

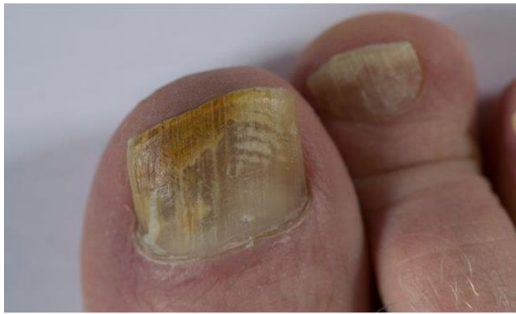
## An introduction to single best answer (SBA) questions

Here is an example showing how an SBA question might appear in an exam:

### Toenail problem

A 53-year-old man has discoloured toenails which are causing discomfort.

A photo of his nails is shown:



Which is the **most** appropriate investigation? Select **one** option only.

- A. Skin scrapings
- B. Liver function tests
- C. Full blood count
- D. Nail clippings
- E. HbA<sub>1c</sub>

This document will look at the structure of SBA questions:

**1. Title**

**Toenail problem**

A 53-year-old man has discoloured toenails which are causing discomfort.

A photo of his nails is shown:

**2. Scenario**



**3. Additional information, (if any)**

Which is the **most** appropriate investigation? Select **one** option only.

**4. Lead-in**

- A. Skin scrapings
- B. Liver function tests
- C. Full blood count
- D. Nail clippings
- E. HbA<sub>1c</sub>

**5. Answer options**

SBA's usually have a standard structure:

## 1. Title

### Toenail problem

- A short heading for context
- Intended to help focus on a different GP Curriculum topic area compared to a previous question

#### Top Tip:

- Remember to read the title

## 2. Scenario

A 53-year-old man has discoloured toenails which are causing discomfort.

A photo of his nails is shown:

- Most questions summarise a short, clinical, primary care presentation
- Typically starting with a person's age and gender
- Followed by a chronological summary of relevant information, which may include:
  - new and chronic symptoms
  - past medical history
  - medication
  - allergies
  - focussed examination (whether normal or abnormal)
  - test results
- Most scenarios have between one and five lines of text
- A limited number of factual questions will have no clinical scenario

#### Top Tips:

- Identify key Information from the scenario by **slowing down**, and **re-reading carefully**
- The information given is relevant to answering the question, for example, the given age or duration of symptoms

### 3. Additional information



#### 3. Additional information, (if any)

- Questions may include information in addition to a scenario, such as:
  - clinical images including ECGs
  - test results in table format
  - graph
  - chart
  - other data
- Most questions with additional information to interpret will have shorter scenarios, or sometimes no scenario at all
- **Images**
  - Photographs may show normal or abnormal findings
  - Use information from the scenario **and** your interpretation of the photo to answer the question
  - The question may be about diagnosis, investigation, or management
- **Test results**
  - Look for abnormal values and patterns
  - Normal ranges will be given, except for some common values which need tailoring to individual patient circumstances, for example, HbA<sub>1c</sub> and lipid profiles
- **Tables**
  - Look for abnormal values and patterns
- **ECGs**
  - Look for normality and abnormalities
  - Link your findings to information within the scenario

#### Top Tips:

Some questions have a 'two-step' process. In the example question from page one:

- It is necessary to first make a diagnosis from the given scenario and image
- Before subsequently then being able to best answer the lead-in question, 'Which is the **most** appropriate investigation?'

## 4. Lead-in

Which is the **most** appropriate investigation? Select **one** option only.

### 4. Lead-in

- It defines the exact question being asked
- May begin 'According to national guidance' or 'According to the current BNF'
- A small number explicitly ask for multiple (usually two) correct answers
- Some words are in **bold** for emphasis to meaning, for example:

- "...the **most** likely diagnosis"

Choose the most plausible diagnosis based on the scenario. Although other answers may form part of a reasonable differential diagnosis, one answer will **best** match the scenario

- "...the **most** appropriate **next** management"

This is emphasising the need to look for what should be done **now**. It is not asking about other possible future treatments

- "...the **most** appropriate **initial** management"

Which action is essential to take **first** in primary care, before considering other relevant choices?

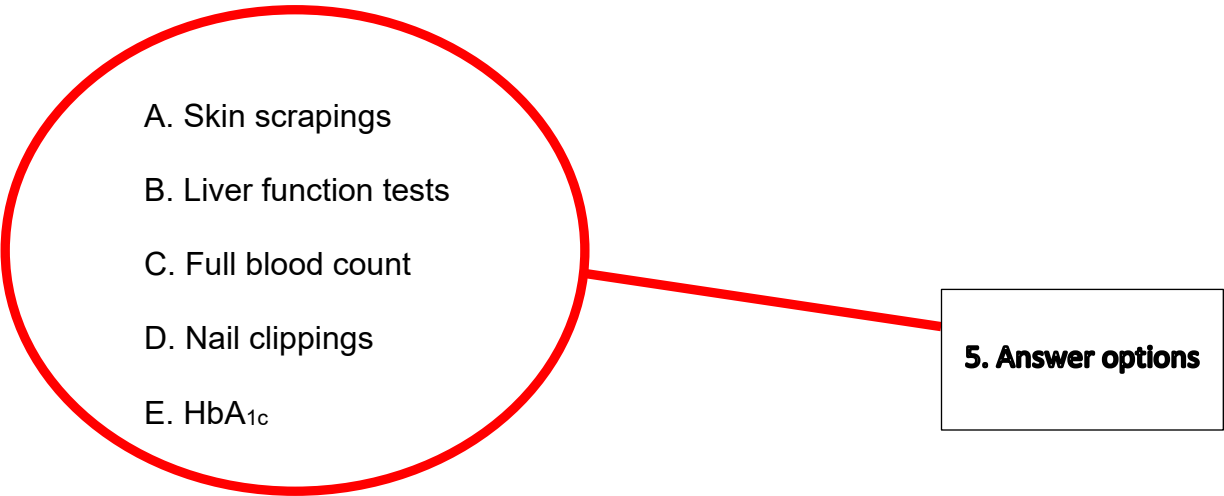
- "...the **most** appropriate **initial** investigation"

Which test is important to do **first** in primary care to confirm or rule out a significant diagnosis? Look for a single test, the outcome of which will guide subsequent decision-making

### Top Tips:

- Some candidates find it helpful to read the lead-in question first **before** looking at the scenario. This may help focus on what is being asked
- Remember that the answer must be based on national not local guidance

## 5. Answer options

- 
- A. Skin scrapings
  - B. Liver function tests
  - C. Full blood count
  - D. Nail clippings
  - E. HbA<sub>1c</sub>

### 5. Answer options

- Most commonly SBAs are 'best of five' answer options, but occasionally more or less
- Answer options will be in a randomised order
- Answers will match guidance across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

### Top Tips:

- Some candidates find the 'cover test' helpful. This involves trying to work out the answer **before** looking at the options. If the answer you come up with is one of the five listed answers, then it is likely correct
- Exclude clearly incorrect answers
- Frequently a question will be asking for the most 'likely' diagnosis, which is not necessarily the most 'serious' diagnosis
- Remember that 'no action' or the recognition of normality may sometimes be the correct answer

Please refer to the many other exam preparation resources on the [AKT website](#).

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