QC48 Mental State Examination eLearning
Question bank

This question bank provides a range of prompt questions you could use in an MSE interview to explore the different components; it is not intended as a checklist as you wouldn't ask a person all these questions at once! Remember to make your interview as conversational as possible.

Appearance

Self care

- With everything that's been going on, how have found time to look after yourself?
- I am hoping to get an idea of what a normal day looks like for you, is that ok? Let's start from when you get out of bed.
- You talked about being very preoccupied with [insert preoccupation] lately, do you think spending time [insert behaviour] has meant you have less time for your everyday things like shopping and cooking food?
- You talked about having low energy, have you been able to have a shower and brush your teeth every day?

Culture/ethnicity

- I think we might have different cultural backgrounds. I'm interested to learn more about your culture, is that something could help me understand better?
- I see you were born in [insert country of birth] is that correct? which part of the country did you grow up in?
- Is there anything I need to know about you to better understand your needs?
- What cultural background or ethnicity do you identify with?
- How do you describe your ethnic or cultural background?
- Do you belong to any cultural group? Can you tell me more about this group?

Behaviour

The clinician's observations of the person's behaviour are recorded; therefore, questions are usually in response to what is happening for the client and the clinician's judgement on what to enquire about at the time of the interaction.

Engagement/rapport

- I want to make sure I get enough information to help you, is it ok if I ask you some questions about yourself?
- Is there anything I need to know about you to understand your situation?
- Can we talk about our catch ups? I notice [insert observed behaviours] can you tell me what is going on for you when this is happening?
- I noticed you have missed two appointments; is there anything about coming to [service] that is making it difficult for you to attend?

Eye contact

- I notice you don't look up at me much when we are talking, can you tell me why?
- In my culture we look at each other in the eyes when we talk, can you teach me about what is respectful in your culture?
- I notice you looking [around the room, at the window, over my shoulder] – can you tell me what you're looking at?

Other behaviours

- I notice you seem [insert observed behaviours e.g. unsettled], I'm wondering if there anything that might help?

Mood

Mood type

- How would you describe your mood lately?
- If you were to describe how you feel, would it be happy, worried, sad, angry?

Use of picture cards, phone emojis, drawings or images may help communicate mood, especially for people with limited vocabulary.

Mood depth: On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being saddest, and 10 being happiest, where would you put yourself today?

Use of simple picture scales of faces with various levels of smiling and frowning could be used.

Mood duration: How long have you been feeling this way?

- Can you remember the last time you felt when you felt a bit happy?
- Can you remember if there was anything happening in your life at the time when you start to feel this way? And how long ago was that?

Mood fluctuation

- Would you say that your mood stays steady over the day?
- Are there times in the day or night are any better?
- Are there any days of the week that seem worse than others?
- Is there a place you can go that makes you feel better?
- Are there any people in your life that seem to help with the mood.
- How changeable is your mood?
- You talk about feeling depressed most of the time, do you feel something else when you [insert an activity the person enjoys]?

Affect

The clinician's observations of the person's expressed emotion are recorded in the affect component of the MSE, therefore no questions for affect are included.

Neurovegetative

- You said you are tired all the time; how many hours sleep are you getting?
- How has your appetite been since you have been feeling this way?
  - And has that effected your weight?
- Has the changes in your lifestyle had any effect on your weight?
  - And have the changes in your weight given you any concerns?
- You have talked about not doing much anymore, what things have you lost interest in lately?
- If you remember a time when you had a better mood, what types of things would you enjoy doing?
- Other people with [insert condition/medication] have complained about changes in libido, is that something you or your partner have experienced?
- Do you worry about changes to any other part of your life we have not covered?

Perception

General

- What is the strangest experience you ever had when by yourself?
- Have you ever had any strange or unusual experiences?
- Have you ever heard any voices or noises but there was nobody else around?
- Have you ever smelt or felt anything but there was no reason for it?
  If so, can you describe what happened?
- Do you ever see, hear, smell, feel or taste things that other people don't seem to sense?
- Have you ever had an experience that your friends or family thought was bizarre or unusual?

Hallucinations (auditory)

- Were you ever surprised you could hear sounds or voices that other people couldn't hear?
- Have you ever heard voices that trouble you? Do you recognise these voices?
- When you are alone, have you ever heard sounds from nowhere, or voices that are not your own?
  If yes, what did they say? Where do the sounds/voices come from?
  What brings these on?
- You seem to be very observant, is your [hearing/sight] better than most people?
- Have you ever heard voices saying things that troubled you?
- Have you heard a voice that tells you to do something, and you felt you had to do what the voice told you?
- Do you know who is talking to you?
- Is the voice telling you what to do? **If so, explore further.**

Important: Command hallucinations require **risk screening and possible escalation** for risk management.

Here are examples of questions to ask about command hallucinations:

- What are they telling you to do? What would happen if you didn't listen?
- Do the voices sound like anyone you know?
- Do you trust the voices?
- Are the voices telling you to harm yourself, other people, or someone in particular?
- Are there any situations that would make you more likely to act on these?
- When did the voices start telling you to do this?
- How frequently are you hearing these?
- Has there been a time in the past when you have done what the voice told you to do?
- Has there been a time when you have been able to resist? If so, how did you manage that?

Hallucinations (visual)

- I notice you have been looking around the room, what are you looking at?
- Are you the only one that can see that?
- Have you ever seen anything so unusual that other people didn't believe what you described?
- Have you ever seen things that other people say they could not see?

Thought content

General

- What has brought you in to see us today?
- What has been on your mind lately?
- What are you thinking about right now?
- Have you been having any thoughts that you don't like?
- Is there anything you're often thinking about or focussed on?
- What occupies your thoughts most of the time?
- What are some of the worries you have been having?
- In your culture, is [the thought] something that everyone believes?

Delusional

Explore if the belief is:

- Commonly accepted by the person's cultural group/s.
- Emerging in specific situations or present all the time.
- Appropriate to the situation in any context.
- Is the person flexible in their thinking or rigid?
- Is there one underlying theme/belief that all the thoughts are linked to or are they random unconnected thoughts.

Thought content – risk issues

Harm from others

- Are you fearful of [X] and/or do you feel unsafe or controlled by [X] or anyone?
- Have you been threatened with harm in any way by [X] and/or anyone?

Initial question about self-harm

When a person gets very stressed, sometimes they might hurt themselves, it might be cutting, burning, or hitting something hard, have you ever hurt yourself on purpose?

Initial question options to enquire about suicidal ideation

- With all that's been going on for you, have you had thoughts about ending your own life?
- When a person gets very stressed, sometimes they think about killing themselves. Is that something you have ever thought about?
- Have you ever felt life wasn't worth living?
- Have you ever wished you could go to sleep and never wake up?
- Have you ever thought of wanting to die?
- Have you ever considered suicide?
- Have you ever tried to take your own life in the past?

If the individual says they have considered suicide, ask:

- That must be difficult for you, what plans have you made to end your own life?
- Do you have any ideas about how you would kill yourself?
- Have you thought how you would do this? (If they can identify a method, be sure to ask about access to means).
- What led to these thoughts? When did this happen? Can you walk me through it?
- What do you think might make you go ahead? (explore triggers, stressors)
- What happened to calm the urge to kill yourself on that day? (explore protective factors)

For further understanding of suicide assessment, watch this video: Chronological Assessment of Suicide Events (CASE) approach ; and enrol in one of the Learning Centre's suicide prevention courses.

Some questions for assessing risk to others:

- We all get frustrated at times; have you ever been so frustrated you have smashed a plate, glass or your phone?
  What about punching a door or a wall?
  Have you ever damaged someone else's property?
- Have you ever found yourself in a situation where you had to fight back?
  What was happening before that happened?
- Do you ever get so angry that you want to hit someone?
- Have you ever felt like hurting someone?
- Is there anyone you would really like to hurt or 'teach a lesson'?
- Have you made any plans to hurt another person? (If yes) What do you plan to do?
- Have you ever been in trouble for hurting another person?
- If you felt like hurting someone, what would stop you?
- Is there anybody you feel has badly let you down or ruined your life?

For more questions related to identifying risks, go to the Risk assessment example questions. You are encouraged to enrol in one of the Learning Centre's risk assessment and management courses to learn more skills in this area.

Thought form and flow

Amount and rate

- How many thoughts are in your mind? [prompts: more than usual, or less than or about the same as usual]
- I notice you are talking faster/slower than usual today, am wondering if your thoughts seem faster/slower than usual?
- How fast are your thoughts showing up in your mind?

Connectedness

Observe if the thoughts are:

- connected to each other
- organised in a logical sequence.

Relationship to central idea

Observe if the person:

- answers questions directly
- offers many irrelevant ideas
- moves off topic frequently or quickly becomes aware of drift and comes back to the point.

Insight

- Do you think you have been experiencing any problems lately?
- Has anything changed in how you do your normal day to day things like [insert activity – caring for family/cooking etc]? Can you tell me about that?
- What sense do you make of what's happening for you now?
- Do you believe you might be experiencing (early warning signs)? [use person's words]
- Do you think you are experiencing (symptoms)? [use person's words]
- Why do you think your parents/partner/children/friends are concerned about you?
- What does (person's words for situation/condition) mean to you?
- What would be important to help your recovery?
- What would happen if you didn't take your medication for (name of condition)?
- What do you think the mental health service/your family should do now?
- What is your understanding of why you are here talking to me?
- You've told me about [symptoms]. These are often symptoms of a mental illness/condition. What are your thoughts on this?
- Your family has said that they are worried about you (staying in your room, not eating, etc.). Can you tell me why they might be worried?
- You were doing well at school/work, but it sounds like things have not gone well this year. What has been happening to interfere with your studies/work?

Judgement

- Can you walk me through what led you to [describe behaviour]?
- Do you think that [behaviour] and [current symptoms] might be linked in any way?
- Where do you see yourself in the future?
- Do you feel that the choices you've made lately are taking you where you want to go in life?
- Do you sometimes act without thinking?
- Do you often do things that you later regret or that get you into trouble?
- Do you feel unable to stop yourself from doing some things?
- How do you make decisions about important things in your life, like your health or finances?
- How do you decide (what to do with your time, what actions to take, etc.)?

Cognition

Alertness

I notice you seem a bit [insert drowsy or sluggish], what do you think might be causing that?

Orientation

- **Time:** Do you know what year and month it is? Can you tell me the date today? Can you tell me roughly what time it is?
- How did you go catching the train/bus today? Are the trains/buses running on time today?
- **Place:** Can you tell me where you are right now?
- **Person:** Can you tell me your name?
- Do you know who I am? If no…Can you tell me what my job might be?
- Can you tell me what we are doing here together?

Memory and Concentration

- Ask for information about the person's childhood or treatment/care that can later be verified.
- Ask for information about the person's recent experiences that can be verified. What did we talk about when we met last week? Ask about recent news events.
- Just need to check you understood the plans we just made; can you tell me what we planned to do in your own words?
- Do you use a diary or app to remember your appointments or when to take your medications?
- How well can you remember what you have talked about with people? How about remembering events?
- How well can you recall details – like who was there, what you did, or what you talked about?
- Have you watch any movies or watched anything on the news lately?
- Were you able to follow our discussion today?
- How do you find learning new information?

Click here to gain access to the Quick reference guide to the MSE a prompt for all components of the MSE you can save or print for your everyday reference.