

Diagnostic Radiology Oral Exam: Study Guide

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Diagnostic radiology (DR) certification includes two different formal exams, with distinct purposes. While the Qualifying (Core) Exam allows the candidate to demonstrate knowledge across the entire domain of diagnostic radiology in a computer-based exam using multiple choice questions, the DR Oral Exam will focus on higher level skills in **observation, synthesis, and management**. The case discussions will assess the clinical and communication skills and professionalism required of an independently practicing general diagnostic radiologist.

The exam will include representative cases across seven categories:

- Abdominal
- Breast
- Cardiothoracic
- Musculoskeletal
- Neuroradiology
- Nuclear
- Pediatric

Modalities may include radiography, CT, ultrasound, MRI, fluoroscopy, mammography, and nuclear radiology technologies (PET, SPECT, and planar imaging, as well as therapies). Interventional techniques including arthrography, myelography, and angiography may be shown within the context of the above categories. Images may be presented as single images, cine clips, or scrollable stacks. MRI sequences will be labeled unless identifying the sequence is the specific question being tested.

Content will include critical findings as well as common and important diagnoses routinely encountered in general DR practice, focusing on examples that optimally assess observation skills, communication, judgment, and reasoning (application of knowledge learned during residency). Candidates will be evaluated on communication and their ability to incorporate clinical information into recommendations for management and additional imaging when appropriate. Clinically relevant physics and safety principles may be discussed in the context of image-based cases.

In addition, percutaneous procedures identified by APDR/APDIR as expected of a general radiologist will be covered ([APDR's Ten Procedures Expected of a General Radiologist](#)), including indications, contraindications, techniques, anatomic considerations, and complications. These procedures include:

- Image-guided core biopsy
- Image-guided abscess drainage
- Paracentesis
- Thoracentesis
- Lumbar puncture
- Ultrasound-guided breast biopsy
- Ultrasound-guided venous access
- Over-the-wire tube exchange
- Thyroid fine-needle aspiration
- Joint procedures

Because interventional radiology/diagnostic radiology (IR/DR) has a distinct primary certificate and residency training pathway, performance of advanced interventional procedures (e.g., embolization, stent placement, thrombectomy, vertebroplasty, etc.) will not be covered in the DR Oral Exam. However, knowledge of anticipated imaging findings and complications after interventional procedures will be in scope for the DR Oral Exam.

The major goal of the new exam model is to assess the knowledge and skill of diagnostic radiologists. To that end, residents should prepare for the exam in a way that allows them to identify and appropriately describe imaging findings and the potential significance of those findings, offer a short differential diagnosis when applicable, and communicate reasonable recommendations for next steps. Case conferences and daily readouts where residents can practice these skills will assist in preparation.

While the content included in any individual exam session is limited and will not cover the entirety of diagnostic radiology, a sampling of material within the areas outlined below may be included using any appropriate modality. Categories of disease may include congenital abnormalities, normal growth and development, infection and inflammation, neoplasms, trauma, metabolic disease, syndromes, and iatrogenic/post-operative problems in the relevant anatomy for each category. Possible topics include, but are not limited to, the following areas:

Abdominal:

Adrenal gland
 Bowel
 Female reproductive organs
 Head and neck ultrasound
 Hepatobiliary
 Kidney/ureter/bladder
 Male reproductive organs

Pancreas
Retroperitoneum
Spleen
Vascular

Breast imaging:

Altered breast
Architectural distortion/asymmetry
Axilla
Calcifications
Interventions and communication
Male breast
Masses
Nipple and skin change

Cardiothoracic:

Acute cardiothoracic conditions
Cardiac CT and MR
Congenital abnormalities
Diffuse lung disease
Infection
Interstitial lung disease
Lung malignancy
Mediastinal lesions
Pleural disease
Thoracic vascular disease

Musculoskeletal:

Arthropathy and joint-based disease
Hematologic, metabolic, and Paget disease
Infection
Neoplasms
Normal variants and adult congenital disorders
Osseous and soft tissue trauma
Post-operative abnormalities

Neuroradiology:

Brain, neck, and spine topics from the following categories:
Cysts and tumor-like lesions

Congenital and developmental disorders presenting in adults
Degenerative disorders
Demyelination
Infection/inflammation
Neoplasms
Normal variants
Post-procedural and post-treatment changes
Toxic/metabolic
Trauma
Vascular disorders and hemorrhage

Nuclear Radiology:

Breast
Cardiovascular and lymphatic
Central nervous system
Endocrine
Gastrointestinal
Genitourinary
Musculoskeletal
Pulmonary
Therapy

Pediatrics:

Cardiovascular and lymphatic
Central nervous system
Fetal MRI
Gastrointestinal
Genitourinary
Multisystem/syndromic
Musculoskeletal
Pulmonary
Skull, head and neck, face and airway