

Descriptors and Terminology for the Mental Status Examination (MSE)

Use of common terminology and descriptors can help make MSE write-ups intelligible to subsequent readers. Shared terminology would prudently include the following, with associated descriptors (generally on a continuum from normal to abnormal):

Term	Definition	Common Descriptors
Level of Consciousness	How alert, aware, responsive is the client?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Alert.</i> - <i>Hypervigilant.</i> - <i>Drowsy, lethargic, stuporous, asleep, comatose, confused, fluctuating.</i>
Orientation	Awareness of time, place, nature of situation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Oriented x 3 (to time, place, situation);</i> - <i>Partly oriented (e.g., oriented to place and situation, but poorly to time, such as "gave current year as 1984").</i>
Quality of Movement	Can include gait, fine motor speed/dexterity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Normal gait and upper extremity movements.</i> - <i>Unsteady gait; tremors (when at rest or reaching, etc.), slowed movements, restless/fidgety.</i>
Affect	Observed range of emotional expression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Normal in range; appropriate to the situation; congruent with mood.</i> - <i>Blunted or restricted (little expressed emotion); flat (no expressed emotion); labile or very variable.</i>
Mood	Client's emotional self-report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Normal or euthymic.</i> - <i>Sad or dysphoric; hopeless; variable mood; irritable; worried or anxious; expansive or elevated mood.</i>
Speech	Fluency, Rate, Volume, Intonation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Fluent. Normal rate, volume, intonation.</i> - <i>Halting speech; word-finding difficulties; pressured speech.</i> - <i>Dysarthric or difficulty enunciating.</i> - <i>Soft or loud volume.</i> - <i>Monotone, sing-song tonality.</i>
Thought Process	Flow and form of thought (as reported by client, or inferred from behavior)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Linear; coherent; goal-directed.</i> - <i>Tangential; flight of ideas; loosening of associations; racing thoughts; thought blocking.</i>

Term	Definition	Common Descriptors
Thought Content	Nature of ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Normal thought content.</i> - <i>Fixed ideas; delusions; hallucinations (auditory and/or visual, etc.).</i>
Attention	Ability to Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Attentive.</i> - <i>Variable attention; distracted.</i>
Memory	Ability to encode, store and retrieve information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Intact for recent memory.</i> - <i>Intact for remote memory.</i> - <i>Limited or deficient for recent and/or remote memory.</i>
Insight	Awareness of one's own strengths and limitations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Intact insight.</i> - <i>Limited insight.</i> - <i>No insight.</i>
Judgement	Understanding of how to act and react in social situations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Good judgement.</i> - <i>Fair judgement.</i> - <i>Poor judgement.</i>
Motivation/ Effort	Client's apparent level of motivation and effort toward participating in session	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Good motivation/efort</i> - <i>Limited or variable motivation/effort.</i>

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