

# Step 1 Reference Guide

Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine  
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collaboration with the Student Affairs Office

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## About the Resource Guide

Case's student community has always been a great source of information and support. For instance, each year, the incoming first year class gets a thorough run down of campus, the city of Cleveland, and strategies to successfully master a massive amount of information. We feel most would agree that over the first two years, a huge thank you is owed to the classes above us who helped make the transition smooth.

When the time came to begin preparing for step 1, many of us felt overwhelmed and confused. There did not seem to be much organized information about how, what, or when to study. Those of us who had friends in the M3 and M4 classes relied heavily on their advice, but for students who didn't know many upperclassmen, there was little information available to help them confidently prepare (besides a couple of study guides that many later found to be too rigid and impractical).

This guide was created in an attempt to consolidate the massive amount of information about step 1 into one place. It's also meant to show that there are many ways to successfully study for, and take, step 1. The emphasis on wellness is also intentional: many of us did not anticipate how anxious and truly unhappy we would feel, and only later did we realize that most of our peers felt the same way. We hope that by acknowledging this up front, future classes will be better equipped to handle the inevitable stress that comes with preparing for the exam.

Fifty-nine M3 students from both Case and Lerner were surveyed, and the following pages summarize their responses. All responses were analyzed separately; if there were significant differences in their responses to particular questions, their answers will be displayed separately. It is our hope that this effort can be expanded upon in the years to come to help future M2s feel more informed about planning and studying for step 1.

Good luck!

Molly, Erika, Allie, & Sarah  
January 2018

## Step 1: The Basics

### How do I sign up?

Before you can choose a test date and location for step 1, you must submit an application for a USMLE scheduling permit. When you submit this application, you will also be required to choose a three-month window during which you want to schedule your exam. The permit will allow you to pick an exam ONLY during this three-month window (if you wish to change the window at a later date, there are fees). The 2017 fee for the USMLE scheduling permit was \$605.

Apply here: <https://apps.nbme.org/nlesweb/#/authenticate>

After filling out the application, you will receive a Certificate of Identification and Authorization Form that is pre-populated with your information. This form needs to be signed by the school registrar and then sent to the NBME. Please note that this form also requires a 2" x 2" passport-style photo, which you affix to the form. The registrar will mail this form for you; once the NBME receives it, you will get an email containing your Step 1 permit. Once you have this permit, you may register for your exam.

### What is the test like?

Step 1 is a one-day exam administered on a computer. It consists of seven 60-minute sections, and each section has 40 questions. Occasionally, you may have a section with a few fewer than 40 questions, too. You are given 45 minutes of break time that you may use in-between sections however you would like. The testing software looks quite similar to that of U-world, so navigating between questions on test day should not be difficult.

Prior to beginning the exam, there is a 15-minute tutorial. If you skip the tutorial, these 15 minutes will be added to your total break time, giving you one hour instead of 45 minutes. You can view the tutorial ahead of time by accessing the following link: [orientation.nbme.org/Launch/USMLE/STPF1](http://orientation.nbme.org/Launch/USMLE/STPF1)

In the exam room, you are given:

- Double-sided dry erase sheet + dry-erase marker
- Noise cancelling headphones (which you can use only if you wish to do so)
- Audio headphones (parts of the exam do have audio)

You are not allowed to bring food/drink into the exam room with you, but you may keep it in a locker outside the exam room.

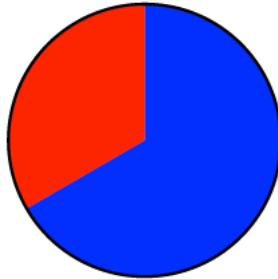
During breaks, you are allowed to access anything in your locker, including your cell phone, any study materials you wish to review, food, drink, etc.

## Studying: When, Where, and How

### Should I start reviewing before my dedicated study time?

Each student is inevitably going to have a different opinion on this. Of note, the overwhelming majority of Case students noted that looking back, if they had studied anything beforehand, it would have been pharmacology only.

#### **Lerner students: Did you study for Step One before dedicated study time?**



- 66.67% Yes, I spent a significant amount of time studying before my dedicated time.
- 33.33% Yes, I studied beforehand, but did not spend significant time doing so.

#### **Case students: Did you study for Step One before dedicated study time?**



- 48.98% No.
- 36.73% Yes, I studied beforehand, but did not spend significant time doing so.
- 10.20% Yes, I spent a significant amount of time studying before beginning my dedicated
- 4.08% Other.

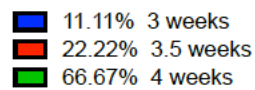
Two students chose "other." They explained:  
- "Only by watching some sketchy micro."  
- "I used step 1 materials to study for block exams."

## Studying: When, Where, and How, cont.

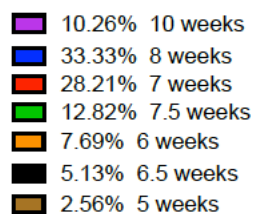
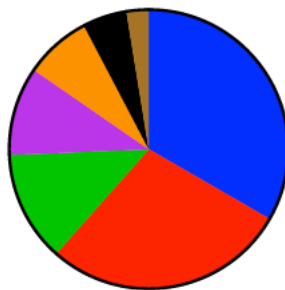
### How long should I study for?

Again, there is a good amount of variability regarding this question. Here's what students said:

#### **Lerner students: How many weeks of dedicated study time did you use?**



#### **Case students: How many weeks of dedicated study time did you use?**



## Studying: When, Where, and How, cont.

### Where should I study?

Case and Lerner students answered this question pretty similarly: about 2/3 of students stayed in Cleveland to prepare, while about 1/3 went home. A couple of students also split time between home and Cleveland.

### How should I organize my day?

Excluding half- or full days off, most students reported 10-12 hours spent studying each day. Students tended to spend a half to two thirds of the day on question sets – that is, answering questions, reviewing the explanations, and annotating relevant material into First Aid. Most students reported ~2-3 sets per day; many added in an additional set as they became more efficient.

Per student report, the other one third to one half of the day was spent on micro, pharm, or other content review, most commonly with First Aid or Pathoma.

### When should I take practice exams?

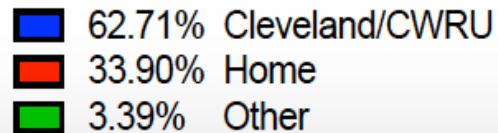
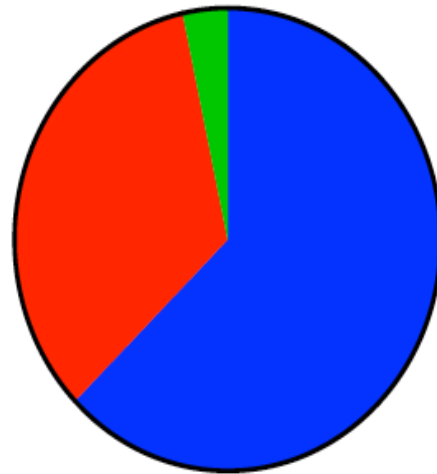
Students reported different approaches to timing of practice exams. A general approach endorsed by many was one exam at the start of study period, one exam after first pass of material, and several additional exams during repeated passes of material, as the exam date drew closer.

For more information about when students timed their practice tests, check out the graphs on the following page.

### What should I use to study?

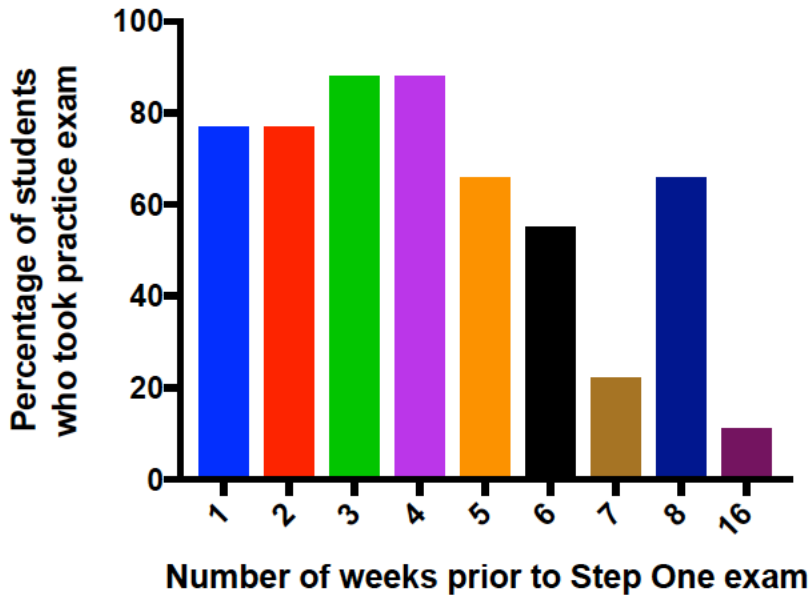
See the Resources section for more information about which resources were most commonly used and tips about how to use resources effectively.

### Where did you study?

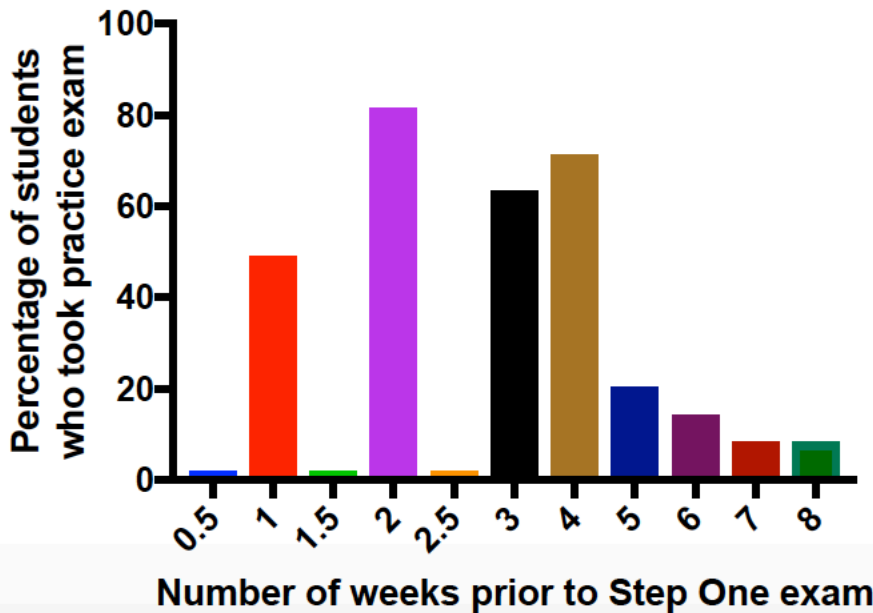


Studying: When, Where, and How, cont.

**Lerner students: When did you take practice exams (NBME and/or U-world?)**



**Case students: When did you take practice exams (NBME and/or U-world?)**

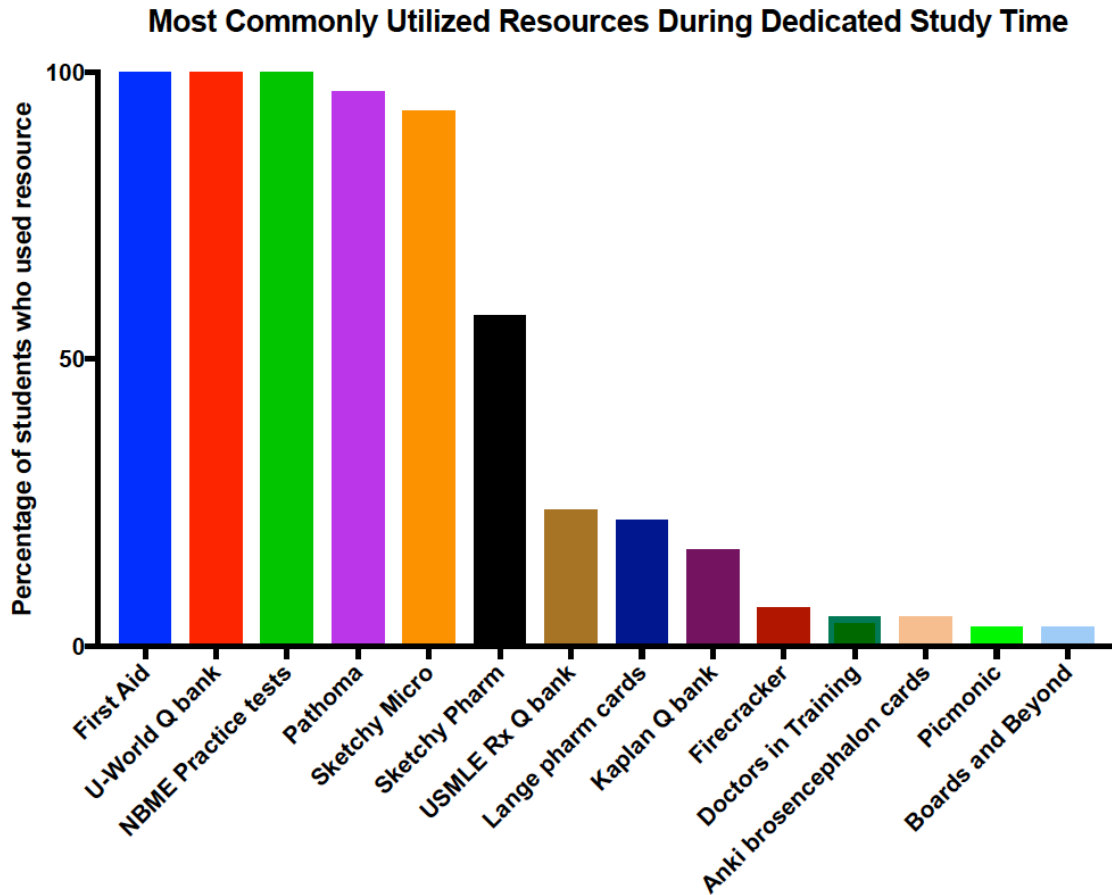




## Studying: What

Which resources were most commonly used?

Both Case and Lerner students reported using a very similar list of resources:



\*This is not an exhaustive list, but it captures the most commonly mentioned resources.

Resources listed with lower frequency include Lange cards (genetics, micro, biochem), customizable flashcards (using platforms like Anki or iFlash), and the NBME free 120.

How do I use these resources?

In the following pages, we have attempted to summarize what students recommend for each resource, listed alphabetically. When applicable, we have also included download links. Note that some have longer explanations than others; this reflects how many students provided feedback for each resource, and how valuable students felt each resource was.

Studying: What, cont.

### **ANKI BROSENCEPHALON CARDS**

A collection of ~13,000 flashcards created and continuously edited by medical students. Each card is tagged so cards can be sorted by category/organ system.

*Cost:* free

*Download here:* <https://www.brosencephalon.com/flashcards/>

“Brosencephalon was king if you start early in M2 or M1; it is not so good for classes, but dedicating a bit of time each day to memorizing cards from the relevant block proved to be nice when dedicated came around months later. I only did the sections I felt weak in.”

### **BOARDS AND BEYOND**

Collection of >300 review videos organized by topic/organ system, with USMLE-style quiz questions at end of each video.

*Cost:* varies depending on length of subscription

*Download here:* <https://www.boardsbeyond.com/signup>

*Try sample videos before purchasing:* <https://www.boardsbeyond.com/samples>

“Really well made videos explaining everything. Used for areas of weakness.”

“I wish I found this earlier in my studying. Awesome resource for teaching relevant anatomy. The neuro and cardio chapters are gold.”

### **DOCTORS IN TRAINING**

Review course with videos and written workbook designed as a comprehensive review of step 1 content.

*Cost:* \$825

*Download here:* <https://www.doctorsintraining.com/shop/usmle-step-1/>

“Did one video and quit. I don't think it's a high quality resource, but if you lack the organizational skills to coordinate your own study program this might be a good option for you.”

“Helpful, but too many videos and took too much time. Was helpful in topics that I felt I needed more attention (e.g. ophtho stuff, interpreting EKG).”

“I preferred this style of learning. More engaging and structured. Would recommend annotating First Aid with materials from the DIT videos.”

“Watched a few of their vids when I was struggling w/ cards pharm.”

## Studying: What, cont.

### **FIRECRACKER**

Flashcard-based program that reviews material covered in First Aid and Pathoma; can organize cards based on topic or complete them randomly. Also offers practice exams.

*Cost:* varies depending on length of subscription

*Download here:* <http://www.firecracker.me/pricing>

*Can do seven-day free trial before purchasing*

“Used it very peripherally, before the exam period, did not like since it had so many questions that I felt were too specific and would never be asked.”

“I used Firecracker during blocks 3 and 4. I am not someone who remembers details without the larger context so I did not find this mode of studying useful.”

“Used it very peripherally, before the exam period, did not like since it had so many questions that I felt were too specific and would never be asked.”

### **FIRST AID**

Most students use this as their central reference and annotate information gathered from other resources and Q-banks into First Aid. This provides a solid framework for studying, especially during first pass, and then can be used as reference during later passes. First Aid includes all of the testable information and topics but does not contain any in-depth explanations; thus, it is best used for review and memorization, not for primary learning.

Most students made it through First Aid 2-2.5 times, and some made it through 3 times. Those that only made it through once commented that they wished they had done it a second time.

Some students read through FA prior to the dedicated study period but many did not. While the dominant strategy was to annotate all of the other resources into FA, some students did not like having to read and memorize from a book and instead made flashcards of the information found in FA.

*Cost:* ~\$50 on Amazon

“For the first half of my study period, I annotated everything that I reviewed into First Aid. After taking my first practice NBME, I realized I had not nailed down a lot of small details that are in First Aid. I spent the second half of my study time really reading over First Aid (I got through it three times over the 8 weeks) and capturing those details, and it made a huge difference in my score on practice tests. Getting my first aid spiral bound was also helpful (Staples can do this for ~\$5-\$10).”

## Studying: What, cont.

“Helpful: Covers a lot of information, diagrams/images were helpful.

Not helpful: Did not find information to be formatted for easy reading, ended up creating my own sets of flashcards with facts from chapters I really did not want to read again.

Utilization: Read through each chapter 1x, then created flashcards for annoying chapters, continued to reread better chapters. Continued reading chapters/doing flashcards every day until my test date.”

“The bible, well organized and it slowly was rooted into memory. Find a way to systematically annotate because it will be important (i.e. color coding, highlighting etc.) I annotated FA with all novel notes from UWorld (in blue) and Pathoma (in red), and anything from curriculum (in black) that came up when I delved deeper to answer a question - rarely tapped into curriculum but had an old FA that was annotated from school studying.”

“Absolutely the best resource. Went through the entire book 1x before dedicated, then 2-3 more times during dedicated depending on the chapter. The first two times I went through it, I just read and underlined. Then I started handwriting notes on sections that I needed extra attention with.”

### **FREE 120**

Three blocks of 40 questions each, written by the NBME, that may be taken timed or untimed. Is sometimes referred to as the “free 150” because older versions of this resource had 50 questions per section.

*Cost:* free

*Download here:* <http://orientation.nbme.org/Launch/USMLE/STPF1>

“This was the last ‘practice test’ that I took before my exam. This was the only resource I know of that let me practice listening to heart sounds exactly as I had to on the actual exam.”

### **LANGE PHARM CARDS**

Flashcards for pharmacology with each card designed as a mini-vignette.

Many students did not find Lange Pharm Cards to be particularly helpful. They are structured with a scenario vignette on the one side and details about the drug class that would be used on the other side. The drug class information was very detailed and thus students often found it hard to commit to memory using these flash cards alone.

*Cost:* ~\$12

## Studying: What, cont.

“I used these to help with Pharm. I liked that they were presented with vignettes that had all of the drug class information on the back. Pharm was the most difficult subject for me to get down for Step 1 because I didn't get a grip on how I was studying for it until late in my study period. I thought these were helpful overall.”

“Sort of helpful. I worked through the flashcards for an hour prior to starting each day during dedicated study time. They helped me keep track of all the drugs and sort them into groups, but they were also much too detailed.”

“Ran through these an hour a day, nothing special to them, they work. Case doesn't do a good job covering medications so pharm will be a subject most people need to devote time to.”

“I attempted using these flashcards, but I found them difficult to learn from--the information didn't stick well for me. I felt there was too much information/detail on each card. I ended up using them more as quick reference and supplemented them with U-World and First Aid.”

### **NBME PRACTICE TESTS**

Four-section tests written by the NBME that mimic step 1; exam is called the Comprehensive Basic Science Self-Assessment (CBSSA). Can be taken with or without timer mode.

Forms with smaller numbers (13, 15) are older practice tests and forms with higher numbers (18, 19) are newer. Some claim that certain forms are more predictive than others of actual step 1 scores, but based on student responses there was little consensus about this.

Toward the end of study period, many students took a full NBME exam and half of a U-world exam in one sitting to improve stamina before test day.

*Cost:* \$60 per test

*Download here:* <https://nsas.nbme.org/home>

“I'd recommend taking as many of these as you can. U-World questions were enormously helpful for reviewing material, but I quickly realized after taking practice NBMEs that the NBME questions test the material somewhat differently. This affected how I studied and what I focused on for the rest of my study period.”

“Useful to gauge how you are doing.”

“Helpful for building up stamina.”

## Studying: What, cont.

### **PATHOMA**

Pathology review that is organized into videos, with corresponding workbook. Does not review pharm, micro, physio, etc. Many students used this to learn material during the first two years and annotated into First Aid beforehand.

The majority of students listened/watched 2-3x total.

Cost: depends on length of subscription

Download here: <http://www.pathoma.com/>

“One of the best resources out there, went through it multiple times. Chapters 1-3 are the highest yield sections and I had many questions verbatim from there.”

“Pathoma was a great high-yield resource. I would recommend going through the videos in order if possible, because there are recurring themes that appear throughout the videos. I annotated First Aid as I watched the videos the first time through. That way, during my second pass through Pathoma, I could watch the videos at a faster speed.”

“I thought Pathoma was helpful for giving me a framework with which to think about topics. For example, it clearly spelled out all of the different renal pathologies I needed to know, and it highlighted important differences between them. However, I found that some important details were not captured in Pathoma. I therefore watched it through (and annotated as I went) once and then I continued to review the diseases Dr. Sattar mentioned with other resources (U-world, First Aid) to learn the missing details.”

“Very good for developing the "why" of things before hardcore memorizing.”

“Helpful in getting more details about disease processes/pathophys. He does a lot of the high yield stuff you'll see on Step 1 but probably won't have some of the obscure stuff.”

“Did not rely on heavily. Watched everything once and selected topics (ovarian/testicular tumors, jaundice ddx) again later in study pd. Watched the first 3 chapters on general stuff twice.”

### **PICMONIC**

>1,300 audiovisual mnemonics of 1-2 minutes each (similar to Sketchy). Has optional quiz mode as well.

Cost: varies

Download here: <https://www.picmonic.com/pricing/medicine>

## Studying: What, cont.

*Try for free:* make an account (but do not purchase any plans) and you can watch 1 picmonic per day

“Used a few but not all the videos. Good for things that I just couldn’t memorize on my own, and for some last-minute topics that I needed to memorized shortly before the exam.”

“Purchased this at the beginning of the year but did not end up using – was not helpful for me. Preferred Sketchy Micro.”

### **Q-BANKS: U-WORLD**

Collection of >2,400 questions with detailed explanations for each question and answer choice. If not purchasing package with one-time reset, must flag each question in order to view it again. Otherwise, after answering all questions one time through, you will be unable to review them.

Some students organized questions by topic during first pass, and reviewed corresponding First Aid/Pathoma material as they went through each topic. These students started with neurology as it made for an easier transition from block 6. They then randomized questions during second pass. Other students felt it was better to do questions in randomized sets throughout their study periods.

Many students did more than 1 pass through U-world questions, but many others also did one pass, or one pass + one additional pass through incorrects.

*Cost:* depends on subscription

*Download here:* <https://www.uworld.com/purchase.aspx>

“Probably the most helpful. I don't think you could do Step 1 without UWorld. The questions are very much pattern recognition so it's probably just the volume of questions and repetition that actually helps, although their explanations were usually pretty good.”

“A gold mine in terms of studying. I used it primarily as a learning tool rather than an assessment--I read and took notes on all of the answer choices for each question in First Aid. It took a very, very long time to make it through U-World with the annotations, but absolutely worth the effort. I attempted going through U-World a second time, but did not finish--I think it's worth at least reviewing the questions you got wrong (if you have extra time).”

“Did the whole bank and then did most of my incorrects. Did not do 2 passes because I found I was just memorizing the questions and would remember the correct answer without remembering why it was the correct answer. I preferred

## Studying: What, cont.

doing 2 separate question banks and increasing the N of questions encountered.”

“I started U-world on day one and I completed one pass of the questions. I took my time with the questions: reading each answer choice, and really carefully annotating. I did not do a second pass because 1) it took me so long to get through it once and 2) I initially started the second pass, but I found that I was just getting questions right because I remembered the question, not the content. I think U-world is the most helpful resource but be sure to also review First Aid. I was missing a lot of small details and did quite poorly on my first practice test (by which point I had focused on U-world rather than reading First Aid). When I started supplementing U-world annotation with just reading First Aid with a close eye, my practice scores drastically improved.”

### **Q-BANKS: KAPLAN**

Collection of questions with detailed explanations for each question and answer choice. Can organize question sets by topic or create randomized sets. Also offers practice exams. Each question has First Aid citation.

*Cost:* depends on length of subscription

*Download here:* <https://www.kaptest.com/medical-prep/usmle/usmle-prep-course/step-1-qbank>

“It was ok at best but I felt that more questions couldn't hurt. There were lots of low yield facts that I never used. Finished about 10%.”

“Barely used. Wish I didn't spend \$\$\$ on it.”

“Some of the questions were very detailed. The practice test for Kaplan was AWFUL. DO NOT DO IT; IT IS A WASTE OF TIME.”

“I used this once I had finished U-World. I found it was more helpful to do new questions rather than go through U-World again because I found I had memorized many of the U-World answers. The Kaplan questions tended to be a little more detail-oriented and maybe weren't super representative of the actual exam but it was still good practice and I learned a lot from the questions I got wrong.”

“I did a few hundred questions from the Kaplan Q bank after completing the U-world Q bank. I stopped because 1) the answer explanations were sometimes confusing 2) I felt there was unnecessary detail. I also just felt that I was spreading myself thin by using 2 different q banks; I thought it would be more helpful for me to solidify what I had already learned rather than try to keep learning new bits of content.”



Studying: What, cont.

### **Q-BANKS: USMLE Rx**

>2,300 questions reviewing step 1 content. Each question has relevant First Aid citation. Can also subscribe to short videos that review high-yield content.

*Cost:* depends on length of subscription

*Download here:* <https://www2.usmle-rx.com/content/step-1-qmax>

“Did not use. But I did use the USMLE RX VIDEOS which were AMAZING!!! They are essentially the pathoma video equivalent for first aid.”

“I started using this Q bank during block 6. I finished almost all of this Q bank in addition to U-world. For me this was the best combination. The questions in this Q bank are excellent and it's a great teaching and learning tool. They include the sections of First Aid that correlate with each question. I finished this Q bank before I started on the U-world bank. Plus you can actually copy and paste stuff from this bank unlike U-World.”

“Used this for micro during block 5 and neuro and psych during block 6 - good way to review first aid but not worth your time during dedicated. (unless you absolutely want max # of questions)”

“Moderately helpful. It is helpful to do before step studying, but maybe not during step studying.”

### **SKETCHY MICRO**

Cartoons explained in short videos (usually 5-10 minutes long) to help remember different microbes and important details. Found by most students to be a very helpful resource.

A useful strategy was to print out the pictures corresponding to the videos and get them spiral bound or paste them into a notebook. Students then annotated the pictures with commentary from the videos, FA, etc. Another strategy was to create flashcards from the videos. Many students started watching the videos prior to the dedicated study time, i.e., during block 5, and then re-watched each video multiple times during the dedicated study time.

On average, students spent 45 minutes to 1 hour on videos each day and felt that it was a nice break from Q-banks and First Aid.

*Cost:* depends on length of subscription

*Download here:* <https://www.sketchymedical.com/#!/home>

*Can try free trial before purchasing*

## Studying: What, cont.

“I was skeptical at first if Sketchy would work for me, but even now nearly a year later I clearly remember many of the drawings and the highest-yield facts about the bugs. Micro turned out to be my strongest section going into Step 1, all because of this resource. I watched 1-2 hours of Sketchy every morning and created a binder of the images printed out with all of the memory "dots" labeled. The first run through was the longest because of how long it took to write everything out, but once you've gone through it once it's so easy to just flip through your binder and focus on the bugs you're having the most difficulty remembering. I felt better prepared for Micro than anything else on my Step exam.”

“Great for visual learners, I still remember 80-90% of what I watched. I printed out all of the cartoons and had them bound in a book at Staples. I spent the first few weeks getting through all of the videos and annotating my book. After that, I watched them on repeat and quizzed myself on the cartoons. I supplemented my micro review with First Aid as First Aid would describe additional details about pathophys, symptoms, treatment that were not always in sketchy (and I definitely got a few questions about these details on my actual test day). Sketchy is very helpful overall, though.”

“SO HELPFUL. I watched each video ~3 times before dedicated and took notes the first time I went through, slowly over the entire previous year. During dedicated, I watched all videos again 1 more time on 2x speed and also quizzed myself on a handful of bugs during my lunch breaks.”

“Brilliant. I took a screenshot of the finished drawing and then annotated it on my tablet while watching the videos, which made it more interactive and helped me remember more.”

“This resource is helpful because it removes the need to rote-memorize micro topics. I watched most of the videos while doing micro the first time and re-watched most during my dedicated period. I should have reviewed them all during the months leading up to dedicated as well.”

“Invaluable. Probably would have failed step without it. Was apprehensive at first but loved it by the end.”

### **SKETCHY PHARM**

Cartoons explained in 20-30 minute videos to help memorize drug classes, side effects, etc.

In general, students did not have the same overwhelmingly positive feelings toward Sketchy Pharm as they did towards Sketchy Micro. This primarily stems from the fact that the videos are much longer (20-30min on average) and

## Studying: What, cont.

significantly more dense than those of Sketchy Micro, with many drugs being lumped into a single video. However, many students did still continue to use it and found it to be helpful for memorizing drugs and side effects, especially if they preferred visual memory cues over flashcards or brute force memorization.

\*Certain sections that students names as being the most helpful include: sympathomimetics, cholinergics, antibiotics, neuro-psych and anesthesia

Cost: depends on length of subscription

Download here: <https://www.sketchymedical.com/#!/home>

“Also helpful though not quite as helpful as Sketchy Micro. The videos are longer and thus harder to pay attention to without zoning out. I found the sympathomimetics, cholinergics and antibiotics videos to be most helpful. I would watch 1-2 videos a day.”

“YES. All I needed to do well on pharm on Step 1 and it's still helping me to this day on the wards. I tried to intersperse the sketchy pharm topics with their respective sections in First Aid and Pathoma but I didn't plan well enough and couldn't adhere to that schedule. Ended up just dedicating 1-2 weeks and did one chapter a day of Sketchy Pharm. Reviewed the pictures for second pass to make sure I remembered the images and knew what the symbols stood for. Would recommend over flashcards.”

“Some of the sketchy pharm chapters are gold (neuro-psych and anesthesia come to mind). Some were too convoluted. Find out which work for you. I found it an easy way to learn pharm.”

“This is the one resource I wish I had started sooner. It definitely takes a lot of time up front to put in to watching the videos because they are longer, but if pharm is one of your weaker points, it is so worth it. Specifically autonomic, anti-arrhythmics, barbituates/benzos/sleep drugs, and anti-epileptics are done very very well!”

“Videos are longer than sketchy micro and not as good but I still found this to be very useful. Choose one pharm reference at the beginning and stick to it. For example, if you're using sketchy, don't mess around with the Lange flashcards.”

## Wellness

A common theme that presented itself amongst surveyed students is best summarized by the following response:

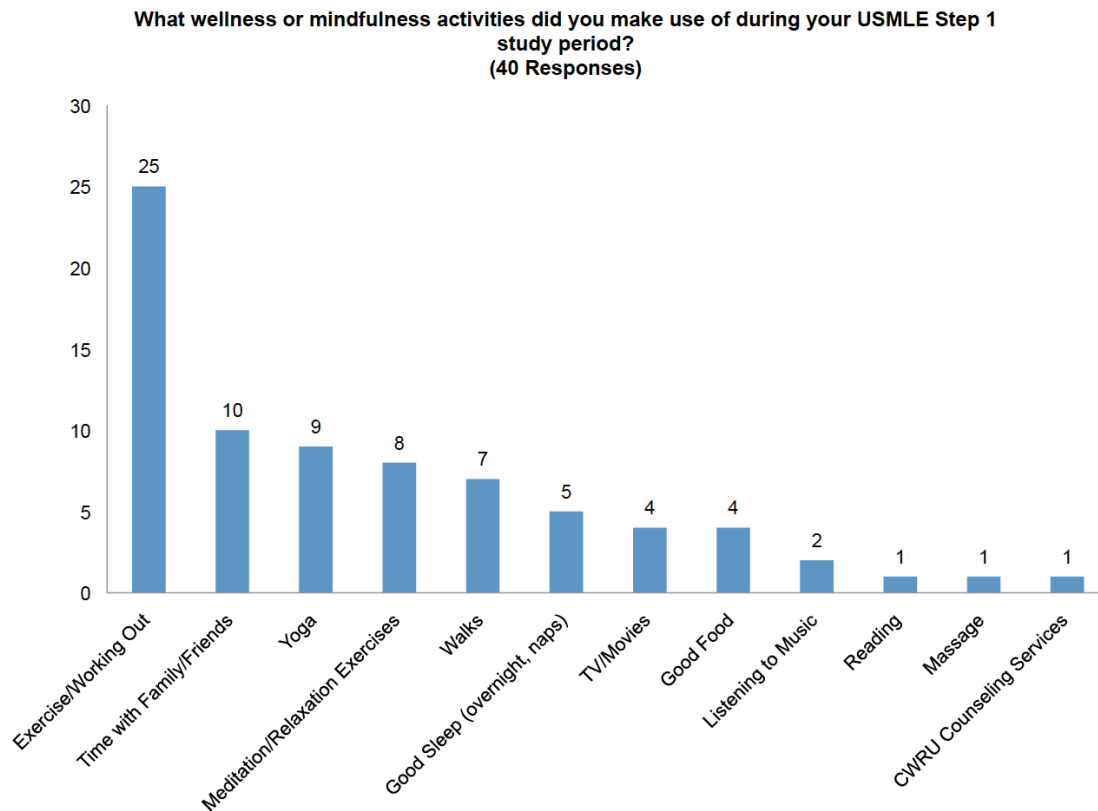
“Before step 1 studying, older students tell you how horrible the work hours are and that you are 'stressed.' I think we would all do better to more realistically prepare younger students for things like the (sometimes overwhelming) anxiety and stress, self-doubt, and inherent loneliness that are part of this process. It is not just mentally grueling, but emotionally grueling as well.”

### How did students manage their stress?

“Having a schedule in which you have flexibility in terms of time, but set tasks that you need to complete in the day helped me. Also, being able to make all of your decisions ahead of time so you don't need to decide what you are going to do next is massively helpful. The more brain space you can save for studying, the better you feel.”

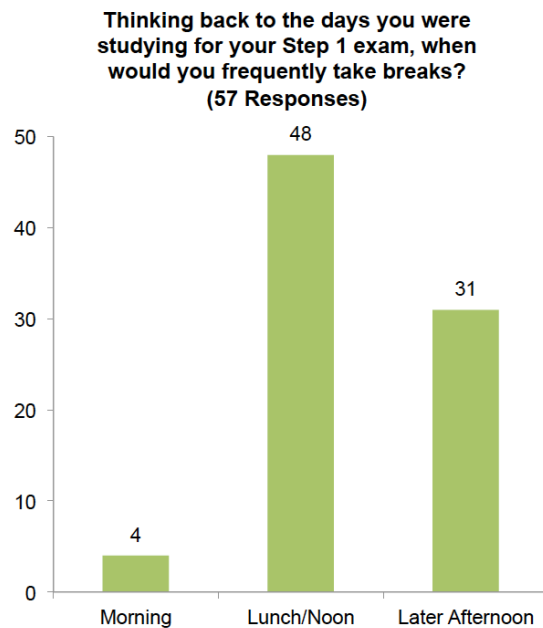
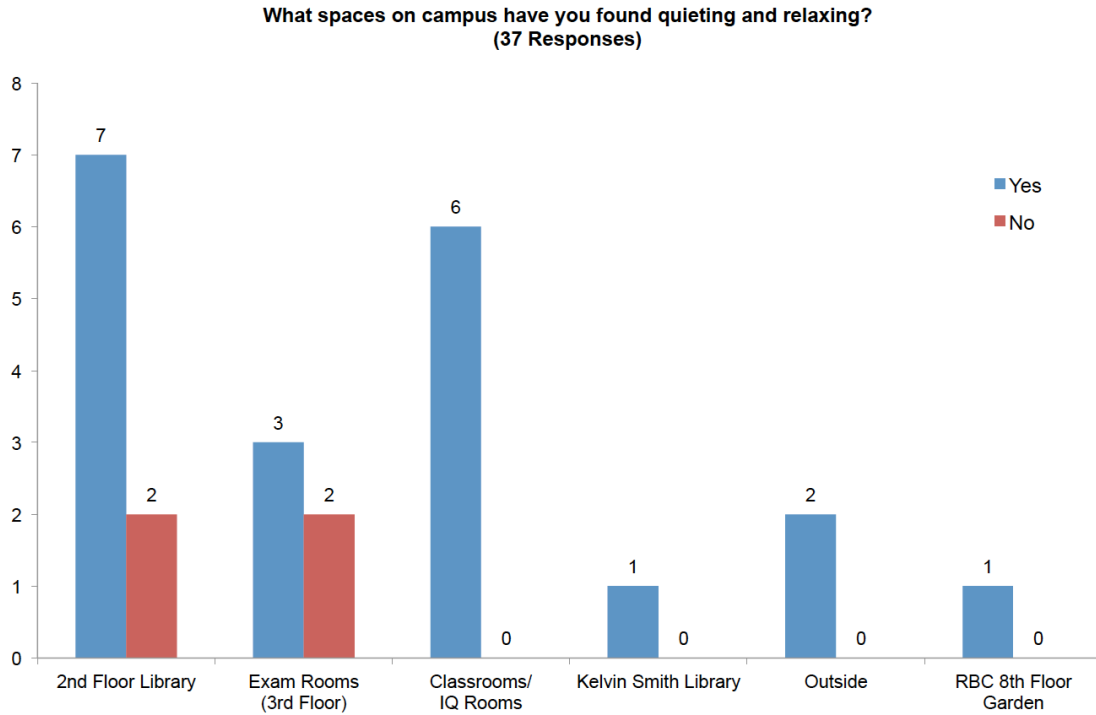
“Have a friend that you feel comfortable talking to when you feel down/have a breakdown. Help each other norm and don't worry about what other people are doing if you are happy with your progress/plan.”

### How did students take breaks?



## Wellness, cont.

### When did students take a break? What spaces were quiet/relaxing?



## Final Advice

Inevitably, everyone will ask, "what would you have done differently?" Both Case and Lerner students responded very thoughtfully, and their thoughts largely focused on one theme: be flexible, and do what works for you.

"I would recommend making a "loose" schedule and then make it more rigid after studying for a couple of days. I was so far behind from my original schedule that it caused unnecessary stress early on in my studying. Take one week at a time and refocus your energy on material that is very challenging to you."

"The biggest piece of advice I have is that if you are following a schedule or using a resource that your gut is telling you ISN'T WORKING, don't be afraid to change your style. This goes for anything that anyone has ever told you about Step 1, EVER."

"I would have changed my expectations of how much time I'd need to study--going into the exam, I figured I'd be able to cover all of the material and finish by the end of 7 weeks (especially because the deans stressed that 6 weeks was more than enough time to prepare). I tried to follow some of the 7-week study schedules from past students. However, I quickly found that 7 weeks was not enough time for me to feel prepared for the exam."

"A lot of people are going to tell you that you HAVE to study a specific way (i.e., do x amount of questions, go through first aid 3 times, etc.). I wish someone would have told me before I started studying to put a lot of thought into what has worked for me in the past and not let that go. I think the classic step 1 study plan did not align well with my preferred study methods, and when I tried to do the classic plan, it didn't work very well for me. I wish people had told me that it's ok to do things differently than everyone else, and not to be scared of that. The same thing doesn't necessarily work for everyone, and it's ok to decide that you're going to do things differently or need extra time, etc. I think if I had realized this sooner, my studying could have been MUCH more efficient and saved me literal weeks of studying."

"Study period is HARD and there will be hard, frustrating days where you feel like everything is hopeless and you're learning nothing. It's important to remember that EVERYONE feels that way, and this too shall pass. You will get through this! Surround yourself with people who make you happy (important: these may not always be your med school friends who are studying with you). Take it one day at a time. Give your mind a break and do something you love for at least a few minutes every day. Bottom line: trust yourself and your gut. You know how you study best. What has worked for your classmates may (or may not) be what is best for you. In the long run, it is so much more helpful for you to lose a day of studying and reassess your plan/schedule to come up with a better one, than to keep studying with a system that is sub-par for you personally."