



**ROYAL COLLEGE**  
OF PHYSICIANS AND SURGEONS OF CANADA

**INFORMATION  
ABOUT THE ROYAL  
COLLEGE SHORT  
ANSWER QUESTION  
(SAQ) FORMAT**

Revised  
December 2007

---

---

**Educational Evaluation and Analysis Unit**

## Information about the Royal College Short-Answer Question (SAQ) Format

The Royal College's examinations are used to determine if a candidate has reached an acceptable level of competence based on the objectives of training of their specialty.

### What are Short-Answer Questions (SAQs)?

Many Royal College specialty examinations have an SAQ component. SAQs are questions that can be answered in a few short words or phrases. Typically, these questions contain words such as 'list' or 'name' suggesting that a series of short responses are required.

Each SAQ will usually consist of the question, a space where the candidate can provide his or her answer as well as the mark allocation for the question.

### Different Kinds of SAQs

Short-answer questions can vary in terms of complexity. For example, the following question requires recall of factual knowledge at a low level of complexity:

<b>Example 1:</b>	<b>Total Marks</b>
List THREE medical specialties with Royal College certification exams.	
a) _____	2
b) _____	2
c) _____	2

More complex questions are usually based on case scenarios (sometimes called clinical vignettes). These questions can elicit application of knowledge or clinical reasoning. As well, a series of questions may be based on these scenarios building on case information.

<b>Example 2:</b>	<b>Total Marks</b>
51 year old man is diagnosed with Barrett's esophagus.	
a) What is the BEST treatment option that should be pursued? _____	2
b) List 4 steps in the pathogenesis of Barrett's esophagus. _____ _____ _____ _____	4
c) List one ongoing clinical issue that needs to be addressed pertaining to the long-term health of this patient of enrolling him in a surveillance program. _____	2

## How are SAQs marked?

Each short-answer question is created with a list of anticipated 'model' responses. This list is used to guide the markers as to the value of the responses when scoring the question. Partial marks may be allocated for some responses.

Example 3 below contains a question with a model response list.

### **Example 3:**

#### Question:

You see a 45-year-old man in your office for headaches. The headaches started one year ago and have been increasing in frequency. They now occur four to six times per month. With each headache he misses three to four days of work. You suspect he suffers from migraine.

	<b>Total marks</b>
a) List FOUR <i>clinical</i> features of migraine.	2
b) List TWO <i>prophylactic</i> medications for migraine.	2

---

#### Model responses for Example 3:

- a) One-half mark for each (maximum two marks)
- throbbing
  - associated with nausea/vomiting
  - associated with photo/phonophobia
  - hemicranial pain
  - preceding aura
  - inability to continue with daily activities
  - relieved by sleep
- b) One mark for each (maximum two marks)
- amitriptyline
  - propranolol
  - flunarizine
  - valproic acid

The use of a model response list helps guide the markers to assess the responses with little or no interpretation. With this in mind, candidates should provide the answers that are most obvious and correct.

## Helpful Hints

- Make sure your handwriting is legible. Examiners can only give credit for what they can read.
- Avoid rambling answers. Answers to SAQs are to be concise and direct. An essay answer is neither required nor recommended.
- Carefully re-read the question and the answer. Ensure that the response you provide is the best answer to the question
- Note the number of questions and the time allotted for the examination. Manage your time wisely. You may want to skip over questions that you may find difficult for future consideration after you finish the rest of the questions.
- Do not be late for the examination.
- Pay attention to the examination instructions that the invigilator will provide prior to the exam administration.