

USMLE Step 1 Preparation

During Block 6, you may be thinking about your Step preparation. One of the best ways to prepare for Step 1 during Block 6 is to deeply master the curriculum. However, at the end of each week, you could add three extra study strategies, which will both assist you with rehearsing the curriculum and preparing you for Step 1.

1. After your reconciliation of the SEQ and the official IQ LO's, connect this information to the appropriate sections in your *USMLE First Aid*. This activity will help you see the overall conceptual network for Block 6 information. Making and building these connections will help you remember and apply the information in the scenario-based Step 1 questions.
2. Answer 10 to 20 UWorld questions from the week's content area. Review both your right and wrong answers, adding additional information to your notes where needed. Then actively rehearse that information
3. Check out your approach for answering multiple-choice questions to make sure that you have the most effective and efficient process. Meet with a tutor at the consult table to review recently missed items to determine if you need to adjust your process for answering questions. Then try a fresh batch of questions while the tutor observes you in order to possibly recommend some changes to your approach.

Key Concepts

1. You can use Step 1 preparation material to support learning in the curriculum.
2. Active rehearsal is a key concept in Step 1 preparation. Rehearsal is an *active* process where you are challenging yourself to recall important information. It will feel hard and may include self testing, 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. Rewatching videos and rereading text are passive forms of rehearsal and will not guarantee that you do more than understand the material.
3. They call it dedicated for a reason. An intense dedicated study block is highly effective for this exam.
4. There are two basic approaches (see below): **OPTION 1** uses test questions to drive any review that you may need to do and **OPTION 2** begins with a few weeks of review along with batches of content-specific questions.

Selecting the approach that is right for you depends both on your learning style preferences and your score on the CBSE at the end of Block 6. Meet with a Learning Specialist to discuss which plan would be better for you.

Milestones for Step 1 Preparation

1. Block 6: Use UWorld MCQs alongside the curriculum. Do question sets that relate to the block material. Bugs and drugs require lots of rehearsal. Consider using a resource like *Sketchy Micro* and *Sketchy Pharm* before your dedicated study period. Use Anki or another tool to quiz yourself and help retain the information.
2. Mid Block 6: Decide on a detailed 4-6 week study schedule. This is another opportunity to meet with a Learning Specialist to discuss your plan ahead of your dedicated study so that you are ready to begin when it's time.

3. End of Block 6: Start using your 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. If you feel the need to make adjustments, consult with a Learning Specialist as soon as possible so that you can resume your study.
3. Intensity is required: 8-10 hours per day and 6 days per week.
4. Complete a lot of practice questions. For example, consider 80 UWorld questions (2 UWorld blocks) a day. Aim to answer 3000 questions, including practice exams.
5. Take a NBME CBSSA exam 1 week before your test date and demonstrate a percent probability of passing at least in the high 80's.

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 very minimal amount of daily direct study focused on high yield memory-intensive topics like microbiology and pharmacology, and instead 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 from both your right and wrong answers from the practice questions. 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. Rehearsal works most effectively when it occurs at least a day after your practice; consider adding this feature to your schedule.

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 inside the content in which it resides. In other words, relate this new information 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 by arranging 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 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: If you feel that you need to spend more time reviewing course content, then consider a cycle of Study, Rehearsal, Practice Questions, and Review. Create a study schedule that sets specific time for you to cycle through these activities:

Study content → rehearse content → take content-specific questions → review your answers → rehearse 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. Keep in mind, active studying is faster and more efficient at cementing memory. Passive studying (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. Instead, spend about 20 percent of your study time rehearsing what you are reviewing.

Rehearsal will feel hard. Some possibilities are 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.

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 2 to 3 weeks of study, begin a 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 time.
- Week 6: An entire practice test with standard time.

Good luck, and make the best of the resources available!

Your Learning Specialists

Dr. Andrew Clifford (appointments [here](#))

Ms. Judy Hammer (appointments [here](#))