



# AUSTRALASIAN COLLEGE OF SPORT AND EXERCISE PHYSICIANS

The following content has kindly been written by Etienne du Preez – an ACSEP Registrar who sat and passed his Fellowship Examinations in his 5<sup>th</sup> year on the Training Program. Etienne was subsequently awarded the 2017 ACSEP College Medal for outstanding performance in the Fellowship Examinations.

ACSEP thanks Etienne for his reflections on how he prepared for his Written Fellowship Examinations. The following is a personal account and is not validated or mandated by ACSEP. Registrars should prepare for their exams in the manner they deem suitable for themselves.

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Hi all,

I've been asked me to write some of my tips on preparing for the written exam, so hopefully this will be of some use to some of you...

## **PREPARING FOR THE FELLOWSHIP EXAM**

I would say that the written exams clearly takes some time to prepare for. Everybody knows what it takes to commit a large volume of work to memory, so my recommendation is as follows: go through the curriculum, see how many topics there are to cover, figure out roughly how long it will take you per topic, then work out your schedule accordingly. I estimate that for the average mortal it will be 6-9 months of prep, depending on what your panic-mode cram capabilities are.

I found it very beneficial to have a “clean run” into the exam – i.e. I had finished all my academic modules, research etc. Try and cut down on weekend sports coverage too, and learn to say no to things. You want to commit your time to getting through this thing, not watching age rep footy on a Saturday. How much you cut back on clinic is a personal thing. I worked full time until 3-4 weeks before exams, and then scaled down big time. Having a few weeks of study leave makes a big difference, and you can easily go over all your notes a couple of times if you have uninterrupted study time. Make sure you practice what you preach and exercise daily in this time.



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I also found having a study group to be very helpful. We had a Skype group on Sunday evenings, and this was a nice break from the solo effort and often the highlight of the week. A good time to practise SAQs and mock MCQs, in addition to sharing papers and pep talks. Misery loves company, and the realisation that you're not alone on your Imodium and Caffeine fuelled journey certainly brings a much needed touch of humour to the experience.

### **MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS**

The MCQ is bit more of a lucky draw, and you generally need a good base of knowledge to get through it. My experience was that you will know about 20% of the answers, then there will be about 20% of the questions you have no idea, and the rest you will likely be able to narrow down to 2 likely possible answers. It's a bit hard to figure out what the likely sources for questions are, and I think you can drive yourself crazy trying to anticipate what will come up. So once again, have a strategy for what you want to cover and accept there will be a few million journal articles they could potentially ask questions from that you will not have read.

My general approach was as follows:

- Use Brukner and Khan and the ACSM textbook as your base of knowledge. This seems to be a good collection of assumed knowledge (not necessarily most up to date evidence, but probably what most sports physicians agree as common sense).
- Then read a few key papers around the topic to fill in the meat. These tend to circulate with the tutorial program, and maybe with the new ACSEP modules.
- Then position statements are a good place to look, and there are tons of them around. ACSM generally has the best position statements on their website: <http://www.acsm.org/public-information/position-stands>, and you probably need to know our college ones.
- Then the big topic ones like Female athlete/RED-s; Wilderness consensus on altitude sickness; Heat illness; Bethesda; Youth resistance training; DOHA, etc.
- I don't know how useful it is to read lots of journals, other than being abreast of the important topical debates, but if you keep an eye on BJSM there is at least one consensus update on patello-femoral pain/ hamstring strains/ groin pain/ low carb high fat diets per month, so probably don't have to read all of them.
- Then your academic modules resources can come in handy, especially the nutrition stuff, and I reckon stay on top of the WADA substances... in detail. JAAOS has good topical reviews on the ortho topics, and ACSM textbook on exercise prescription as well as the Swedish physical activity book is gold for your exercise prescription.



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Regarding the actual MCQ questions, in general I reckon they tend to relate to facts containing numbers or true-false statements. So for example:

- If you look at ACSM position statement on heat illness, you might look at the table on temperature guidelines for calling off matches and that's a good number to know.
- Or the cutoff values for hypothermia/ hyponatraemia etc.
- Or the most likely risk factor for x is y.
- Or 10% of ACL ruptures will rupture contralateral ACL etc.

These are pretty hard to anticipate, but I kept track of a lot of random numbers and facts I thought could come up, and I kept a couple of tables of "how often does it occur bilaterally" with values for various conditions; or "gender patterns" for injuries that occur more commonly in males v females etc. and important demographics 30% of Australians have x; as well as inheritance patterns of common things like HOCM/ Marfans. Etc.

As you go through the topics it is worth thinking about what facts in that topic would make for a good MCQ. Remember, even if you can't remember exact number, or the resource you studied has a slightly different value to the resource the examiner used, knowing this stuff still makes it much more likely you'll be able to take an educated punt when confronted with the options.

## **SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS**

Regarding the SAQs, the best preparation really is practice.

I would advise getting your hands on as many old papers as possible and sitting down and practice writing them. It's not so much about your content as it is deciding on a strategy that works for you. I tried to anticipate 10-12 different types of questions (eg. Management of an injury, travel questions, altitude, nutrition advice, history and exam, etc.) and design a template which contained all the essential headings. Then you practice answering the questions with your templates as the structure to your answer. A good example would be to always write the [SOCRATES questions](#) for any questions on history, as this would probably cover most of the important questions. Then remember to add some risk factor questions, red flags, etc. Similarly for a rehab style question you might always have: education, activity modification, graded progression whatever, then simply fill in the details (which you will have lots of filling your brains!).



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I found the hardest part of the SAQs was learning to condense 5 years of knowledge into a coherent, time-efficient answer, and this approach worked for me. It might not be for everyone, but you have to have a plan.

## **FINAL THOUGHTS**

Most of you would have gone through the performance psych module by now, so apply those principles to your exam prep. I knew that the way I could best manage exam stress was to prepare as thoroughly as possible, not just in terms of knowledge, but in terms of the actual experience. So, practice writing SAQ answers under exam conditions – give yourself time pressure and some form of distraction to block out. You want to control all the controllables so that on the day you can focus on one thing only. So don't aim to get there 5 minutes ahead of time and get stuck in a traffic jam. Get there 1 hour before and go have a coffee. Mindfulness strategies are great to start practising to help you calm down and focus when things get rough.

Happy Studying!

Etienne du Preez

ACSEP Registrar 2013 - 2017