

## USMLE Step 1 Preparation

**Make it count twice. You can master the CWRU curriculum and prepare for Step 1. Even though Step 1 is now pass/fail, it is still a hard exam and requires an intentional plan and preparation. The following are suggestions on how to develop a plan for your dedicated study block.**

### **Key Concepts:**

1. You need to have a plan of how you are going to approach your studying prior to dedicated.
2. Active rehearsal is a key concept in Step 1 preparation.
3. They call it dedicated for a reason. An intense dedicated study block is highly effective for this exam.

### **Milestones for Step 1 Preparation**

1. Summer M1-2: Consider using multiple choice question (MCQ) questions to actively review material from M1 (Free resources provided by the school are [Board Vitals](#) or [MedOne Adaptive learning](#)).
2. Blocks 5-6: Use MCQ's alongside the curriculum. Do question sets (30-60 per week) that relate to the block material. Bugs and drugs require lots of rehearsal. Consider using a resource like Sketchy Micro (concurrent with Block 5) and Sketchy Pharm before dedicated. Use Anki or another tool to quiz yourself and help retain the information.
3. Mid-Block 6: Decide on a detailed 4-6 week study schedule. Have someone else review it—your society dean, Judy Olsen-Hammer, or an upper year student who has already taken Step 1.
4. End of Block 6: Start working detailed schedule with intention.

### **Expectations for the dedicated study block:**

A disciplined and intense study period results in a favorable outcome on Step 1.

1. Work it like a full-time job. During your Step 1 dedicated block, do not do other things like research or work another job. Do not plan vacations until several weeks after your scheduled test date just in case you feel the need to move the test date.
2. Follow the detailed plan that you have created before the start of your dedicated study period to make sure it will work for you.
3. Intensity is required: 8-10 hours per day and 6 days per week
4. Complete a lot of practice questions, for example 80 UWorld questions (2 UWorld blocks) a day. Goal of 3000 questions, including practice exams.
5. Take a NBME CBSE exam 1 week before your test date and demonstrate a percent probability of passing of at least in the high 80's
6. Make sure you schedule in time to take care of yourself!

## **Guidance for Your Study Plan**

All study plans contain the same three elements: review materials, practice MCQ questions, and practice MCQ exams. There are two main ways to use both practice questions and practice tests as you prepare for your STEP 1 Test.

### **Option 1: If you feel your foundational knowledge is strong, use mostly test questions**

Take a self-assessment and compare your performance to a national mean: using UWorld, an NBME CBSSA, or other examination. If you feel that you are well prepared with the content that will be tested on Step 1, you could do a minimal amount of daily direct study focused on high yield memory intensive topics like microbiology and pharmacology, spending most of your time answering 80 to 100 questions a day and reviewing both your correct and incorrect answers.

During the first three weeks of dedicated study, organize this test-question practice into content-specific batches of questions. That way, you will be reviewing one area of content at a time through your work with practice questions. When you are reviewing the answers, you need to store knowledge for later review by annotating First Aid or creating an Anki card.

Take time to rehearse what you have noted. Rehearsal is an active process where you are challenging yourself to recall important information. It will feel hard and may include saying the material aloud, creating a chart that consolidates information, drawing pathways, teaching information to a study partner, creating summary sheets, and using Anki cards to practice specific information. Just adding notes without any sort of active rehearsal does not guarantee that you will remember this information on the official exam. You need to move this information from understanding it to remembering it. Some students have found it helpful to unsuspend 1-3 Anki cards related to the topics they got incorrect as a way to actively review the material. Also, you need to remember this information within the content that it resides in. Think about how this new information relates to what you already know. If you think about this information as just an answer to a practice question, then you will not have a strong way of recalling it later on the official exam.

If you opt for this manner of test preparation, you may still want to set aside a few hours daily to study pharmacology, microbiology, vitamins, and whatever other areas that you have identified as possibly needing some additional review.

Midway through your dedicated study time, do practice tests in the following manner. If possible, arrange the setting and timing to replicate the anticipated official testing setting. As you work through these full practice tests, you will follow up in the same manner as you did in the first few weeks. However, you may only have time to focus on the questions that you missed or that you guessed on and ended up answering correctly.

The NBME CBSSA exams will give you a scaled percent correct and a probability of passing. Ideally, you will want a percentage correct in the high 60% or a prediction of passing approaching 90%. Scores such as these 1 week before your test date are highly predictive of passing.

- Week 3: NBME CBSSA
- Week 4: An entire practice test (or two back-to-back half-length exams) with the standard timing in place so that you can assess your ability to do randomized questions within the expected timeframe
- Week 5: NBME CBSSA exam
- Week 6: An entire practice test with standard timing

### **Option 2: A Cycle of Study, Rehearsal, Practice Questions, and Review/Rehearsal**

If you feel that you need to spend more time reviewing course content, then consider this approach.

Create a study schedule that sets specific time for you to cycle through these activities:

- **Study content →rehearse content that you have reviewed →take content-specific questions →review your answers →rehearsing this information**

For the first two to three weeks, you may be splitting your time between studying and answering questions and reviewing answers and rehearsing this information.

Active studying is faster and more efficient at cementing memory. Passive studying like watching videos, reading textbooks, and taking notes may feel easy and nonthreatening. However, all of this activity does not guarantee that you will remember this information. You need to spend about 20 percent of your study time rehearsing what you are reviewing. Rehearsal will feel hard and may include saying the material aloud, creating a chart that consolidates information, drawing pathways, teaching information to a study partner, creating summary sheets, and using Anki cards (unsuspending or making your own) to practice specific information.

The ultimate rehearsal will be answering content-specific clusters of test questions. Aim for at least 40 to 60 questions a day. Review the questions that you answer incorrectly. As you work through processing the correct answers, include this new information into your notes, which may be your annotated *USMLE First Aid*, related Anki cards, or self-made Anki cards. Once this review resource is complete, rehearse this information within the context of your notes.

At the end of each week of study, take a randomized batch of questions that are from the content reviewed during the week and any previous week.

At the end of your 2 to 3 weeks of study, begin this testing process. After each test, review the questions that you answered incorrectly and those that you may have guessed on but landed on the correct answer. Be sure to include active rehearsal of this new information once it has been folded into your annotated *First Aid*.

- Week 3: An entire practice test untimed (if possible) so that you can determine your ability to respond to questions presented randomly
- Week 4: An entire practice test with the standard timing in place so that you can assess your ability to do randomized questions within the expected timeframe

- Week 5: An entire practice test with standard timing
- Week 6: An entire practice test with standard time.