

CORE SURGICAL TRAINING INTERVIEW GUIDE

2027

CSTREVISION



CST Revision

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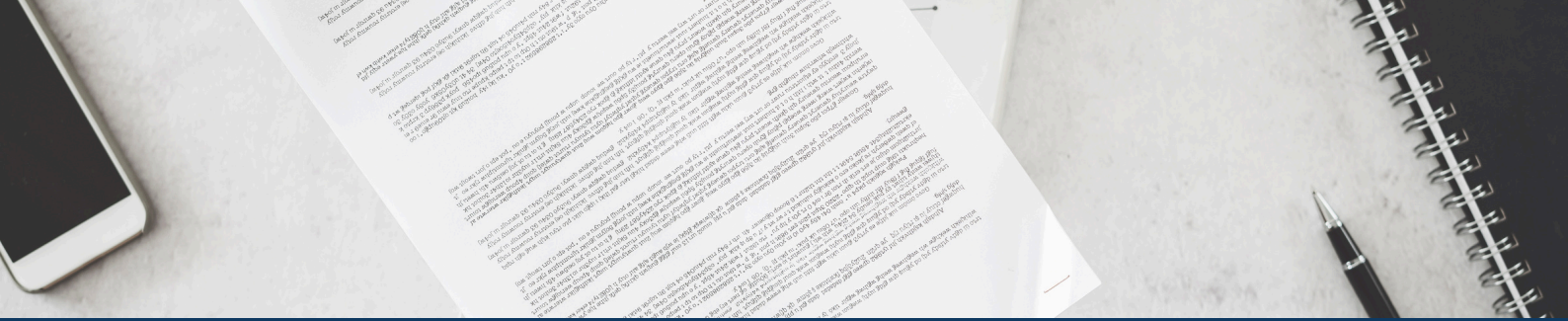
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What you need to Know



CST Revision



Application Overview

Introduction

Preparing for the CST application process is a pivotal step towards securing your desired position. With the **right approach and adequate preparation**, excelling in the CST interview becomes an attainable goal. Commencing your preparations early not only affords you the opportunity to accumulate points for your portfolio but also grants ample time to hone your skills for the **Multi-Specialty Recruitment Assessment (MSRA)** and rehearse **both clinical and managerial scenarios** essential for the interview.

Prior to CST

In your medical school and FY1 prioritising your portfolio for CST applications is key. Here are concise yet impactful goals for your FY1:

- **Lead a surgical-focused Quality Improvement (QI) project.**
- **Initiate a teaching program for medical students.**
- **Present a poster or oral presentation.**
- **Take on a representative role in FY1.**
- **Maintain a detailed surgical logbook.**
- **Secure affiliate membership with RCS.**
- **MRCS Part A**

Additional goals may include completing surgical courses and pursuing academic achievements like publications or prize presentation entries. These milestones enhance your candidacy for future surgical training.

Application Overview

CST Interview Application

During FY2, prioritise the development of your portfolio, a crucial asset for core surgery interviews. Gather evidence from various sources such as teaching sessions, courses, and clinical engagements, ensuring meticulous organisation. Initiating this process well in advance is advisable to **alleviate any last-minute document-related anxieties** as interview season approaches.

Useful Links

1. [CST Application Overview \(HEE Website\)](#)
2. [CST Self-Assessment Guidance](#)

Application Window

The application window spans from October to November, presenting a critical opportunity for aspiring candidates to embark on their journey towards securing a CST position. The application procedure for Core Surgical Training across England, Wales, and Scotland **operates on a national scale**, with Northern Ireland following a distinct process.

Streamlining this process, applications are managed through the **Oriel Recruitment Portal** to submit their applications. Coordination is managed by the **Health Education London and the Recruitment Office for Kent, Surrey, and Sussex**.

Throughout the application, emphasis is placed on aligning with the essential criteria outlined in the **CST Person Specification**. It's imperative to meticulously review these criteria, ensuring a clear understanding of the specific eligibility requirements. Take proactive steps to meet the required examinations and courses within the designated deadlines, setting a strong foundation for a competitive application.

Application Overview

Essential components of the application include sitting for the MSRA exam and submitting your Self-Assessment score. Following this stage, a select group of approximately 1,200 candidates are invited to engage in remote interviews.

Link to Oriel Recruitment Portal

MSRA Exam

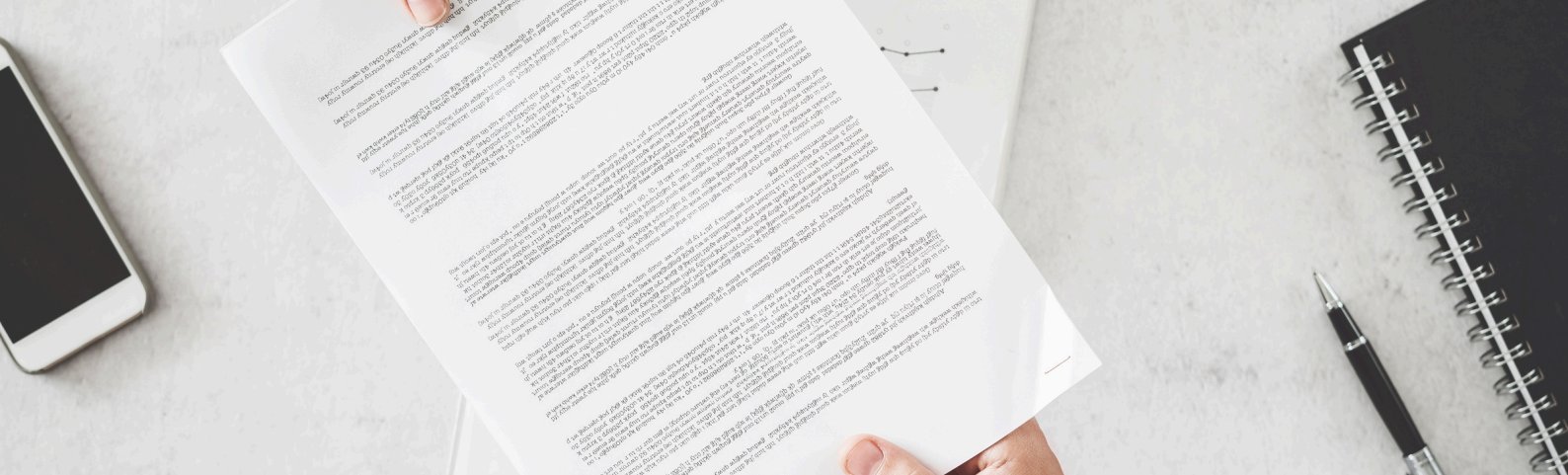
From 2023 interviews onwards candidates have been required to sit the MSRA Exam which **contributes to 10% of the final selection score**. The MSRA Exam is sat during this exam window and is sat at a specialist centre.

Evidence Upload

As part of your application, you'll complete a **evidence index**, evaluating your surgical experience, project involvement, and personal achievements. Your responses, along with supporting **evidence will be evaluated in the Portfolio station** (15 minutes), account for 45% of your overall interview score. It's essential to provide accurate information, as attempts to mislead could result in referral to a probity panel.

Interviews

These interviews, conducted remotely, serve as a crucial opportunity for candidates to demonstrate their suitability and commitment to pursuing a career in surgery. The interview panel comprises experienced professionals who assess candidates based on various competencies, including clinical knowledge, communication skills, professionalism, and ethical considerations.



Self-Assessment Score

As part of your application, you'll complete a **self-assessment questionnaire**, evaluating your surgical experience, project involvement, and personal achievements. Your responses, along with supporting **evidence will be evaluated in the Portfolio station accounting for 45% of your overall interview score.**

Following the self-assessment phase, the **top 1,200 applicants** with the highest scores in the MSRA earn invitations to a virtual interview. With a shorter timeline this year, early preparation is key to maximising your chances of success.

Whether you're a foundation year doctor, medical student, or on a training break, thorough preparation is essential. Utilise resources such as the **CST Applicant Handbook**, **Self-Assessment Question guidance**, and **CST Personal Specification** to understand the criteria and expectations. Additionally, access the **[CST Revision Question Bank](#)**, compiled by successful candidates, to refine your interview skills.

Self-Assessment Score

CST Scoring Criteria

- **45% Portfolio Station (self-assessment score)**
- **45% Clinical & Management Stations**
- **10% MSRA Exam**

2025 Important Portfolio Station Update

For those applying in 2026/27, the self-assessment section has been transitioned to the portfolio station at the interview. This means only those invited to interview will need to self-assess, with final scores determined by interviewers. Building on the multi-station interview format, candidates invited to interview will complete a new portfolio station.

The portfolio scoring has shifted from a numerical to a letter-based system, with evidence assessed by interviewers. Instead of the previous self-assessment on Oriel, candidates will:

- **Upload a self-assessment index page** listing key achievements within designated domains.
- **Assign a letter grade (A to E)** to each domain, representing where their evidence best aligns, with “A” as the highest and “E” as the lowest.
- **Assessors will determine scores** based on completeness and relevance, with a separate score awarded for the interview discussion.
- **Only two domains will be discussed in-depth**, allowing assessors to explore the candidate’s understanding and experience.

[Self-Assessment Guide Link](#)

Self-Assessment Score

An assessor will review the uploaded portfolio during a 15-minute session prior to a virtual interview. During which the assessors will finalise the scores based on evidence and responses. No preliminary scores will be provided before the interview, as the score is determined entirely during the discussion.

Changes to Specific Portfolio Domains for 2027

- **Portfolio Evidence**
 - Upload evidence between **19–24 Feb 2027**
 - Include the mandatory index page – **missing it = zero score** for portfolio. Only one item of evidence per domain will be reviewed
- **During the Interview**
 - Be prepared to discuss and justify your evidence (e.g. surgical experience, QI project, teaching).
 - Assessors may test honesty or understanding, especially if claims seem exaggerated.
 - **Portfolio score = evidence review + interview responses**
- **ITU no longer allied surgical**
 - From this round, ITU is NOT considered a surgical specialty for portfolio scoring.
- **Foundation posts ≠ surgical experience**
 - Foundation surgical placements will no longer count as surgical experience.

There are **three key domains** tested each with unique scoring criteria

1. **Knowledge, Skills and Development**
2. **Patients, Partnership and Communication**
3. **Colleagues, Culture and Safety**

Visit the **portfolio station guide** on **CST revision website** to help you maximise your score in preparation for the CST interview process.



MSRA Exam

Introduction

- The Multi-Specialty Recruitment Assessment (MSRA) stands as a crucial gateway for candidates aspiring to secure positions in CST
- As an integral addition to the selection process, the MSRA was first introduced in the 2023 recruitment cycle, aiming to meticulously evaluate candidates' competencies and aptitudes.

At its core, the MSRA serves as a **comprehensive evaluation tool** meticulously crafted to assess competencies delineated within the Core Surgical Training Person Specification. This multifaceted assessment comprises two primary papers: the **Professional Dilemmas (PD) paper** and the **Clinical Problem Solving (CPS) paper**. Each paper is meticulously designed to probe specific skill sets deemed essential for the practice of surgery.

Registration and Invitation Process

Candidates initiate the examination process by registering with **Pearson VUE**, utilising specific account credentials linked to the newly introduced **Oriel 2 account**. However, successful registration does not guarantee an immediate invitation to the exam. Invitations are extended exclusively to eligible candidates, contingent upon meeting predetermined eligibility criteria.

Scoring and Weightage

The MSRA scores wield significant influence within the overall selection process, constituting a **notable 10% of the final interview score** it is used to determine **which candidates are invited to interview**. Both the PD and CPS elements carry equal weightage, with each contributing 5% to the total selection score. The 2027 process also include **prioritisation status at shortlisting**.

Candidate Tips

To excel in the MSRA, candidates are encouraged to delve deeply into exam formats and controls through available tutorials and glossaries. **Meticulous attention to instructions and questions is paramount, given the absence of negative marking.** Additionally, candidates should invest time in revisiting and reinforcing areas of knowledge or practice to bolster their capability demonstration during the assessment.

Professional Dilemmas Paper (95 minutes)

The Professional Dilemmas (PD) component introduces candidates to a nuanced **Situational Judgement Test (SJT)**, probing their approach to the multifaceted role of a medical practitioner within the NHS.

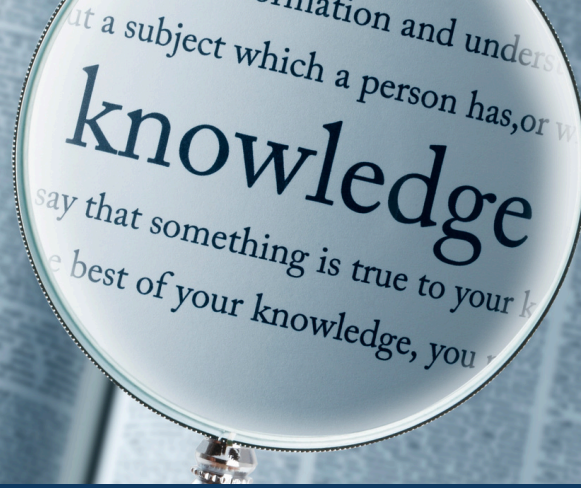
Spanning **50 items, candidates are allocated 95 minutes** to tackle the PD paper. The assessment aims for a panoramic representation of contexts and rotations commonly experienced by Foundation Doctors, encompassing diverse hospital settings, primary care environments, and unconventional scenarios.

Clinical Problem Solving Paper (75 minutes)

In the segment focusing on **Clinical Problem Solving (CPS)**, candidates are presented with a diverse array of complex clinical scenarios, challenging them to employ judgment and problem-solving skills in navigating the intricacies of patient diagnosis and management.

The CPS assessment, **encompassing 97 questions, imposes a strict time limit of 75 minutes** for candidates to navigate through the complexity of scenarios presented. Designed to cover a broad spectrum of clinical topic areas relevant to general medicine, the assessment ensures comprehensive coverage across diverse facets of medical practice. There are **five key domains** to assess candidates' proficiency in various aspects of clinical decision-making and patient management.

1. **Diagnostic procedures**
2. **Identification of medical conditions**
3. **Urgency in responding to potential serious illnesses**
4. **Oversight of medication usage**
5. **Management of treatment modalities beyond pharmaceutical interventions.**



Interview Structure

In 2024, the Core Surgical Training (CST) interview process underwent notable changes, with the introduction of the **Qpercom video platform** to replace Microsoft Teams. Candidates were selected from the **top 1200 MSRA candidates** and interviews were scheduled in February. It's imperative to familiarize yourself with Qpercom's functionalities beforehand and ensure the smooth operation of your microphone and camera.

For 2027 the interview comprises a **single 30-minute interview**, featuring three distinct sections presented in a sequential order. First, candidates tackle a **15 combined minute clinical and management station** followed by **Portfolio for 15 minutes each**. The remote panel comprises a maximum of two consultants and a lay representative ensuring fairness and consistency. Unlike previous years, **the interview does include a portfolio station** with a prior self-assessment score submitted by candidates prior to interview.

Your overall score encompasses:

- **45% Clinical & Management station**
- **45% Portfolio Station (Self-assessment score)**
- **10% MSRA score.**

Interview Structure

Clinical & Management Station

The clinical & management station is split into three sections:

Management Scenario = **5 mins**

Clinical Scenario 1 = **5 mins**

Clinical Scenario 2 = **5 mins**

Management Scenario | 5 mins

In this section you will confront an unforeseen management scenario encompassing ethical, professional, and personal dilemmas common in surgery. Respond to questions posed by interviewers related to the scenario, focusing on addressing real-time challenges like identifying and managing colleagues with potential issues.

Expect potential additional information or prompts from interviewers as you navigate through the scenario, allowing them to assess your adaptability and critical thinking skills. Consider utilising any spare time to enhance your responses

You will be scored on the **three scoring criteria:**

- Probity, professional integrity, and understanding of safety and ethics.
- Judgment and prioritisation skills under pressure.
- Communication effectiveness in conveying your decisions and rationale

Interview Structure

Clinical Stations | 2 x 5mins

During the Clinical station of the interview, **lasting 5 minutes each**, candidates typically encounter two scenarios, focusing on surgical situations, such as trauma cases or post-operative complications.

Part 1 | Candidates given a clinical scenario followed by a series of questions from interviewers based on the scenario.

Part 2 | A clinical scenario is presented during the station, prompting questions on investigation, differentials, etc.

Each scenario is marked separately and lasts for 5 minutes, with interviewers assessing:

- **Clinical skills and knowledge** demonstrated.
- **Judgment and prioritisation** abilities under pressure.
- **Communication skills** in conveying decisions and rationale effectively.

When facing an acutely unwell patient scenario, it's crucial to follow a structured approach. Utilise the **ABCDE approach** for clinical assessment, addressing prompts from interviewers and formulating a working diagnosis accordingly. Identify immediate interventions required and decide on contacting relevant healthcare professionals for assistance. Stay abreast of **common post-operative scenarios**, tailoring revision to match surgical experience and understanding potential complications.

Anticipate follow-up questions from examiners and maintain a **comprehensive understanding of key topics**. Practice efficient time management, ensuring responses are fluent and concise to allow for further exploration of complex topics.

View the **Clinical and Management Station Guide** on the **cstrevision.com** website for further top tips on how to perform well

Interview Structure

Interview Tips | Performing well on the day

1. Ensure Adequate Rest

- Establish a consistent sleep pattern in the weeks leading up to the interview.

2. Plan Ahead

- Take time off before the interview to dedicate to preparation and relaxation.

3. Technical Preparation

- Test your video conferencing equipment well in advance to avoid last-minute glitches.

4. Dress Appropriately

- Choose professional attire, such as suits for men and formal attire for women.

5. Organise Documents

- Prepare all necessary documents and portfolio materials ahead of time.

6. Stay Calm and Focused

- Approach each interview station with confidence, focusing on the task at hand.

7. Maintain Professionalism

- Acknowledge and engage with all individuals present in the interview room.



Interview Scoring System

Each of the scoring criteria below is scored against a **0–6 scoring system during the interview**. Examiners will evaluate and score you on each on the data points which is divided into four sections matching those in the interview (see below).

Keep in mind that interviewers aim to assist you in achieving the highest possible score. If they transition to another topic, it indicates that you have already attained full marks in that domain or that other domains require more attention and focus.

Scoring Criteria

- 0 – No Evidence**
- 1 – Very Poor**
- 2 – Weak**
- 3 – Satisfactory**
- 4 – Good**
- 5 – Excellent**
- 6 – Outstanding**

Interview Scoring System

Management Scenario

- Probity & Professional integrity and awareness of safety & ethics
- Judgement under pressure & prioritisation
- Communication

Clinical section (Part 1)

- Clinical skills & knowledge
- Judgement under pressure & prioritisation
- Communication

Clinical Station (Part 2)

- Clinical skills & knowledge
- Judgement under pressure & prioritisation
- Communication

Prepared Presentation

- Content
- Presentation Delivery
- Questioning

Portfolio Section

- A-E Scoring System (new from 2025)
- There are **three key domains** tested each with unique scoring criteria
 - **Knowledge, Skills and Development**
 - **Patients, Partnership and Communication**
 - **Colleagues, Culture and Safety**
- See self-assessment guidance for more details on individual scoring

The above scoring criteria is adapted from the [HEE CST website](#)

Competition Ratios

Latest Figures

Year	Applicants	Posts Available	Competition Ratio
2026	4975	720	6.91
2025	5399	630	8.57
2024	3384	645	5.25
2023	2,539	609	4.17
2022	2,302	622	3.70
2021	2,528	607	4.16
2020	2,322	605	3.84
2019	1,896	648	2.93

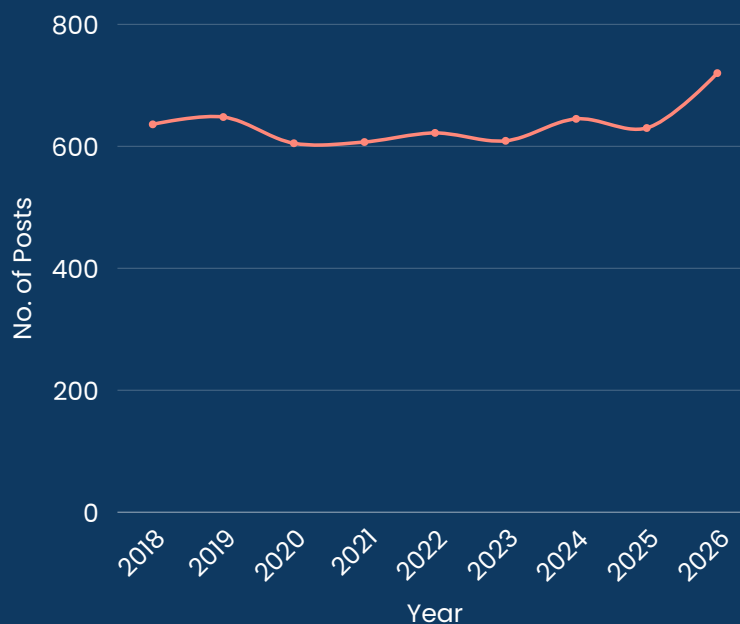
Competition Ratios

According to NHS England Data, the competition is heating up. CST application numbers remained high at **4975**, giving the **second highest ever competition ratio of 6.91** in the 2026 interview cycle. Data and from reports available on [NHS England's Medical Specialty Training website](#)

Competition Ratio



Number of Applicants



Ranking Preferences

Ranking

Once shortlisted for an interview, expect an invitation to **select CST preferences from 8-22nd March 2027**. Prioritise available CST posts, numbering them in order of preference.

Allocation follows a straightforward algorithm: starting with your top choice, if available, it's offered; if not, it moves to the next. Rank all desired placements, excluding those you don't wish to consider.

Consider geographic regions wisely; you can apply to **15 deaneries in the UK** (excluding Northern Ireland). Be mindful of competition ratios when ranking posts.

Factor in future speciality aspirations when selecting rotations. Determine whether hospitals are district general or teaching hospitals, as each offers distinct advantages in professional development and exposure to medical conditions. **Conduct research to ensure informed decisions.**

For more information visit [**HEE Competition Ratios & Posts**](#)

Ranking Preferences

Available Jobs – See visit [HEE Competition Ratios & Posts](#)

Region	Indicative numbers
East Midlands	38 to 43
East of England	To be confirmed
Kent, Surrey and Sussex	35 to 39
London	89 to 93
North East	29
North West – North Western	45 to 55
North West – Mersey	24 to 31
South West – Peninsula	19 to 22
South West – Severn	0 to 25
Thames Valley	23
Wessex	23 to 26
West Midlands	50 to 60
Yorkshire and Humber	54
Scotland	50 to 55
Wales	39 to 45



What **you** need to Know

Revising for the Clinical Station

To perform well during the CST interview, you should demonstrate safe practice by producing **thorough assessments, ordering specific investigations,** and **escalating to seniors** within a 5-minute timeframe. Advanced candidates will have a deeper understanding of management plans and surgical aspects for each scenario.

The [**CST Revision website**](#) scenarios are designed to cover everything you need for the interview and enhance your understanding of common surgical conditions. They are designed to take longer than 5 minutes to complete in order to cover all potential topics you may be asked alongside giving you an advanced understanding of the surgical conditions. **A solid grasp of these scenarios, combined with strong interview techniques, will put you in an excellent position.**

Below are some tips for revising for the clinical station in individual versus group settings. Remember, practice is key!

Revising for the Management Stations

The interview guide, included on the website, will first show you useful frameworks for answering questions; this includes the useful **STAR, CAMP, SPIES and SBAR frameworks**. Visit the page and learn these prior to starting your revision and use them as a basis to formulate your answer around. It is best to break up revision into 3 key sections for the management station:

Management Scenario

The management scenario section involves a 5-minute management scenario. Candidates are presented with a situation, such as dealing with a drunk colleague at work. You must demonstrate your problem-solving, leadership, and management skills, explaining to the examiners how you would handle the situation. Using the SPIES framework and practicing various common ethical scenarios will help you excel in this part of the interview.

Your communication skills will also be assessed in the CST interview. Good candidates will have the ability to effectively communicate and navigate the challenging management and leadership questions. The examiners are looking for candidates who can demonstrate **clear and concise communication**, active listening, and an understanding of the emotional aspects of patient care.

Pre-Prepared Presentation

In this section, learn how to effectively tackle the 3-minute management presentation. This task is provided to candidates before the interview as part of the interview process. Since this is one aspect of the interview that you can prepare for thoroughly, it's crucial to master this part of the management station.

After the initial presentation, candidates will have 2 minutes to answer questions from the examiners. These questions generally focus on management and leadership but may also touch on communication skills, teaching, and training. Practicing commonly asked interview questions and applying frameworks such as STAR will put you in a strong position.

Individual Practice

- **Reading & Answer Preparation:** Focus on both clinical knowledge and management station questions.
- **Practice Scenarios:** Record yourself responding to questions, review the footage, and refine your technique. Although initially uncomfortable, this method is highly effective.
- **Utilise Website Scenarios:** Test yourself on commonly asked scenarios to reinforce your knowledge.

Group Practice

- **Virtual Practice Sessions:** Form a small group for virtual mock interviews to simulate the actual interview environment. Maintain formality to mirror real conditions.
- **Constructive Feedback:** Ensure group members are at a similar level and provide honest, constructive feedback.
- **CST Interview Courses:** Attend as many group interview courses as possible. Put yourself under pressure, observe how other candidates answer, and incorporate useful tips into your own technique.

Supplementary Resources

In addition to the provided question bank, these resources can further enhance your preparation:

1. **ATLS Manual**
2. **CCrISP Handbook**
3. **Oxford Handbook of Surgery**
4. **BMJ Best Practice**
5. **NICE Guidance**
6. **MRCs Revision Resources**
7. **CST Surgical Interview Courses**

What you need to Know

Structuring Revision

November

Submit Application (oriel)

Gather Evidence for PDF Upload

Sign up to **CSTRevision** question bank

December

Clinical Station Revision (start with this – alot to cover)

Structure revision to cover five key areas:

**Trauma / Orthopaedics / Vascular / General Surgery / Urology /
Post-op Complications** (see website)

January

Self-Assessment upload (oriel)

Start building in **Management Stations on Website**

Complete all notes on CST website

Complete MRSA Exam

Complete **CST Knowledge course**

February

Complete **3-minute Leadership presentation**

Ask SpR / Consultants to interview you daily

Regular daily practice with interview partner – focus on interview technique as get more confident

Take **CST Mock Interviews**

Complete Interview

Clinical Stations

Revision Map

Trauma

Airway Management
Subdural Haemorrhage
Extradural Haemorrhage
Tension pneumothorax
Pelvic Trauma
Hip Trauma
Renal Injury

General Surgery

Upper GI Bleed
Acute Cholecystitis
Ascending Cholangitis
Acute Pancreatitis
Small Bowel Obstruction
Appendicitis
Large Bowel Obstruction
Anastomotic Leak
Intra-Abdominal Abscess
Hernias

Urology

Pyelonephritis / Renal Calculi
Renal Cell Carcinoma
Urinary Retention
Bladder Cancer (TCC)

Orthopaedics

Compartment Syndrome
Cauda Equina Syndrome
Supracondylar Fracture
Shoulder Dislocation
Ankle Fracture
Neck of Femur Fracture

Vascular

Acute Limb Ischaemia
Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm

Post-op Complications

Opioid Toxicity
Pulmonary Embolism
Fat Embolism Syndrome
Atrial Fibrillation
Myocardial Infarction
Acute Kidney Injury

Management Stations

Revision Map

Section 1: Management and Leadership Presentation

Look at “**how to structure answer**” section on Website

View **previous high scoring presentations**

Practice over and over

Section 2: Management and Leadership Questions

Break down into **7 key question areas**

- **Management**
- **Leadership**
- **Teamwork**
- **Communication**
- **Training**
- **Audit / Research**
- **Complaints and Consent**

Section 3: Management Ethical Scenarios

Patient Confidentiality

Patient Information

Professionalism

Drunk Colleague

Late Colleague

Theatre Delays

Theatre Supervision

Surgical Site Infections

Never Events

Theatre Experience

Complications (Duty of Candour)

Complaints Process

Confused and Aggressive Patient

Jehovah's Witness

Capacity

Gillick Competence

Unhappy to Consent

Explaining a Procedure

Struggling Colleague

CST Revision is your comprehensive resource for Core Surgical Training interview preparation. **Our platform offers everything you need to succeed**, whether you want to deepen your knowledge or refine your interview skills.

Innovative, Structured Learning

We use a **subspecialty-based approach**, thoroughly covering clinical stations and frequently asked interview questions. Our preparation also includes both sections of the management station, ensuring you're fully equipped. Additionally, **our CST Interview Guide walks you through every step of the interview process**.

Consolidate and Apply Knowledge

CST Revision helps you consolidate your knowledge by offering a systematic approach to clinical stations. Each topic is presented in a **structured question-and-answer format**, enabling you to self-assess and sharpen your interview readiness.

Key Features

- **Clinical Stations:** Over 500 clinical questions, organized by subspecialty, with relevant guidelines, anatomy insights, and surgical knowledge.
- **Management Station:** A structured approach to management stations, with multiple scenarios and expert tips to help you succeed.
- **CST Interview Guide:** A detailed guide covering the entire CST application process, including the MSRA Exam and Self-Assessment Scoring.

Choose CST Revision for the **most comprehensive and effective CST interview preparation**.

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Start your path to CST
Success
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CST Revision

