

Hello M1s & M2s,

Our medical school class was the first class to take the USMLE Step 1 exam pass/fail. Some of the advice we received from upperclassmen and administration was not specific to our particular situation, so we opted to create a document that shares our own experiences.

Below are the experiences and advice from 14 members of our class. We hope this provides some insight into what Step 1 preparation entails.

Best of luck,
CWRU SOM Class of 2024

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Students who felt over-prepared at
the start of dedicated



Response A1

No respondents identified as “over-prepared.”

Students who felt well-prepared at
the start of dedicated



Response B1

I received advice from multiple sources to approach preclinical years as if Step 1 was still scored. That mindset certainly helped me set myself up for dedicated fairly well; whether all the extra effort was worth it I can't say yet. Boards and Beyond and Anking were my primary resources during preclinical. I would watch B&B videos corresponding to the curriculum material each week and unsuspend the Anking cards tagged for those videos. I tried to do the same with videos not directly related to curriculum material, but I didn't do that consistently and I never ended up watching all the B&B videos by the time I took Step 1. I tried to keep up with my Anki reviews with moderate success, and I capped my new cards/day at 150. If I got buried in backlogged reviews, I would set new cards/day to 0 until I caught back up. By the time I started dedicated, I think I had over 20,000 cards unsuspended. I also started using UWorld a few weeks before dedicated, but not more than 1 block a day.

I took a little under 4 weeks for dedicated. I read and annotated First Aid cover to cover once and then skimmed it again for the topics I was less comfortable with. I also completed UWorld by doing 4 blocks a day. The main benefit for me was getting practice approaching test questions, not so much learning content. I didn't go crazy with UWorld; I only read through explanations and looked things up if I had to guess on a question or got it wrong - came out to about an hour per block. I also read and annotated the Pathoma book once. Lastly, I felt super weak on bugs and drugs going into dedicated because I hadn't learned anything beyond what was required for Block 5. I thought I would use Sketchy to fill the gap, but it turns out I hate Sketchy so I just did all the Anking micro and pharm cards instead. I ended up doing something like 1,000 cards a day (not 1,000 unique cards - I hit "again" a lot), but that was honestly better for me than watching all the videos.

I give the experience 4 stars out of 5. I felt really good going into Step 1 and pretty okay coming out of it. During dedicated I still had time to sleep 8+ hours every night, exercise 3 days a week, and take an hour or so to unwind most nights out of the week. Preclinical years were where the real work happened; it was a lot but definitely manageable. If I had to do it all again I would 100% still do B&B and Anking during preclinical, maybe with fewer new cards/day.

Good luck and go study
Brian Liu bjl92@case.edu

Response B2

If you're even READING this document, congrats on making it this far (in your education, in life)! You are at an amazing medical school and are going to CRUSH Step 1 and be an incredible doctor one day! Huge thanks to Big Mike for pulling this together... skimming through my classmates' answers is a testament to how everyone learns differently and approached the test differently. Throwing up what I did in case it resonates with anyone else!!

I did not prepare for Step during my preclinical years; I focused on doing well with Case's curriculum and also keeping my mental health afloat during ZoomU. I used AnKing chaotically and not longitudinally (e.g. resuspend everything at the end of each block). Watched maybe 2 B&B videos during M1 and wasn't for me so haven't watched any since. In hindsight, I might have approached Step differently during preclinical years but in the end it all worked out so no regrets.

I planned to enter dedicated cold but ready to work my butt off and embrace the grind, which I did. **I'm putting this response in the "well-prepared" section in that I was prepared to start from zero but WORK with a GRINDSET.** had two years of meaningful engagement in the medical school curriculum under my belt, and felt very comfortable going into test day. Took 6.5 weeks to study, and had a 99% chance of passing for the last three weeks based on the NBME practice tests.

Phase 1: Content review

During the first three weeks I did comprehensive content review and got through all of First Aid, Pathoma, and Sketchy. Took two practice tests. Screenshot of schedule from week 2 below:



Mornings: in HEC IQ rooms - work through First Aid chapter, watch Pathoma and annotate in book for that system, watch sketchy pharm for that system. Then get through an hour of sketchy Micro. Unsuspend pepper cards for micro/pharm reviewed. For First Aid, I was a big fan of using the white boards, the kinetic/physicality of writing it out and standing on desks and chairs and whatever and walking around to make connections between anatomy/phys/pathophys/pharm

made it stick for me. For the 5-6 hour block I used the pomodoro method (25' on, 5' off) and would hula hoop or dance to pump-up fun songs during my breaks. Example of what room would look like after I was done (I took pictures to review later)...



Note for first aid: get it bound! The UPS on cedar next to target does it for under \$5. I also bought tabs to easily flip between chapters.

Break: Run/Lunch – eating and exercise are important! Running was the only way I could shut off my brain. Get on the meal prep life too!

Afternoons: 2 UWorld blocks – 40Q's in system reviewed in the morning, 40Q's mixed. Fill out review spreadsheet (linked shortly). At the beginning it was taking me forever to get through the blocks, but I found a good rhythm and by the end was getting through 100 Q's in 4 hours. I used tutor mode, highlighted the key points I missed/reviewed after each question (and if I was confused didn't move on until I understood), and then kept going. After completing my 80-100 questions for the afternoon, I went back and added the things I highlighted to my review sheet.

UWORLD/PRACTICE TEST REVIEW SYSTEM: I made a pivot table to see system-specific stats and organize my reviews later. This system allowed for three passes of missed material (first during initial question, second during the end-of-day, third when I would go back through First Aid and annotate – during end of phase 1/more heavily during phase 2). **TEMPLATE**

HERE (w/a few examples): https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1iDK1lozkHsrHmo20-YLxBPVg-pOKMsAA-rl_P3NDNwo/edit#gid=467176416

Evenings: Dinner and do Pepper Anki for Sketchy Micro/Pharm. Anki works best for me when I write out answers but this takes a while, so I alternated nights for writing out micro and pharm.

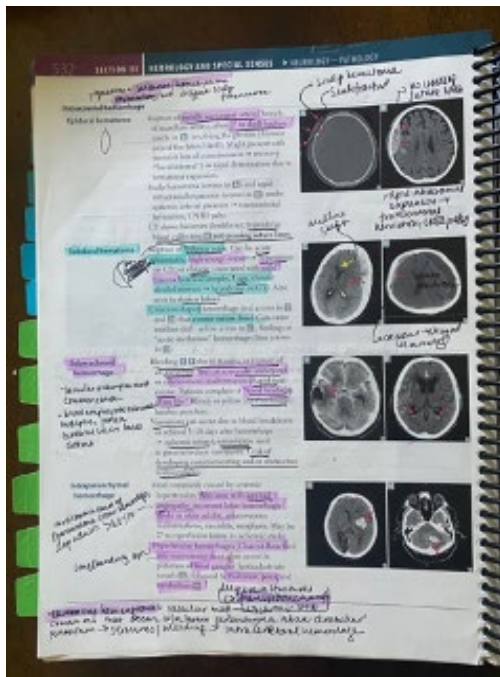
Phase 2: UWorld and targeted review

The last three weeks I did Uworld, pharm/micro anki, practice tests, and tertiary reviews of old questions. I ended up settling into routine of two chunks of 5-6 hours of pomodoro (25'on, 5'off) with the following rotation:

- 25' Uworld tutor mode
- 25' Pepper anki writing out answers
- 25' First Aid tertiary reviews

I did this until I got through two Uworld sets and recorded my highlights in review sheet, when I finished my anki alternated between Uworld and tertiary reviews. I ended up getting through all of Uworld in my dedicated period.

The tertiary reviews were based on system previously described, I went through my review sheet and would spend a 25' section reviewing a specific organ system and highlight/annotate in first aid. Purple for Uworld, blue for NBME practice tests (example below). Again, for me, the physicality of flipping through pages and hunting for a piece of information aligned with my learning style.



I took NBME practice tests each week. In my opinion, taking the NBME forms was worth the investment, as the questions are slightly different than UWorld and I'm a firm believer in "practicing like it's gameday."

In last days leading up to test prioritized revisiting my NBME reviews, read through Pathoma once more, did all of Sketchy Pepper pharm/micro cards, and at least read through all of my Uworld reviews. I also went on walks and listened to the Med School Phys podcasts as a review: <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/med-school-phys/id1260429134>

Fire up! You got this! 🍌

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This is pretty disorganized tbh but if you think have similar study style please reach out, happy to talk! Link to study schedule:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1NgABfmrB3w9DS0PvCznGSmE1xiUt2WJw739GJZLrql/edit#gid=0>

Response B3

Hello friends!

IF YOU KEEP UP WITH ANKI AND LEARN BEST WITH PRACTICE QUESTIONS, THIS IS WHAT I DID

During M1 and M2:

I did anki all throughout M1 and M2. I unlocked the Anking cards that related to lecture, IQ, seq, and anatomy content and kept up with them throughout all of the blocks. By keeping up with the material I was able to take the AMBOSS step 1 self assessment and pass in the middle of Block 6. I then took a cool week off after block six to get my wisdom teeth out and sit on the couch (it is ok to take time off after b6!!!).

Dedicated schedule:

Day 1- NBME self assessment (case funded): I was in a good place and already probably passing

The rest of dedicated:

At this point after AMBOSS and the NBME self assessment I decided I was probably going to move my test up. I spent my days doing anki and Uworld, I didn't do any dedicated content review time. I would wake up and do a uworld block (40q always). Do a deep dive on every question and unlock the relevant anki cards. I would do some anki. I would do another uworld set (again doing a deep dive on each question). I would then finish my anki and call it a day. I tried to squeeze a workout in there every other day! I ended up taking a little less than 4 weeks to study just to make sure I covered as much content as possible; by the end I was doing at least 3 uworld sets per day. I got through about 90% of Uworld! I took four total practice tests (2 NBME, 2 uworld) + the NBME free 120 three days before my test (there is a link to this on reddit somewhere).

This is my plug for saying if you kept up with the content during M1 and M2 (be honest with yourself), you do not have to feel pressured to do content review like everyone else is doing. I opened first aid twice during dedicated. I also did not have a super strict schedule. It is pass/fail, let yourself live.

You are here for a reason and are going to do great! Proud of you always! Let me know if you have any questions (or if you want to do peds surg/MFM chart review)!

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847-309-1057 (text me with any questions or anything I can help you with!!)

Response B4

During M1 and M2:

I unlocked Anking cards as we covered content in lecture. I did this by watching the recorded lecture on 2x speed, then B&B videos that went with the lectures and then unlocking all the cards associated with that tag. A lot of the time this was more than what was directly addressed during lectures. It helped me keep up during blocks 1-6. I was consistent with my reviews even all summer. Block 5 was kind of miserable because micro, but I'm SO glad I wasn't cramming that all in during dedicated.

Leading up to dedicated (last couple weeks of block 6) I took the amboss self-assessment which I passed but barely, so I felt pretty well set-up going into dedicated. After block 6, I did not take a break. I went right into dedicated to try and get the whole thing over with.

During Dedicated:

I took 5 weeks, with my test on Monday of what would have been week 6. Making a daily/hourly schedule stressed me out, so I broke it up weekly (ie how many UW blocks to do that week) and made a big spreadsheet where I could check stuff off. Total I did like 3200 questions (about 70% of it), and averaged between 700-1500 Anki cards a day, or 2ish hrs of Anki including new cards). Overall, I think I only ever unlocked about 70% of Anking. My schedule sheet is linked here if interested:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1OP5j3eQ7iDgdENveRrmZXcLI1Oddw34lah0HkBCpjUE/edit?usp=sharing>

I didn't take any days off during my 5 weeks, but was training for a 5 mile race (which happened to be the day before my exam. We also went to brunch that day and I did my anki reviews, but no UW questions, so it was kind of like a day off) and I babysat twice a week because I was already doing that during M2 and had agreed to it earlier, so my runs and babysitting are also on my schedule. I also did normal stuff during the day like viewing apartments with my boyfriend because we moved in the beginning of May, going to events/birthdays/out to dinner, weekly errands, etc. I tried to roughly plan my days/weeks in my own head to make sure I had time daily to get through everything, and I was consistent with waking up at 7am each day.

For content, I watched all of Pathoma at 2x speed, and added any relevant Anking cards associated with those videos over the first 2 weeks. I also did either 2 or 3 blocks of Uworld questions daily, entirely on timed mode, but about half on tutor and half off, just because not having to review them all the end made it easier to get through. I did not read anythingng except UWorld explanations (ie no formal content review), and did not re-watch any BandB or Sketchy. If a new drug or bug came up, I watched the Sketchy and unlocked the anking cards that day.

For practice tests, I did the CBSSA from the school's voucher week 3, UW Self-Assessment 1 Week 4, and UW Self-Assessment 2 week 5. To further practice timing, the week before the exam I sat in silent study at the HEC and did 3 blocks of UW questions on timed tutor with timers set for 1h of review time to go over them, then a timer for 1 hour of Anki reviews, with a 1 hour countdown that I started and stopped to simulate exam "breaks," just to make sure I was in the habit of focusing for a whole 8 hours. This sucked and I only did it twice.

I never bought any full-length practice tests because I never failed any and my CBSSA and UW self-assessment scores were decent (99% likely to pass and both 240) so I didn't think I'd fail and didn't want to spend any more money.

Overall, my only regret is I wish I only took 4 weeks instead of 5, which was what my advisor recommended.. By week five, time was really dragging and I was over the whole thing, so 10+ hour days started feeling kind of futile because I was pretty sure I'd pass. (I did, you will too)

Good luck and happy studying!

If you have any questions, feel free to email or text (Anna Swetz, ams499@case.edu, 716-512-9700)

Response B5

Overall: I felt very well prepared, but not overprepared, because of the way I approached M1 and M2. This allowed me to spend time essentially only doing/reviewing UWorld questions and going through pathoma. My only content review was centered around what showed up in UWorld blocks (plus pathoma).

During M1 and M2: I stayed very consistent with anki/B&B. Different people will have different opinions, but I did not suspend cards after block exams. Which meant that I was still doing block 2 cards all the way through the end of block 6. Once I started dedicated, I started suspending anki cards aggressively because it's not feasible/enjoyable to do 400-600 cards on top of 3 Uworld blocks a day. Also, at that point you know those cards so you have to trust yourself.

In general, I would advise that you look at the cards before you unsuspend them after watching a video, and ask yourself "do I need to do this card to remember it". You likely can skip the cards that say "Hemoglobin is made of heme and globin", which will cut down the time you spend on this. I cannot emphasize enough how important I felt that doing anki consistently was to my success studying for step 1.

For IQ research, I relied almost entirely on board resources and filled in the gaps with textbooks etc. as needed. IQ misses so many topics/little bits of information that you need for step 1, so I would also watch videos/unlock cards that were related to the overall topic of the block as I went along. For example, during block 5 I would recommend doing all of sketchy micro, despite the fact that many of the bugs won't be covered by IQ. I would also recommend that you try to watch as much of sketchy pharm in block 6 as you can. I didn't finish it until like a week before my exam, which was not a big deal, but it did mean I had to find time to fit in to an already busy schedule.

I think that this approach was really helpful because it prevents you from getting to dedicated and having to spend all your time learning tons of small facts at once. Instead it allowed me to slowly learn these over the first 2 years, and focus on learning how to approach Uworld questions/reviewing content through Uworld questions once in dedicated. It would be nice if the Case curriculum adequately prepared you to take step 1, but the reality is that, on its own, it does not. Thus it is important to have the foresight to prepare on your own alongside it.

I wish I had used block 6 as time to start reviewing the neuro/psych content in the context of step 1. Some people start doing UWorld during M2, I did not. I don't think you need to start early, I liked having it all concentrated in dedicated. That being said, I only finished 85% of the questions, so it would have been nice to do some during block 6 and be able to finish it all.

It's tempting to think "all you have to do is pass, I can just ignore this for now and deal with it during dedicated". I would really advise you to not think that way. There is a massive amount of information you need to know, ~3600 Uworld questions, 100's of sketchy videos, tens of thousands of anki cards, endless hours of pathoma etc. that you need to learn before you can

even review/practice with questions. Everyone is different, but if I had left all that to do during dedicated, it may have been impossible.

During dedicated: I used the first week as a vacation and went to the beach. I think it was important to take a break following block 6 to mentally recover. After that, I ended up studying for 4 weeks. Initially I was planning on doing 5, but moved my test a week forward. I felt that around 4 weeks my knowledge/question answering ability had peaked. There will always be a lingering thought that you need more time/should be studying longer, so I would suggest you use this as your marker. There's a point where you'll feel like you've hit your peak, and after that you'll start forgetting things from the beginning and feeling burnt out. I didn't take any days off during this time, which was rough but I really wanted to be done so I just powered through. I based my readiness of my Uworld scores, UW self assessments and I bought one NBME practice test (in addition to the free one from Case - I took this dedicated day 1 to get a baseline). If you are consistently scoring well above passing, and you feel like you're getting questions right based on skill/knowledge as opposed to guessing then I would say you're probably ready.

I built my schedule around content blocks (basically I just used pathoma chapters to define these), and then added in the few things that were missing (biochem, stats, psych etc.). I allotted 1 day to things I felt more confident in (psych for example) and 2-3 days for things I knew needed more time/had more Uworld questions (cardiology, pulmonology, repro etc.). My advice would be to design your own schedule around your own weaknesses. Don't spend extra time blindly reviewing things you know well at the expense of missing things you don't know as well. Use others schedules as a template, but remember you are not necessarily the same. This is how you can keep your dedicated shorter/more efficient.

My resources were: UWorld (essential), pathoma (essential - I had questions on my step exam that he answered word for word), sketchy micro + anki (done before dedicated), sketchy pharm + anki (done half before dedicated), B&B (didn't use during dedicated b/c had done most during M1/2). Honestly, I didn't really remember much of the sketchy sketches themselves, I think the most beneficial part is the associated cards. Some people skip the videos and just do the cards, that probably would work but I liked listening to the videos first still. Don't blindly unlock all the cards! scan the cards after each video before you unsuspend them, some are duplicates and some are pointlessly easy.

I didn't make any new anki cards for incorrect questions/topics I didn't know during dedicated, this might be something that works for you but it did not for me. What I did instead was reset cards from Anking related to topics I got wrong on Uworld or just wasn't that comfortable with. UWorld questions are actually tagged in the Anking deck too, so its easy to find related cards.

I used Dirty medicine youtube videos for content review often as well, I loved these videos and I would highly recommend you take a look at them. The couple days before my test, I just started watching random ones that seemed like they might be useful and it definitely bought me a few questions on my actual exam.

My day generally looked like this (I was already a morning person, so adjust accordingly):

- 5:15-6:15am wake up, breakfast, contemplate life choices that got me into this situation
- 6:15-8:15am pathoma chapter while annotating book + selectively unsuspend anki cards
- 8:30-11:30am 40 question Uworld block + review uworld block
- 12-2p gym, lunch
- 2-5p 40 question Uworld block + review uworld block
- 5p-6p dinner/break
- 6-9p 40 question Uworld block + review uworld block
- 9-10:30 watch sketchy pharm, suffer through all anki cards I left for end of day
- 11p go to bed at a consistent time every day

UWorld is a great learning tool. I would review all questions, even those you got right (at least at the beginning). Towards the end, I started only reviewing incorrects to get more questions done. Make sure you understand why the answer is what it is, what question would make the other choices correct etc. Additionally, I think a key thing to learn is how to answer questions you don't automatically know. Learn how to look for clues in the vignette, often they are telling you the answer or pointing you to what they want you to pick. Question taking skill is just as important to develop as factual knowledge.

Lastly, be kind to yourself. If you don't do well on a practice test, get a Uworld question wrong, go way off schedule for the day, remember that it is okay. Just adapt your schedule for the day, use it as a chance to learn from what you got wrong, and keep going forward. You are smart, you earned your spot here and you deserve to be here. This is a hard test, and studying for it is challenging. You'll get through this before you even know it.

Good luck, let me know if you have any questions. Happy to help you however I can.

Jean-Luc (jam524@case.edu, 4432621220)

Students who felt moderately prepared at the start of dedicated



Response C1

I felt decently prepared for dedicated - throughout preclinical, I had (1) used Anki/Anking fairly consistently, (2) used B&B (and did associated cards) as topics arose in IQ/SEQs, (3) completed all of Sketchy Micro, and (4) did Pathoma within the curriculum. In M1 I kept up with all of the cards cumulatively in Anking but I got pretty overwhelmed with it sometime during Block 4 and from then on would suspend any cards that weren't part of the current block, so Block 2/3/4 content was extremely rusty when I started dedicated. (Side note: I know a lot of people have mixed feelings on Anki... imo it really truly is the best resource to retain everything in med school and gave me a much stronger base going into dedicated than I otherwise would have had.) However, my first couple of practice tests definitely kicked my butt, so I knew right away that I needed to get to work.

I would say some older students emphasized that we should still treat this test as if it was graded, while others (including some faculty) emphasized that the time commitment would be significantly reduced. I started off M1 listening to the first group, but as things got busy during M2 I started to believe the second group more and let my Anki habits slide. **Listen to the first group!** This test is no joke and I ended up having to extend my test date out a week (which was slightly discouraged by some, but in hindsight was 100% the right choice for my confidence in feeling prepared). I don't think it's necessary to completely mature Anking, but would recommend at the very least keeping up with your cards throughout preclinical and avoiding suspending old cards so you don't lose that knowledge base by the start of dedicated. Once you start dedicated, try to not spend more than an hour or so a day doing Anki because practice questions become more important at that point.

One thing I am SO glad I did was Sketchy Micro (and antibiotics) at the end of M1 summer, because Step 1 heavily tests micro and that ended up being one of my strongest topics from having such long-term familiarity with those videos/cards. I ended up saving most of Sketchy Pharm for dedicated, but wish I would have done these videos by organ system with their corresponding organ block throughout the curriculum (esp block 4 autonomic drugs!).

Other critical resources:

- Pathoma (if time, rewatch Ch. 1-3 in days leading up to the test, I had multiple questions directly from small buzzwords/quotes I don't think I would have gotten from notes alone)
- Dirty Medicine videos on YouTube (truly a godsend for biochem/HY topics)
- The [Mehlman study guides](#) ESPECIALLY arrows (read through this whole document the last 2 days before my test and it was a really good concise physiology review)
- There's a pdf floating around on the internet/reddit of 100 high yield anatomy concepts (from some anatomy course at SGU) - I reviewed this the day before my test and 100% of my anatomy qs were covered on it
- Used First Aid to supplement topics I missed on UWorld, which is a smooth segue to....

I truly feel that dedicated does not start **until you start doing practice questions** (i.e. UWorld). A large part of this test is obviously the knowledge base, but similar to the MCAT, a significant part of the battle is learning how to interpret the NBME's logic and how to strategically interpret

their questions, since so many of these questions are second or third-order logic. If I could change a single thing about my prep I would have started doing UWorld as soon as we got the subscription for it during block 6 (some schools do UWorld over their entire preclinical curriculum and manage multiple passes of all the questions, which tbh I wish we had as an option at Case). Would also highly recommend finishing ALL of UWorld. I think my classmates had varying approaches to this, but my advice (assuming you have an ok knowledge foundation, even if it isn't all fresh) is to do *random* blocks of UWorld WITH tutor mode from the day 1 of dedicated. I didn't always do this in the beginning and instead would do selective blocks of topics I had just studied. I would definitely score better on those blocks, and random blocks were sometimes discouraging, but nothing will prepare you for the marathon of real test day like a true timed random block. Plus, if you finish your stronger topics at the beginning of dedicated through selective topic blocks and then switch to random to better emulate the real test, you'll be left with much harder blocks/questions devoid of your strengths and your scores will probably be even more discouraging. Reviewing the block should take as long if not longer than completing the actual block. At peak dedicated I was doing 2-3 40q blocks a day with reviewing, and did an NBME every 5-6 days with a full day to review NBMEs.

- NBMEs are generally the best way to assess your readiness vs. UWorld; if you don't have time to get through all NBMEs/UWSAs, would recommend skipping NBME 25 and UWSA2 because these were randomly hard and none of my friends found them to be very representative
- Try saving NBME 30 towards the end of dedicated and do Free 120 3-4 days before your test and aim for 70%+ to be safe, there are often exact question repeats from these!
- If your scores aren't quite at the 99% chance of passing mark, just focus on consistency and don't freak out. It seemed like people online kept changing the standard for what was safe to pass (e.g. hitting 65%, 70%, 75%+ on multiple tests). If you are hitting 90%+ chance of passing on multiple tests you're very likely fine

Remember **UWorld is a learning tool** and don't get too caught up in your percentage correct, just try to get through as much as you can and make sure you are learning from each mistake so you don't make the same mistake again. During dedicated I usually stopped working sometime between 8-10pm every night and would take some chill time to watch Netflix or read a book.

Finally, I just want to emphasize that almost everyone feels like crap when they finish this test. Almost everyone has a moment of crisis in the week leading up to it and experiences some self doubt (and if you don't I don't think you're human). So much of this test is a confidence game - just know you aren't alone when you get stressed for this test, and when the day finally comes to take it just walk into that testing center like you are going to DEMOLISH that exam. Play pump up music and do whatever you normally do to make yourself feel powerful and in control. This test sucks pass fail or not, but we all got into this school for a reason and are all 100% capable of passing this thing!! Good luck!

Kathleen Mulligan

Response C2

To the other students who were hesitant to AnKing,
I was never a fan of AnKing throughout the blocks but did find boards and beyond, sketchy, and pathoma videos to be extremely useful as an adjunct to IQ research. I felt well prepared for Case exams but felt a little nervous about step1 because I did not do anki very much. I want to emphasize that going through anki cards throughout the first two years is not necessary; however, if you were like me and did not do this significantly, recognize that many of the step 1 questions will be straight identification of key buzzwords that will not be emphasized in reading textbooks and other resources for IQ research. This does not mean that you cannot quickly learn the buzzwords by doing uworld questions during dedicated. I spent the majority of my time during dedicated doing practice questions on uworld as well as watching the doctors in training (DIT) videos which do a great job highlighting these keywords you need to be able to pick out. DIT was recommended to me by my research block mentor and I want to point it out here because for some reason I was completely unfamiliar with it (I think very few Case students were using it this year but it is really worth checking out these videos—you can find old free videos online!) If you spent a significant amount of time learning the material throughout the blocks it is VERY LOW YIELD to go through all of the boards and beyond videos, pathoma, sketchy, etc. during dedicated. You will remember very little of the information and it is more useful with your time to focus on concepts that you are missing questions on. I took step 1 in mid April after only getting through about 50% of the uworld questions. I did not feel perfect by the time I took it but would recommend taking this test sooner rather than later because you will never feel 100% about a test like step1.

Oh by the way, test day is a lot more strenuous than practice exams because it is actually an 8 hour exam (all the practice tests are only 50% of the length). Keep this in mind when you are doing the practice tests, because it was not something emphasized by the proctors in the end of block NBME assessments.

Regarding taking care of yourself during dedicated— studying for step1 really is no different than studying for anything else in medical school. If you treat it like a job with on hours/off hours it will be easier to compartmentalize. I trained for a marathon during step1 and thought it was great to have another project on the side. I highly recommend having goals for yourself outside of studying to keep yourself motivated. I think focusing too much on one thing can be overwhelming mentally.

Please contact me with questions if you are someone who didn't use anki and wants advice about step1!

Madeline Garb
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Response C3

I felt OK going into dedicated since I was pretty consistent with doing Anking through Block 5. I would unsuspend cards during the block after learning with B&B/Amboss and kept up with it until one day I just kinda stopped since honestly Anki can get really boring. I planned to go back to it at the start of dedicated but saw that I had 5000+ reviews from all the backlogged cards so I quickly nuked the deck and deleted all of the cards. This ended up being a really good decision since otherwise most of my days would have been filled with so much Anki rather than UWorld, which is where I think the best learning is done. I think Anki can still be very helpful during preclinical but it is certainly not required.

So starting there, I had about 6 weeks of dedicated which is plenty of time to learn enough to go into the test with a good amount of knowledge. You'll quickly learn that this exam has an absolutely massive amount of material to learn and it can feel overwhelming. My first recommendation is to make a general study schedule with topics you want to get through by which dates and when you want to take practice tests. It doesn't need to be super detailed and have your entire days planned out hour-by-hour, unless that works for you. Realize that the schedule will likely change and be comfortable with flexibility. My general plan for each day was to do content review by watching Sketchy and/or Pathoma in the first half of each day then a few blocks of UWorld at night. All of my UWorld blocks were subject specific after going through the content during the day and I recommend you do it this way too. Others might say that your UWorld blocks should be random timed 40 question blocks, but this did not work for me as I had a lot of things to learn still at the start of dedicated. Sketchy was a game changer and I tried to get through all of Micro, Pharm, and Path while doing UWorld. Sketchy Path is rarely talked about but for me it was super helpful and went along nicely with Pathoma. Highly recommend trying it. I also started doing smaller premade Anki decks for each of these Sketchy sections and avoided Anking after abandoning it at the start. About halfway through dedicated I also abandoned these smaller decks (notice a theme here?) since Anki was taking up too much of my time. Also, First Aid was always open on my desk for me to quickly flip to sections if I needed to look up something.

Biggest takeaways:

- Don't be afraid to abandon a study method if it isn't working for you. There's no "right way" to do this and go with your gut if something feels like it's too low yield.
- Try to do all of the subject specific UWorld questions before moving onto the next subject if you have time. Avoid doing random questions unless you go into dedicated with a solid knowledge base. Spend time reviewing the answers but try to limit your time doing this since you can get carried away.
- Start with your weakest subjects when making your schedule. For me that was basically going in Case's curriculum order from blocks 2-6.
- Focus all of your attention on this during dedicated. I know this sounds intense but at the start I thought I wouldn't have to do too much since it was P/F... then I opened First Aid and realized that wasn't an option. It's tempting to want to do research or go on

vacations but you'll learn early on that this test is a beast and should be your sole focus. That being said, still take breaks and give yourself time to live outside of the ~8-10 hours/day you should be studying.

I ended up doing four practice tests (3 NBME, 1 UWorld) in the two weeks before my exam. I scored well on these and kept improving because reviewing every exam helps with taking the next one. I went into the test fairly confident but walked out feeling defeated. If you're like me, you'll start to remember all of the easy ones you got wrong afterwards and it's demoralizing. BUT please trust your practice scores! It's a hard test but if your practice scores gave you a good chance of passing then you almost definitely passed, no matter how many you think you got wrong or how much you think you failed. Waiting for the results was rough but try to get your mind off things as much as possible.

Feel free to contact me if you have any questions!

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Students who felt unprepared at
the start of dedicated



Response D1

I used First-Aid to learn Block 6 material in more detail than SSEQs, but other than this, I did *nothing* to prepare for Step 1 prior to dedicated. Step 1 is a very tough exam that needs to be targetedly studied for. (Statements like “you just need to pass” and “you have dedicated to worry about studying” can give you a false sense of security.) I initially planned on 4 weeks of dedicated but ended up extending it to 6 weeks. (It’s smart to buy flight insurance for any flights you book close to test day, just in case you need to push Step back.) I consider myself relatively strong at learning quickly, retaining information, and test-taking. 6 weeks was barely enough time to get me ready. If you historically have struggled with standardized tests, you will likely need more than 6 weeks (or better yet – start preparing for Step *before* dedicated).

I set a timer and paused it every time I was not actively studying, averaging 8+ hours per day, with no days off. Here is the [neurotic spreadsheet](#) I used to track my studying. I only took time off to work out 3x/week, to tutor 1-2x/week, and occasionally check social media, emails, etc. I personally did not feel the urge to unwind by watching TV or going out because I knew I would be preoccupied with thoughts about Step. Even though it was more expensive, I used grocery delivery apps to save time. I called my parents or my college friend (who is NOT a medical student) 3-4x/week for mental support because I was STRUGGLING. I was the most miserable and stressed I have been in my whole life. Please prepare for Step *before* dedicated so this does not happen to you! Your goal for dedicated should be to review topics and facts, rather than to learn them for the first time (like I did, which is why I struggled).

Pathoma and Sketchy Micro are musts! I watched both, downloaded the Duke Pathoma and Pepper Sketchy decks from Reddit, and reviewed them every day. It took me about 3 weeks total (i.e. half of dedicated) to get through both of these. I then started spending more of my energy completing U-World sets and NBME practice tests. For each question I missed or each unfamiliar answer choice, I either made an Anki card or added a key takeaway to my spreadsheet. This covered most of the big topics, so I ended up not using First-Aid that much. MedBullets was a lifesaver for quickly looking up unfamiliar topics. I “brute-forced” my way through pharmacology because I didn’t have time to watch Sketchy Pharm. This was the worst part of studying. By the week before Step, I was scoring 63-66% on practice tests. My goal was to score 70%+, but I felt like I just needed to get Step done.

Here is my advice on what to do during your preclinical years to be well prepared before dedicated without overextending yourself:

- Do Anki reviews 4-5 days per week (rather than everyday). If your daily reviews get over 200 cards, do not add any new cards for a while.
- Watch the videos for Pathoma and Sketchy Pharm as they relate to block material. Watch Sketchy Micro videos during Block 5. Unlock the relevant Anki decks.
- If you want to be spicy, do up to 60 U-World questions *per week.*

Best of luck,

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Response D2

I did not feel prepared going into Dedicated, but to be fair I was not studying for Step during preclinical. This is up to you because preclinical is tough as is, but it was a mistake to believe the message that our curriculum is sufficient and that everyone is fine going into Dedicated.

I made an extremely ambitious study schedule for Dedicated that left me burned out after one week. So my first piece of advice is to be realistic and flexible. I realized I needed time to do basic life things like grocery shopping, working out, and taking naps, so I drastically changed my schedule after the first week. I also found it important to take a half to full day off per week, whether that was to socialize on a Saturday or give up on studying halfway through a random Wednesday and not beat myself up about it. It was very important to me to maintain balance instead of forcing myself to study when I was already burned out. The best thing you can do for yourself during this time is to prioritize your health and well-being.

My more realistic schedule ended up looking more like a daily to-do list than an hour by hour schedule. My main content resources were Pathoma, Sketchy Micro, and Sketchy Pharm. I thought I would use First Aid way more based on my preclinical studying but I barely touched it. Sketchy Micro was the only thing I had even made a dent in before Dedicated, as it was useful during Block 5. I started by getting through all of Sketchy Micro and Pathoma, taking handwritten notes for Pathoma (my learning style). Once I felt like I had a decent knowledge base I started UWorld, aiming for 100-120 questions a day. Some days saw more or fewer questions but the important thing was to keep up with it and review wrong answers. I know this is a hot take but I don't use Anki! I tried for Sketchy but found it overwhelming and not the best use of my time. Again, study according to your own style and be flexible. I did not enjoy Sketchy Pharm the first time through but forced myself to rewatch them and found that the content stuck the second time through. I'm also not usually an auditory learner but started listening to Goljan lectures (Daddy Goljan on Spotify) in my final 2 weeks which helped me immensely. That showed me that it's never too late to change up your studying, and it also forced me to get away from my computer screen. Every day I went on long walks or drives and listened to them at 1.5x speed, which saved my physical and mental health while helping me still feel productive.

I ended up pushing my test back 1 week, so my total study time was about 7 weeks. I know for sure I would not have been ready by my original test date, and the extra 6 days got me to where I needed to be. I spent my extended time getting through as much of UWorld as possible (it's really okay if you don't finish), reviewing difficult topics, and taking one more practice test. I basically focused on active studying and building confidence and am so glad I listened to my needs and gave myself more time.

Please reach out if you have any questions or want to chat, you got this!
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Response D3

I felt very unprepared for STEP 1 despite working harder than I needed to in almost every block. I took studying really seriously and also took professors seriously; when they told us we didn't need to prepare for STEP because it was pass/fail, I assumed they were right, and put my attention towards the curriculum and learning practical clinical skills and knowledge. Although I excelled in the curriculum, this is unfortunately NOT the format of the USMLE. However, I think both are important. I'm going to tell you what helped me prep for STEP, but I'm also going to tell you what I wish I had done differently: I wish I had started STEP questions in 1st year (prob BoardVitals is a good option bc it's free; UW 2nd year).

Hands-down the best resource I had was Mike Mehlman, of mehlmanmedical.com → do HY Arrows if you do nothing else; join his Telegram group for free PDFs of every past NBME and a vibrant community of other students also prepping for USMLE. I listened to his audio qbank on walks (and found this a lot more helpful/practical than Goljan lectures, because statistically, doing more questions matters WAY more than hearing more lectures/videos with potentially superfluous information).

I did 55% of UWorld and then quit because after I met with Mike I was 3 weeks out from my exam and panicking (I scored in the 8th percentile on UWSA2 - and yeah, I'm telling you that, because I don't usually mess up standardized tests - I scored in the 95th percentile on MCAT and I'm not saying that to toot my own horn but rather to be transparent and vulnerable). At 3 weeks out we changed my strategy:

- 1 full NBME per day (on a PDF on my iPad, not always timed bc timing wasn't an issue for me - doing the questions mattered more) → converted to a 3 digit score and the rule was if I got below a 205 on any of them I was going to delay my exam. I did NBMEs 18 thru 30.
- Either Duke's Pathoma Anki (I only did chapters 1-3) or the Anki of my incorrects (only NBME incorrects) daily

The week before my exam I took the Free 120 (go to USMLE website to find this; I didn't even know it existed until sort of mid way through studying which made me feel dumb, but this is a very good indicator of how you might perform on the real deal). I scored 80% on that and felt ok with keeping my original date.

To be very clear, anyone can excel at ANY standardized test. You just have to learn the game and get good at it and treat it like it is your job. Once I started approaching STEP the way I approached MCAT, things got a lot better. Mike's feedback helped a lot, too. He talks about USMLE like he knows the exam writers, which he pretty much does (he used to edit FA).

LASTLY, I went to Coachella (!!!!), Sedona, London, and Tahoe during dedicated (~3 weeks traveling). You're allowed to travel during dedicated. You're allowed to take several days off and do fun things because putting off feeling alive for medical school is a zero-sum game and you will never, ever be done with the work. (Also my score went up 20 points after Coachella, so.)

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Response D4

Assuming a little over 1 month of dedicated:

1. First Aid – simultaneously with Anki
 - a. 2-3 chapters/day (read twice, then consult as desired)
2. Anki (assuming no use before dedicated) – simultaneously with FA
 - a. 2000-3000 news/day (no reviews)
 - i. Set to see news before reviews
 - ii. Do reviews as desired
 - b. Finish Lightyear in ~10 days, AnKing in ~15
3. UWorld – after Anki
 - a. 10 blocks of 40 questions mixed/day
 - b. Finish UWorld in ~10 days
 - c. Do incorrects as desired
4. Practice exams
 - a. UWSA 1-2 and NBME 25-30
 - b. 1-2/day, start 1-2 weeks before
 - c. UWSA 1 week of starting UWorld, UWSA 2 week before actual
 - d. NBMEs whenever
5. Sketchy and Pathoma
 - a. Did not use

Response D5

I felt unprepared, never got better but I did pass, so that's that.

I was not an Anki person, I was not on top of my things during preclinical years, I did pass all my Blocks and knew my information but did not go above and beyond. I went into dedicated feeling very unprepared.

I spent a little less than 2 months studying for Step.

Resources used:

- Cram fighters to make a loose study schedule
- Pathoma (chapter 1-3 reviewed twice)
- First Aid
- Uworld
- Sketchy Mirco
- Kissprep Pharmacology
- Dirty Medicine
- Anki (100 concepts, Rapid Review First aid cards)

I felt very unprepared throughout my studying, I did Uworld, NBME practice exams and my score never really improved until the last 2 weeks before my exam. I studied more leisurely during the first month of reading Pathoma, First Aid, doing 40 questions daily, spent around 4-5 hours studying daily. I was lenient with myself and my score because I thought it was my first time seeing a lot of this information. Once I finished Pathoma and First Aid I put more pressure on myself to start scoring higher in Uworld Questions and NBME. My score did not get better, I started to panic a little and reassessed my studying.

I changed my routine, started studying 8 hours a day, started incorporating Dirty Medicine videos for mnemonics and simply explained concepts. I increased my daily questions to 100 with a more intense review process than I did during the first month. The initial learning curve was rough, it was very difficult to start passing. I focused mainly on questions and managed to do Uworld 1.5 times, as I preferred questions over reviewing notes. I did take a break from questions when my score did not improve for a while, and had 3 very heavy review days and my score improved from 50s to passing low 60s. I continued to do questions and incorporated 30 minutes of review to my schedule. Once I started passing my score did not drop again. I was initially aiming for around a 70%, I never reached it once I broke into the 60% my score increased to around 63-67% and plateaued here. I was anxious about taking the exam but did not feel like I could do more studying, I took the exam after 1 particularly good score of a high 70 on the free120 and rode that confidence to the exam, which I think really helped.

(One bad test will shake your confidence so if you are a week out or a few days out from the exam and did well do NOT do another test, review instead that confidence of passing ride it out.)

Response D6

TLDR: I wish I did more review during preclinical and felt unprepared and also unmotivated starting dedicated. I pushed my Step 1 exam to my Flex Block in the middle of my rotations, so I'll take it in November/December of my M3 year.

I really wish I realized that the advice from older classes was not as applicable to our class. I should have still approached Step 1 as if it were scored in the sense that I should've done a better job keeping up with Block 1-4 material. I was never a big user of Anking and with Step 1 going Pass/Fail, I naturally just prioritized everything else besides it. Even starting dedicated, I had a really hard time focusing and taking the exam seriously. Maybe I was burnt out or just lazy? Idk. But I just felt so unmotivated.

I pushed my Step 1 exam from April 25 to May 24 and cancelled my test date the day before. I felt like I only studied for it seriously for 3-4 weeks and my last two practice exams were both 59% so I definitely was not ready to take it lol. I also have never had this much anxiety about anything before and found it SO helpful to be able to talk to a few of my classmates who were in similar situations to motivate each other.

I ultimately decided to take it during my Flex Block, which starts in October, after my surgery and neuro/psych rotations. I didn't want to take it in June before rotations, because I had 2 trips and I wanted to have time to relax and prepare for my surgery rotation. I felt like studying for Step 1 until late June and then going straight into surgery was just a recipe for disaster for me.

Overall, this isn't how I planned it but I've learned a lot through this. Hopefully sharing my experience will help you learn from my mistakes. And even if you need to push your exam back, it's ok!!! We'll all pass this, it's just a matter of when. There's no need to compare what other classmates are doing, we're all on our own timeline!

Feel free to contact me about anything.

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