

Step 1 Guide

About the Test

- First part of general medical licensing exam series
- Covers preclinical basic sciences materials
- All standardized multiple choice questions in NBME style
- 280 questions organized in 7 blocks of 40, 1 hour per block
- 45 minutes of total break time
- 15-minute tutorial, which if skipped adds to 45 minutes of break time
- Scored as pass/fail only
- Read this article for more info: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USMLE_Step_1

Study Materials

- UWorld
 - Useful practice questions that are reasonably similar in style to NBME questions and will teach you how to answer questions accurately, understand nuance, and work under time pressure
 - Recommend starting using this as soon as you are adjusted to medical school. When starting organ system blocks, or even sooner, is good.
 - Provides practice exams for use during dedicated period
- First Aid
 - Reference book that outlines the overall set of facts needed to pass this exam.
 - You don't need to actually read the book, you just need to acquire this set of facts in one form or another (whether from lectures, Anki decks, videos, books, etc.)
 - Make sure you are keeping up with acquiring these facts during the organ blocks themselves. Lectures do not always cover all the facts you need to succeed so please be proactive. Do not wait until dedicated to start acquiring these facts.
- Pathoma
 - Short video lectures that cover the important parts of each organ system block
 - Distills the topic down to key bits of info, and correlates with the needed set of facts from First Aid
 - Ideally start using this during the organ system blocks themselves, as this will be the least workload intensive.
 - Each ~ month long organ block is distilled into total of 3-4 hours of video. Very manageable to keep up with if you are proactive.

- Can also watch during summer break or during dedicated.
- There are corresponding Anki cards to keep the info fresh on your mind
- Sketchy
 - Videos containing visuospatial mnemonics to memorize information corresponding to microbiology and pharmacology
 - Useful for memorizing key features needed to distinguish these organisms and get test questions right quickly.
 - Ideal time to get started is during first semester pharmacology and microbiology blocks, but can watch at any point during preclerkship or even during dedicated, though this may be an overwhelming quantity of videos
- NBME practice exams
 - Just over half the length of real exam
 - Questions are same format as the real deal so this is valuable practice.
 - Begin taking just before or during dedicated period
 - There is a free mini exam called Free 120 that is valuable because the format of the digital exam is identical to the real exam. Questions are slightly funky so don't give too much credence to this score.
- Anki
 - Free spaced repetition flashcard software
 - Advantages include community support, premade decks, support for large content libraries
 - Can use any other tool (e.g., Quizlet, re-reading physical notes manually) that facilitates active recall and spaced repetition: this is essential so that you retain the material you learn during each preclinical block.
 - Otherwise, you will be relearning a lot of content during dedicated, which is not enough time to properly learn this vast amount of content (or if so, will require great stress and duress)
 - Requires consistent usage to be effective. Must use early and often for maximum benefit, limited benefits to cramming using Anki
 - AnKing deck
 - Large premade, community-sourced Anki deck available online with ~30,000 flashcards which nearly comprehensively covers the arsenal of facts needed for Step 1 and preclinical education
 - Ideal time to use is beginning at the start of medical school, or at least during the start of organ blocks.
 - If you begin early and study consistently (i.e., nearly daily), load of cards can be very manageable (400-600 reviews most days, occasionally 900-1100 reviews on 5-10 days out of the year during heavier organ blocks)
 - Not advisable to start using during dedicated period, as the quantity of cards will be unmanageable
 - Anecdotally, I found that memorizing a large proportion of this deck, starting early in medical school, felt analogous to memorizing an answer key to Step 1 (and Step 2, for that matter). Dedicated period

for Step 1 was painless as a result of having memorized this deck over the preceding year and a half.

Prep Time

- Long term preparation should start early in medical school. As soon as you adjust yourself to medical school, you should turn some of your energies towards setting yourself up for success with Step 1 and beyond by utilizing some resource to attain and retain the information during each organ block. The more information you retain from each block going forward, the less stress you will have down the line and the better you will perform on the exam.
- Dedicated period:
 - Length needed varies from 1 week to 10+ weeks, with most doing it in 6 weeks.
 - Anywhere from 2-16 hours a day of studying is done. Generally, more than 12 hours a day is not advisable. Less daily studying is possible, particularly if you do not require content review
 - Ideally, most content is fresh because you kept up with it with consistent active recall and spaced repetition throughout the year. This will enable you to devote more time to developing test taking skills and less on content review.
 - If you don't have all the information retained, not the end of the world. Simply use ~ half of each day in the first couple weeks to review books, videos, or other resources on your rusty areas
 - Remainder of time should be spent on practice questions
 - Some people like timed mode, other prefer tutor mode. Both seem to be effective generally.
 - Can randomize questions to mimic real exam or do block specific questions to target particular areas.
 - I personally am proponent of mostly (or exclusively) randomized blocks in timed mode, as this simulates the task of the real exam
 - Dedicated is where you hone your test-taking skills/gamesmanship, not just for content review
 - Take practice exams (NBME and UWorld) approximately weekly during dedicated. This is best benchmark of your progress.
 - Also plan out your strategy for dividing up the break time during these practice exams

Test Scheduling

- Choose initial date based on your performance on the NBME exam administered at the end of preclinical blocks.
- Err on side of later. Better to push exam back than to fail.

- You should be scoring above the “low pass” range on NBME practice exams to be reasonably confident you are ready for the real exam

General Principles

- Begin early and often. The content needed is sizeable but becomes relatively more manageable the earlier you begin acquiring it and the more diligent you are about retaining it. Conversely, the later you begin acquiring the knowledge and less attention you devote to retaining it, the more difficult it will be to prepare for this exam.
 - Best day to start is day 1, second best is today
- Focus on task-specific performance, namely, for a block of 40 random questions, can I choose the most correct answer within 60 minutes.
 - Not a test of can I explain every fact in depth or can I draw concept maps for every topic.
 - Test performance comes from both content knowledge and test taking/gamesmanship
 - Gamesmanship includes ability to efficiently parse questions, eliminate wrong answers, and not get tricked
 - Best way to improve this is to do lots of practice questions in similar conditions to the exam
 - Best way to get good at shooting basketballs is to shoot lots of basketballs
- While this is an important exam, don't lose sight of bigger picture and don't sacrifice your own well-being. Seek help from peers, trusted friends, and other components of your support system. Continue doing activities that make you whole while preparing for this.