisation, including topics such as regulation, safety, drug discovery, clinical development, statistics, and health economics
 - **Next steps** – these require you to consider the utility and implications of the research in the scientific paper, e.g., how this might impact future work and what alternative or additional studies you would suggest to answer the same or follow-on questions
- Approximately one third of the marks are assigned to descriptive questions and the rest are for critique/next steps; the types of question are not grouped together
- You do not require detailed therapy area knowledge to answer the questions – the examiners are looking for general principles only
- It is recommended that you read the whole scientific paper, rather than just looking for the answers



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- You do not have to answer the questions in numerical order, however, the questions are designed to run in a logical flow, so it may help if you do this
- The critique can be positive points about the scientific paper as well as negative ones – do not automatically look for deficiencies, look for what is good about the paper as well
- You may be asked to answer a question, or part of a question, in lay-language – this means using language that a member of the public would understand, i.e., no medical, scientific, or statistical terms ('jargon')
- You will not be penalised if you do not answer every question, but it is highly recommended that you do attempt them all

General Tips for all Papers

- The pass mark for each paper (MCQ, SAQ or CAP) is set in advance of the examinations and is based on the content of that paper, not on how well or badly candidates perform
- There is no set quota for how many candidates pass or fail – in theory, all candidates sitting a paper could pass that paper (or fail it!)
- The questions for the MCQ and SAQ papers are based on the contents of the PharmaTrain Syllabus (currently V 3.0, issued 2024) – any section can (and will) be examined
- There is no substitute for revision, and it is important to cover all sections of the syllabus in your revision
- Forming study groups with colleagues who are also preparing for the examinations is recommended and will help you to revise and prepare – helping your colleagues will help you to consolidate your own learning
- It is not necessary to attend a formal revision course
- Example MCQs and past SAQ and CAP examination papers are available on the DPM website – use these as a guide to the type and format of questions asked

General Tips for the SAQ Paper and CAP

- The following terms may be used in the SAQ paper and CAP:
 - 'List', 'Give' or 'State'
 - This requires a few words or a short sentence for each item



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- It is the 'what'
- Giving extensive answers will not score extra marks
- **'Describe'**
 - This requires a few sentences addressing the key features for each item
 - It is the 'what, where, why, when and how'
 - Single word answers will not score marks
- **'Define'**
 - This requires a few sentences to explain a concept or term
 - Simply rearranging the words in the question will not score marks
- **'Compare'**
 - This requires a few words or short sentences giving the similarities and differences of one thing versus another
 - It may help to use the sub-headings of 'similarities' and 'differences' when writing your answer
- **'Comment'**
 - This term is often used in the CAP and requires you to give your opinion (critique) on the paper
 - Remember to include the 'so-what' in your response – do not just give the facts, give the implications too
 - Often, there are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers, but you should be able to support your opinion with reasoned discussion and/or evidence
- Read the question carefully and answer the question that you are being asked, not the one you think you are being asked – responses not addressing the question will not score marks (even if the information is factually correct)
- The examiners are looking for evidence that you understand the question and the answer you have given – providing a random list of terms, even if some of those are correct, will be unlikely to score all available marks, particularly if some of your list is actually incorrect!
- Write in bullet point format, using a few words or a short sentence for each bullet
- Be concise (quality not quantity) – writing lots of words will not score more and will waste valuable time (both for you and the examiner marking your paper!)
- Be guided by the number of marks available for a question – do not write a whole page for an answer worth 1 mark



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- If a question asks for two points and there is 1 mark for the question, each correct point will be worth half a mark – check that you have provided enough points to score all available marks
- If asked to give 'x-number' of features and you give more than 'x-number', all your responses will be marked, but you will not score more than the maximum marks available
- If asked for several points, avoid repeating the same information in a slightly different way – this will only score once
- If asked for advantages and disadvantages, do not give the same information as an advantage and the converse as a disadvantage – this will only score once
- You will not be required to draw diagrams
- Marks will not be deducted for incorrect responses, unless what you have stated is dangerous, illegal, or unethical

And finally, GOOD LUCK from the Board of Examiners!