

The Four Techniques

Nursing

Inspection, palpation, percussion and auscultation — what each one can actually find.

Order is inspect, palpate, percuss, auscultate — except the abdomen.

Technique	What it finds
Inspection	Colour, symmetry, effort, swelling, wounds
Palpation	Temperature, tenderness, masses, pulses, oedema
Percussion	Air, fluid or solid tissue underneath
Auscultation	Breath, heart, bowel and vascular sounds
Comparison	Side against side, and now against baseline

Educational reference. Inspection yields most of the findings and costs nothing — the commonest error is going straight for the stethoscope.