

# HOW TO ATTEMPT DNB(FM) THEORY PAPERS?



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I wanted to share some information I know about tackling the theory questions. I had been a facilitator in a theory workshop conducted by the National Board. These are some of the thoughts that was shared in the workshop and my personal experience in both writing exams and correcting answer papers.

I want to specially mention that I have not been an examiner for the national board yet. You can decide to completely disregard the suggestions. I write in good faith that some of this will help you clear the exams.

I sincerely hope that no harm comes to any of you due to this mail. If you find it helpful, please feel free to pass it on to other friends who write the National board exam in any other specialty. It will help them too.

1. The correction is usually done by varied examiners, both specialists in the subject they correct or others. For eg, the FM 2nd paper contains surgical subject questions, and it may be corrected by a general surgeon or an orthopedician or on from any other surgical specialties.
2. When the exam paper is set, the question paper setter (who is usually not the person correcting the answer sheets) is asked by the board to also write a key for the answer, so that there is uniformity in correction.
3. The examiners are all given a set of points that they need to look for in an answer that is specific and if they are there they would give marks for content, which would be approximately 6-8 on 10. The remaining would be for presentation, relevance of the diagrams, flow charts, tables, clarity, handwriting etc.
4. The method of questioning is called "short structured questions".
5. Before starting to answer:
  6. Remember you have about 15 to 18 minutes to answer each question (180 minutes/10 questions) You will be given answer sheet booklet (and additional sheets) that are in LANDSCAPE (horizontal rectangle) format rather than in PORTRAIT (vertical rectangle, A4) format that we are used to writing. It will be ruled paper.
  7. Use the last page of the Answer Booklet to plan.
  8. Give a full 5 to 10 minutes at the beginning of a paper to plan all the answers.
  9. Write down in a small way all that you will like to write in the answer. For eg: if for Colles fracture, you can plan writing down these things - definition, mode of injury, risk factors, clinical features, other fractures to be considered in the area, complications, investigations, treatment, precautions, follow up, a diagram. Then when you come up to answering the question, just start writing based on the plan. Once a plan is laid out we can always improvise later. The advantage is that at the beginning of the answering, you will have an idea, of the whole paper and you will not waste time.
10. You also know the questions that you know best and worst. Lesser the feeling of uncertainty, more confident you will feel when you write the answers.
11. Also, many of us have "thought blocks" in the start of the exam. But if you have a place to plan the answers, if a specific point for an answer comes to your mind while writing another answer,

you can turn to this page where you have planned and write it there. You will not be worried about forgetting to write that point for that question.

- Attempt questions in the order given in the question paper, in serial number, i.e. 1 - 10.
- The less the examiner has to search to get the answer he wants, the more marks you get. With all the other pressures of their life, I guess examiners, surely go through answer papers quite fast. So faster they can see the answer, more marks.
- Avoid being over ambitious in writing more than asked and incorporating information that is not needed. It does not get you more marks and it may actually irritate the examiner.
- It is a test of your communication skill in writing apart from content. So some things are to be remembered.
- Handwriting is important. It need not be fantastic but should be easily readable without any doubt. Do not slant too much to the right or left; do not let it be too big or too small, round shaped is better
- There should be enough space in all the margins of the page. White space make the paper more pleasant to the eye
  
- Small sentences or telegraphic language is better
- Use bullets or numbered points
- Important point should come first; order the points logically
- Avoid writing controversial points
- Do not write more than one or two concepts in a paragraph
- Do not write more than 4 to 6 lines in a paragraph.
- Avoid too many underlines or striking through
- Do not use more than 3 colors in a page
- Be consistent in the use of colors; if brown is used for underlining headings use it the same way in all answers
- Do use abbreviations, better to write in full words than in a controversial abbreviation
- Do use the same language we use for SMS ing or texting for the exams
- Be specific in your answer. Focus on the area asked. Some guidelines for specific terms
  
- Define - just give a definition
- Describe - give an account
- Discuss - present different aspects of a problem
- Enumerate - give a listing
- Summarize - Examine main point briefly
- Clinical features - Symptoms and physical signs (do not bother to define, diagnose or treat)
- Management - Diagnosis and treatment
- Diagnosis - Diagnostic clinical features and investigations
- Treatment - conservative, medical, surgical, preventive, rehabilitation aspects, if any
  
- Use appropriate diagrams, flow charts, tables, or any other illustrations for the answer.