

The SD 10 Rules for Success

1. Medical School is a team sport.

The way to get through medical school is by assembling your team: school-based advisors like the Society Deans, near peers (classmates, more senior students, residents...) and specialty/research advisors. These people are excited to support you! Like an athlete, embrace the growth mindset: everyone can get better with practice. Reject false messages like "I'm not good at biochemistry" or "I'm a bad test taker." Add the word yet to the end of any negative sentence. "I'm not good at biochemistry, yet!" Find an accountability study partner. If you set a specific time to meet your study partner, you are more likely to go. You do not have to actually study with this person; just use the power of the group to get you to study.

2. Treat medical school like a full-time job.

Expect to work $9 \times 6 = 54$. 9 hours/day: 4 hours of class + 5 hours of practice, i.e., study (on average) for six out of seven days. You may also need to create a mid-day routine to refocus as you move from IQ or lecture to your daily study session. Typical schedule: 7:30 am to 6:00pm, six days per week. Deep learning requires time management. You will miss required tasks and be perceived as unprofessional if you do not have a system. Make a template for a typical week, keep a calendar and a to-do list. Overlay your template on top of the electronic calendar provided by the medical school, so that your system accommodates weekly activities and programs. Don't give up on your schedule if you have a few days of procrastination. Get back to your schedule, adjusting your places and times of study to move towards increased productivity. Better > Perfect. Action breeds motivation. If you are struggling, seek out coaching from our learning specialists to set up an effective time management schedule.

3. Work smart: use evidence-based strategies to learn efficiently.

It's not just about putting in the hours. Active strategies are more efficient than passive ones: re-reading, re-watching, and retyping your notes are passive, time-consuming, and inefficient at building memory. Efficient learning should feel hard, like you are struggling a bit, but not to the point of frustration. Learning is a mix of deep conceptual understanding (75% of your time) and active review and rehearsal (25%). Seek coaching from our learning specialists. Choose practices from this menu of evidenced-based strategies:

- i. Focused Study: Build a deep foundational understanding of concepts through note-taking, answering learning objectives, and making summary documents. Use time boxing or the Pomodoro method (i.e. 45 minutes study + 10 minutes practice retrieval + 5-minute break).
- ii. Interweaving: Mix up topics within a study block. For instance, study anatomy and then change to endocrinology.
- iii. Practice Memory Retrieval (active review and rehearsal): The more times you practice calling up material, the easier it is to call it up. Use active self-quizzing strategies such as flashcards, MCQs, answering OLOs without resources, mock essay exams, teaching a study partner, teaching yourself by drawing out information on your own personal whiteboard. However, avoid trying to learn the material through flashcards alone.
- iv. Spaced Practice: Take a rest from a subject (i.e. study anatomy early in the week, then later in the week). The time off in between improves retention. Try spaced repetition software like Anki targeted to difficult topics or things you get wrong. Doing bulk Anki cards without a context is inefficient.
- v. Variation: Mix it up by using mnemonics, pictures, anatomy coloring books, flashcards, and Anki (making your own decks is better than borrowing someone else's because the work of selecting what is important to learn and the act of creating flashcards also reinforces learning).
- vi. Handwriting: Find the right balance between typed and written notes so that you gather information to address the learning objectives and have time to rehearse new information. Writing requires slowing down, making conscious choices about what is important, and recording it. Neurocircuitry is different for writing and some evidence suggests that the material sticks longer when you write. Typing quickly is more like transcription and requires little processing. Add summary sheets and practice diagrams to your electronic notebook.
- vii. Stop Cutting & Pasting: Copying a table and pasting it into your notes does not mean you know the material. Reading several sources, closing the books and screens, and then creating the table on your own promotes stronger learning and retention.
- viii. Select a system to collect and integrate information each week: If you learn best through examples, use your IQ notes as the spine of your weekly notes and then add more conceptual information from lectures. If you learn best by understanding the big picture first, then use the block or weekly learning objectives as your spine. Then add more specific information from your IQ notes. Either way, your notes should reflect both concepts and more detailed information in an organized, interrelated system.

4. Be kind to yourself.

Medical school may be the first time that many of you will struggle. All medical students feel the pressure to be perfect and fear asking for help. These concerns are normal. It is how you handle these struggles that is important. Seek help sooner than later. You belong here. The Admissions Committee did not make a mistake when admitting you. Embrace your failures and use them as opportunities to improve. The fear of failure or hiding from failure may lead to procrastination and feelings of shame, causing a student to turtle (hide in their shell). Turtling is a maladaptive coping strategy to stress that is unhealthy and may look to others like a lapse in professional behaviors. Address depression and anxiety, which can impact your ability to recall information during pressure situations such as exams and presentations. Recognize stereotype threat, the cognitive load placed upon you by the biases against your identities. Never worry alone. Seek help and community when you become overwhelmed. Reach out to your Society Deans, Learning Specialist, CWRU Health and Counseling Services, LGBTQ+ Center, Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, Disability Resources.

5. Sleep 6-8 hours per night and exercise daily.

Medicine is an early morning sport, and you have 18 months to become more of a morning person. You need sleep to consolidate new information with learned material. Trading sleep for studying does not work. Improve your sleep hygiene: taper down after studying, no screen time 30-60 minutes before sleep, no caffeine after 12:00 pm, wear an eye shade so it is dark, use white noise, mindfulness meditation, etc. Find sustainable forms of daily exercise that can be intentionally inserted into your schedule. Examples of sustainable exercise include 10,000 steps per day (collecting data inspires change), 150-300 minutes per week, HIIT (high-intensity interval training), scheduled classes at a gym, taking the stairs rather than the elevator, and finding a workout buddy to keep you accountable.

6. Eat real food.

A diet based on vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and lean protein will improve your energy level and mood. Processed foods, refined carbohydrates, and fast food will make you sluggish. Think about how you crash after a sweet treat or a large meal built on rice, pasta, bread, or potatoes. Start by adding one vegetable (non-starchy) to your diet each day and stopping all sugary drinks and fruit juices. Instead, drink water every day, all day. An Instant Pot or slow cooker will allow you to batch-prepare meals that you can eat all week.

7. Affirm your values and what gives you joy.

Affirming your values and a sense of purpose makes the demands and sacrifices of medical school manageable. Ask yourself what gives you joy and make time for it. Your values like a compass that will sustain you and help. Examples are community service, religion, spiritual mindfulness, music, arts and crafts, politics, advocacy, pets, family, reading for pleasure... Make a family of choice. Find a group of like-minded people and meet with them regularly for support. Find an activity that you enjoy or would like to try for the first time.

8. Express gratitude.

People who consciously express gratitude are more content with their lives (and more fun to be around). Make an effort to thank a person in your life, pray, meditate, or keep a gratitude journal, 3 Good Things.

9. Engage in continuous quality improvement.

Adopt a mindset of continuous quality improvement using personal reflection and feedback to define what works and identify plans to improve. Some of the strategies and techniques that made you successful in the past may not work in medical school. Ask for specific feedback to inspire reflection and improvement. Say, "Tell me one thing I could do better." General queries like, "How am I doing?" rarely result in meaningful feedback that will drive improvement.

10. Society views you as a medical professional, so you need to act like one.

When you are in public, you represent yourself, the CWRU School of Medicine, and the medical profession. Patients don't want to see their doctor (or student doctor) impaired under any circumstances. Scrub your social media. If you would not show a post to your grandmother or future employer, don't post it. Engage in civil discourse even with people who hold discordant views: listen and agree or disagree respectfully.