



EMORY
UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF
MEDICINE

Center for Holistic Student Success

Class of 2027
Step 1 Guide
2024-2025

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INTRODUCTION

Medicine and the MD program should be seen as a sequence of marathons, not sprints. The Foundations phase of Emory's curriculum is the start of your first marathon culminating with the completion of the USMLE Step 1 examination. Your second undertaking is the Applications Phase with the USMLE Step 2 exam being the finish line. As in all challenging pursuits, you must start with a plan of action; this guide is to help you create such a plan.

As you begin to study in earnest for Step 1, choosing the appropriate study materials and study strategy will be crucial to your success.

The **Emory School of Medicine Center for Holistic Student Success (CHSS)** is here to support you in this journey through individual Step 1 planning, group workshops, and this annually updated Step 1 guide meant to provide an outline of suggested resources, strategies, and answers to frequently asked questions.

Please read this document thoroughly as many answers to your questions lie herein.

GETTING STARTED

How to study

Keep in mind, **no single approach to studying is right for everyone**. First, have faith in your current and established study strategies. Next, seek advice from a variety of other students, faculty, and alumni. CHSS including learning specialists, Dr. Hairston, and EUSOM tutors will then help you to create an individualized plan and check-in with you along the way.

There will be some trial and error that comes with the Step 1 preparation process, and we are here to support you as you navigate.

What to study

Not surprisingly, **it is easy to overwhelm yourself by using too many resources**. This guide will help you develop a plan and choose what is right for you.

When considering resources, be sure to ask other students' opinions before purchasing for yourself; many can be quite expensive. CHSS will host a workshop at the beginning of 2024-25 academic year to expose you to students' favorite resources, who they work best for, and how to combine resources to give you a holistic review prior to the exam.

Remember, if studying from certain resources in a certain way guaranteed a "pass," it would have been readily known long ago and multiple resources would not be available. Do not equate a high price with a high score. (See [Content Review](#) for more information).

When to study

Study materials outlined in this guide can be used both during the curriculum and during dedicated. **How, when, and to what degree you use them varies based on what you personally need as a student**. Together, with the use of this guide, support from CHSS, faculty, small group advisors, and others, you will find what works for you and be ready for test day. Just breathe and believe; you have support on this journey. (See [Structuring Study Schedules](#) section for more information).

When to take the exam with score targets

Most students will use on average **6-8 weeks** of focused, dedicated study time to prepare for the Step 1 exam. EUSOM provides students **approximately 10 weeks of dedicated study time** from November-February each year. Your readiness to take Step 1 will be based on a combination of your NBME practice test scores and your personal circumstances (i.e., mental / physical wellbeing, life events, etc.).

NBME Score Targets: Passing at least two NBME practice exams with a minimum score of 65% indicates a 96% chance of passing within the next 2 weeks.

Please see the USMLE Step 1 guidance sheet from NBME based on CBSSA scores [here](#). Please work with the CHSS to assess readiness to give you the best possible outcome. (See [Practice Tests](#) section for more information).

EUSOM Step 1 expectations

The deadline for completing Step 1 is **3 weeks** prior to starting the Application phase. In 2025, the application phase starts on **March 3, 2024**, so the last date to complete the Step 1 is **February 10th** to remain on-cycle in your academic progression in the MD program.

Integrations 1 and Orientation (end of February) are required of all students entering the Application phase. A delay in taking Step will delay your start of Applications.

To guide your decisions, please see the following chart, outlining the 2024-25 EUSOM MD student USMLE Step 1 Test Timing and its impact on academic progress.

If a student takes Step 1...	They will begin clerkships...	Which means...
On or before Feb 10 th	Mar 3 rd	On-time
Feb 11 th - Mar 10 th	Mar 31 st	4-week delay
Mar 11 th - Apr 7 th	Apr 28 th	8-week delay
Apr 8 th - May 12 th	Jun 2 nd	12-week delay Graduate with class of 2028
After May 12 th	Delay the start of clerkships until March of 2026	Graduate with the class of 2028

WHAT TO EXPECT: STEP 1 LOGISTICS

Step 1 Scheduling Permit

In September 2024, you will begin the process of registering for Step 1. Dr. Hairston will send you an email with detailed instructions.

- **Match names:** When you sign up for the USMLE Step 1, provide your name as it is written on your Driver's License or other form of ID acceptable to USMLE). If you have had a name change, please work with NBME, USMLE, Emory, and the registrar to be sure your name is correct across systems.
- **Pick a testing window:** You will select a **three-month window** within which you would like to test. Make sure to make the first month the month you intend to take the test. If you plan to take it January 15th, make your testing permit for January, February, and March. This gives you more time if you need to move your date.
- **Get verified:** MD student affairs, currently Mary Kaye Garcia and Zachy Farrell in OMESA, will check the NBME site every day to approve students' enrollment at EUSOM.
- **Certificate of Identification (CIF):** Complete and submit the CIF to [Emily Generally](#), Senior Program Coordinator, in the CHSS. There will then be a verification process to validate you as a EUSOM student and finalize your registration.
- Once you are registered, you will receive a **scheduling permit** via email from the NBME.
- Thereafter, you can **choose your test date**.
- Please see [When to take the exam with targets](#) and assess your test readiness before spending money on a test date. As mentioned, it is expensive to [reschedule your test date](#). The CHSS will help you to assess but we do not recommend everyone scheduling in October unless finances are not a concern. Instead, wait until you have a baseline and progress score to assess how many weeks you will need.
- EUSOM will expect all students to have a test date officially in the NBME system **no later than January 1, 2025**. Please note, students [applying for accommodations](#) cannot schedule a date until they receive a decision on their accommodation request. Do not forget, [EUSOM Step 1 expectations](#) as you are deciding.

On Test Day

- **Documents:** You must bring the scheduling permit you receive via email to the Prometric testing site on the day of the exam. (Be sure to open the link and print the actual scheduling permit). **You must present this permit along with an unexpired, government-issued photo identification with your signature** (e.g., current driver's license). Your first and last names on the photo ID must exactly match the first and last names appearing on the scheduling permit.
- **Break time:** Step 1 is a test of endurance. There are seven, one-hour blocks of 40 (or fewer) questions; eight hours are allotted to complete the test. **Forty-five minutes of break time is automatically allocated.** In addition to the exam blocks, the test begins with a 15-minute tutorial. However, the tutorial is identical to the one online. **It is best to complete the tutorial online prior, skip it on test day, and take those 15 minutes as additional break time.** This allows you to begin with 1 hour of break time, which you may take between sections at any point during the day. Also, if you finish an exam block early, the remaining time is added to your break time.

- **Use of breaks:** Some students complete a couple of sections at a time and then take a prolonged break, while others choose to take a five-minute break at the end of each section. Choose what helps you increase your test taking endurance. Proceed with caution when looking things up in between sections - doing so may end up stressing you out. If your testing center allows the use of a cell phone during the breaks, you can call a friend or loved one during the break to keep you grounded, if that works for you.
- **What to bring with you:** Water bottles in a clear, transparent container without labels are allowed into the exam room as well as unwrapped, unbottled medications (pills) like pain relievers or cough drops (unwrapped); place pills/cough drops in a clear Ziplock bag. You are also allowed to bring your own set of earplugs. Consider wearing pants without pockets to minimize time spent doing the security check upon entering the exam room after breaks.
- **Lockers:** You will also be assigned a locker that you **will** have access to during your breaks, so you can bring snacks and lunch with you to the testing center. However, please note that some Prometric testing centers (e.g., Smyrna) have lockers that are only 1 foot x 1 foot, which are not large enough to fit a full-size backpack (wall hooks are available to hang bags next to the lockers as well).
- **Note:** You **will** be able to access any notes/study materials/devices during the breaks, but we strongly recommend that you use your break time to breathe and prepare for the next block.

Moving your Step 1 Test Date

If you are not yet passing your practice tests consistently, you may decide to push back your Step 1 date. Please see section on [EUSOM Step 1 Expectations](#).

Review the USMLE costs associated with moving your Step 1 test dates below.

Appointment Change Fees for Computer-based Examinations Fees (listed in US dollars) beginning January 1, 2024

The date that you change your appointment	Prometric Testing Region	Step 1	Step 2 CK	Step 3
46 or more days before (but not including) the first day of the scheduled test date	All testing regions	No Fee	No Fee	No Fee
31-45 days and before (but not including) the first day of the scheduled test date	All testing regions	\$35	\$35	\$35
6-30 days before (but not including) the first day of the scheduled test date	All testing regions	\$100	\$100	\$100
5 or fewer days before (but not including) the first day of the scheduled test date	US and Canada	\$137	\$155	\$275*
5 or fewer days before (but not including) the first day of the scheduled test date	Outside the US and Canada	\$352	\$396	N/A

* For Step 3 administrations, if you are rescheduling one or more, but fewer than all days of your appointment, between 1 and 5 days prior to your first scheduled test date, you will be charged a rescheduling fee of \$138.

Exam Structure

Step 1 is a one-day examination divided into seven, 60-minute blocks and administered in one, 8-hour testing session. The number of questions per block never exceeds forty. Exam questions will not exceed 280. For every exam, an unidentified 80 questions are new and being validated thus they do not count toward the overall outcome of the exam.

As you start your study plan, the following tables show the exam structure weighting by content areas.

Tables 1 (right), 2, and 3 (below) are slicing the Step 1 exam in three different ways—percentage items by (1) system, (2) physician tasks, and (3) discipline.

Table 2: Step 1 Physician Tasks/Competencies Specifications*

Competency	Range, %*
Medical Knowledge: Applying Foundational Science Concepts	60-70
Patient Care: Diagnosis	20-25
History/Physical Examination	
Diagnosis	
Communication and Interpersonal Skills	6-9
Practice-based Learning & Improvement	4-6

This information can be helpful to you in mapping out how many study days you will spend by content area in relation to their weighting on Step 1.

For a very detailed USMLE Step 1 Content Guide, visit:

https://www.usmle.org/sites/default/files/2022-01/USMLE_Content_Outline_0.pdf. This guide can provide additional insight into every detail and subject area covered.

Table 1: Step 1 Test Content Specifications*

System**	Range, %
Human Development***	1-3
Blood & Lymphoreticular/Immune Systems	8-13
Behavioral Health & Nervous Systems/Special Senses	10-14
Musculoskeletal, Skin & Subcutaneous Tissue	7-12
Cardiovascular System	6-11
Respiratory & Renal/Urinary Systems	10-15
Gastrointestinal System	5-10
Reproductive & Endocrine Systems	9-13
Multisystem Processes & Disorders	11-16
Biostatistics & Epidemiology/Population Health	4-6
Social Sciences: Communication and Interpersonal Skills	6-9

Table 3: Step 1 Discipline Specifications*

Discipline	Range, %
Pathology	44-52
Physiology	25-35
Pharmacology	15-22
Biochemistry & Nutrition	14-24
Microbiology	10-15
Immunology	6-11
Gross Anatomy & Embryology	11-15
Histology & Cell Biology	8-13
Behavioral Sciences	8-13
Genetics	5-9

ACCOMMODATIONS

Accommodations for Step 1

If you are planning on applying for accommodations for USMLE Step 1, please plan to meet with [Dr. Christen Hairston](#) at the **beginning of your M2 year** to discuss and plan timing for applying.

Typically, Step 1 accommodations are granted to those with a long history of receiving accommodations. We will work with any student interested in applying to send in the best possible application. ***Sending a thorough and early application is the best approach.*** For more information on requirements to apply for Step 1 accommodations, please see <https://www.usmle.org/step-exams/test-accommodations>.

Accommodation Timing

The application for accommodations is extensive and requires many forms with appropriate signatures, medical documentation, and a personal statement. Plan to start gathering these items ***in July and August of your M2 year***. There is about an 8-week waiting period from when you submit your application to when you receive notification of your approved accommodations, and you will not be able to sign up for a test date until those are received. Note that NBME accommodations may not match your accommodations as granted by Emory Department of Accessibility Services (DAS). If this is the case, you can appeal the decision, but this will lengthen your process and hinder your ability to schedule the exam. CHSS will work with you through the process.

STEP 1 STUDYING: M2 Year and Dedicated

Step 1 studying during M2

Step 1 studying during the Emory SOM curriculum can and should reinforce what you are already studying. In other words, Qbanks or other sources can be used to reinforce curricular knowledge as you learn material during your Foundation courses.

The amount of time you designate for additional Step 1 studying during the curriculum should be guided by the amount of time you have available to study after completing your course activities. Please do not allow your studying for Step 1 to hinder you from passing a course. Remediating a course after summer break usually means completing the remediation at the beginning of dedicated. If this happens to you, keep in close contact with Dean Hairston for support - you are not the only one who has been through this!

Emory School of Medicine's curriculum is preparing you for Step 1. What you CAN do during the curriculum is constantly reinforce your content knowledge, layer, and interleave¹ concepts, and frequently assess and reassess your areas of strength and weakness.

¹ Interleaving is the mixing of subject content to interlace concepts and make connections. This differs from blocked studying in which you study one topic without moving on to a new topic until the review is complete on that one.

Step 1 studying during dedicated

Dedicated studying will require content review, improving how you approach questions, and increasing your individual endurance for a long, strenuous examination.

As such, this guide is organized around three domains for Step 1 preparation:

1. Content Review
2. Question Strategy (QBank)
3. Improving your test-taking Endurance

The following sections of this guide will target each of these three areas and the resources available to you as you navigate improving each dimension.

As you begin, ask yourself:

- Where am I strongest in these three areas?
- Do I feel strong in content but weaker in how I approach questions?
- Do I get exhausted in long exams and need to improve my endurance?
- Do I feel like I need to start from scratch and review content in absolutely everything?

This will differ for each individual, but based on where you are at this moment, we can create a plan customized to your greatest areas of strength and weakness. Your time and energy are limited; the more strategically you plan for Step 1 the less stressful the experience can be.

CONTENT REVIEW

When approaching Step 1 studying, it is helpful to first identify your **content areas of greatest strength and weakness**.

Content review needs to be **engaged and active** - not passive. The more passive, the less likely you will retain the information. The most active work is through UWorld questions and using them to guide what you do and do not know. Once you are aware of your areas of great weakness, you can engage with content videos, online resources, questions, and beyond to resolve them. This is an iterative process and requires regular self-evaluation.

Together, we can map a plan for how and to what degree you review content but know content review will be an essential part of your Step 1 dedicated review process.

CONTENT REVIEW: RECOMMENDED RESOURCES (organized alphabetically)

This guide is not an endorsement of one product over another, nor should one believe that the higher the price, the higher the quality. We are, however, including only popular resources that have helped students succeed, and we are listing them to guide you in your choices.


2024 pricing is provided in green.

A note for students who come from lower-income backgrounds or who are nervous about the additional costs associated with these resources: you do not have to spend a lot of money to be prepared for Step 1! In this list, there are many free resources that will help you be fully prepared to take this exam. If you feel especially nervous or concerned, please reach out to fellow students and CHSS - someone will be able to help you create a study strategy that is both successful and affordable.

AMBOSS - <https://www.amboss.com/us>

- **Full Qbank access is in addition to the monthly membership; \$149 for 1 month; \$189 for 3 months; \$229 for 6 months; \$299 for 12 months.**
- Includes content review using unlimited library access, Anki add-on and smart study tools, as well as interactive medical imaging with overlays. Includes “phrasionary, table quizzes, charts, radiological images with overlays, videos, SmartZoom samples and other images that illustrate key points on different topics” all on a digital platform.
- Includes 2,700+ Step 1 questions, and with your subscription you also have access to 3,200+ Step 2 questions, 3,700 Shelf questions, and 2,000+ Step 3 questions.

Anki Flashcards - <https://apps.ankiweb.net/>

- **Android and Mac version: FREE; iPhone app version: \$25**
- Some students use flashcards extensively, and others never use them.
- For those who benefit from flashcards (e.g., a quick review of material prior to bedtime or first thing in the morning) this is a popular option.
- For students who choose to use Anki, continuously keeping up with cards from previous units can help minimize the amount of content review that is necessary during dedicated.
- Different Anki Decks to Consider
 - Zanki offers a Step 1 specific deck using First Aid prompts.
 - AnkiHub has a \$5/month [subscription](#) and a “pay what you can” [scholarship subscription](#) that syncs with V12 cards and new sketchies/other third-party resources, including Sketchy, Pathoma, B&B, etc.
 - One of our members of the class of 2026 has provided an [AnKing deck](#) for preclinical courses.
 - The following decks are commonly used (and can be found online): AnKing, First Aid 2020 Rapid Review, Anatomy Step Clinical Correlations
 -  [100 most important Concepts Anki Deck.apkg](#)

Boards and Beyond - <https://www.boardsbeyond.com/>

- Subscriptions range from **\$24 for one week to \$399 for 2 years.**
- **\$399.00 - 2 Years | \$349.00 - 18 Months | \$249.00 - 1 Year | \$199.00 - 6 Months | \$149.00 - 3 Months | \$89.00 - 1 Month | \$24.00 - 1 Week**
- Step 1 resource includes 447 videos, PDF copies of the slides, and Qbank of 2,300 questions. Covers content review and Qbank with one subscription.

Clinical Key - <https://proxy.library.emory.edu/login?url=https://www.clinicalkey.com/>

- **Offered FREE through Emory Health Science Library**
- Clinical Key is an online database to search conditions, treatments, drugs, books, journals and more related to clinical practice. A great content review resource for clinical overviews, drug monographs, calculators, drug class overviews, and guidelines.

Crush Step 1 Podcast

- <https://open.spotify.com/show/1zRYlByLLzgpXMkeUPOKW1?si=f0a8d14eb07447f7>
 - **FREE Podcast**
 - It feels very much like the First Aid.
 - They just read the facts aloud. No real explanation.
 - Only high yield information.

Dirty Medicine - <https://www.youtube.com/c/DirtyMedicine?app=desktop>

- **Offered as FREE YouTube videos**
- Conceptual review of one or more concepts that are similar, this resource helps you discern the ways in which they are different with mnemonics. Known for excellent biochemistry videos.
- DM also offers extensive coverage of high yield drug classes and images. High Yield images are updated; [DM YouTube playlist](#).
- Pay special attention to their social sciences/ethics videos, as they teach you about the unique way the USMLE asks ethical questions.

Divine Intervention Podcast - <https://divineinterventionpodcasts.com/category/usmle-step-1/>

- **Offered as a FREE Podcast**
- **Highly recommend listening to episode 37 - Preventative medicine to review risk factors and trends prior to Step 1 test date (27 minutes)**
- Focuses on high yield concepts. This podcast allows you to choose specific topics to supplement learning deficits. Because it is a podcast, it can be listened to during commutes, while running errands, or even during exercise.

Firecracker by Lippincott

<https://www.wolterskluwer.com/en/solutions/lippincott-medicine/medical-education/firecracker>

- **For the full MD Firecracker deck: \$150/year and up; 7-day FREE trial**
- Offers several “bundles” for Step 1 review which include various additional (and more expensive) options; the most popular of which includes First Aid citations and a collection of topics, flashcards, and test questions which reference material from *Pathoma* and *SketchyMedical*

First Aid for the USMLE Step 1

- **First Aid 2024 is \$51.89**
- **First Aid is available for FREE when a student becomes a member of the American Medical Association (AMA) which costs \$20 a year or \$68 for 4 years. You will also get the FREIDA residency database and other wellness tools.**
- The book is separated into the following sections:
 - Section 1: Guide to Efficient Exam Preparation
 - Section 2: High Yield General Principles
 - Section 3: High-Yield Organ Systems
 - Section 4: Top-Rated Review Resources
- Students often read relevant sections of *First Aid* throughout the first three years (especially second year).
- Many students make notes directly into *First Aid*; while others choose to hole-punch the pages and put them in a binder, combining class notes and high yield information gleaned from *UWorld* questions into one source.
- As valuable as it is, *First Aid* is not recommended as a stand-alone resource. It is great for a high-level, high-yield overview of target areas for review.

Goljan Pathology Lectures

- **Offered as FREE Audio lectures on the web or Spotify Podcast as “Daddy Goljan Lectures”**
- This resource provides a comprehensive pathology review for high-yield content in a way that integrates multiple disciplines. It has become one of the most popular resources for concept connection and crucial for review throughout the year. Because it is an audio podcast, it can be used for passive learning at regular or increased speeds (up to 3.5x on Spotify) during commutes, while running errands, or even during exercise.
- In particular, the Neoplasia lecture felt particularly high yield for a last-minute review. The recordings provide a fast-paced, high yield review and help with important word associations for commonly tested concepts. His lectures bounce from concept to concept (but also connect topics in ways that other resources do not) which helps train your brain for the exam.

HyGuru - <https://hyguru.teachable.com/p/usmle-step-1-pass-fail-course>

- **USMLE Step 1 Course: \$196**
- HyGuru, Dr. Rahul Damania, is a former critical care fellow at Emory School of Medicine. His course was utilized by quite a few of the members of the class of 2026 and they appreciated his high yield reviews and how this resource incorporates practice questions after every video.
- Focuses on integrated organ systems. "HyGuru's comprehensive USMLE Step 1 course augments the pathophysiology in the free NBME Top Concepts with the relevant physiology and pharmacology. Integrated with immunology and biochemistry, this course provides a high-yield, integrative overview of each organ system."
- HyGuru also provides free recordings of many sessions on YouTube including systems based and pharmacology lectures.

Medbullets Step 1 - <https://step1.medbullets.com>

- **Offered as a FREE Podcast on Spotify or for Peak Subscription \$98 for 6 months and \$175 for 1 year.**
- Presents Step 1 questions/topics as short "bullet-phrase" style reviews with a clinical vignette afterwards. It is available both as a podcast and an online question and content repository and is a thorough source to quickly review specific topics. It functions especially well as a quick overview on memorization-heavy concepts like metabolic disorders.

Med School Bootcamp - <https://bootcamp.com/med-school>

- **QBank (2,000+ questions, included in the price); 1 month (\$49); 1 year (\$199); 2 years (\$349)**
- Med School Bootcamp offers review materials in all content areas, from the basic sciences to the organ systems.
- Many of the videos are accompanied by questions to cement the learning.

They have USMLE-style questions, along with benchmarks to suggest when students might be ready to take the exam.

Great resource for anatomy, as well as imaging (a lot higher yield than gross anatomy on Step 1).

MedSchoolBro - <https://medschoolbro.com/collections/usmle-guides>

- **USMLE Step 1 Rapid Review Guides, starting at \$29.99**
- Free USMLE Study Pack Resource too - <https://medschoolbro.com/collections/free-resources>
- PDF, Anki Deck, Hard Copy Available
- High-yield study notes designed for passing the USMLE. With effective memory techniques / mnemonics (as seen in MedSchoolBro's videos) to maximize retention. Every detail is purposefully included to ensure you focus on essential information, avoiding any time wasted on low-yield material.

- This guide seamlessly integrates various disciplines within specific pathologies and disease processes. Unlike most resources that separate subjects into distinct chapters, such as anatomy, physiology, or pharmacology, this approach fosters a more comprehensive and interconnected understanding of each topic.


Mehlman Medical - <https://mehlmanmedical.com/>

- Offered as **FREE** High Yield documents, learning modules, self-assessments, and pre-recorded lectures.
- Additional services offered for a fee (**Anki decks - \$44 - \$70, Tutoring packages - \$185 - \$10,800**).
- Would strongly encourage reviewing the "HY Arrows" document (<https://mehlmanmedical.com/hy-arrows/>) to solidify key pathophysiology and work through pathways in your head to solidify your understanding. Self-assessments are very high yield.

Pathoma - <http://www.pathoma.com/>

- **PathomaFree version is FREE and does not include the textbook or all videos. PathomaPro starts at \$84.95 and offers the textbook, and 3-, 12-, or 21-month subscriptions to videos for every chapter of the book.**
- Pathoma offers a Step 1 review, and this resource covers high-yield pathology information for all organ systems in shorter videos. For those who prefer reading, the *Pathoma* textbook may be faster than reviewing the videos. The textbook has many color images like those on Step 1 and 2.
- Chapters 1-3 include very high yield topics about cancer, immunology, and topics that you may have not reviewed since the healthy human modules.

PHYSE Biochemistry Map

- Offered as a **FREE** resource
-  [Biochemistry Map.jpg](#)
- Analyze biochemistry questions using the visual to conceptualize the biochemistry map.

Pixorize - <https://pixorize.com/>

- **Medicine and USMLE Complete 1 year for \$249, Biochemistry \$150 for 1 year, Pharmacology \$150 for 1 year, Immunology \$150 for 1 year.**
- A visual mnemonic series for biochemistry, microbiology, immunology, and pharmacology.
- Recommended primarily for useful mnemonics on biochemistry as a long-term memory tool.

Randy Neil for Biostats -

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLuyQGqW98Zlsm4MlnaD2LJCub8i9D3pms>

- Offered as a **FREE YouTube videos**
- Dr. Neil's videos cover **everything** you need to ace every biostats question on Step 1
- He uses USMLE-style questions to make biostats intuitive and easy to remember.

Sketchymedical - <https://sketchymedical.com/>

- **\$299.99 for 6 months; \$399.99 for 12 months; \$599.99 for 24 months**
- A visual mnemonic series for microbiology, biostats / epidemiology, physiology, pathophysiology, anatomy, biochemistry, pharmacology, and microbiology.
- Sketches "help you create a memory palace by associating medical topics with memorable visual elements."
- Students have noted that Sketchy Micro supplements the Emory curriculum and provides helpful memory tools for USMLE questions.
- If possible, beginning Sketchy Micro specifically during the infectious disease module creates a solid foundation for starting your dedicated study period. Additionally, Sketchy pharmacology is a helpful resource to begin early as it includes many high-yield medications and explains the body system(s) they work in. Watching these videos and completing the corresponding Anki cards (information below) help solidify this knowledge for both Step 1 and clinical rotations.
- Another strategy that has worked for some students is aiming to watch one Sketchy Micro and one Pharm video a day starting at the beginning of the M2 year. That way, you can learn a few facts a day at a slower pace. You do not have to keep up with this schedule every day, but it can be helpful to get a head start.

USMLE Scholar Rx - <https://www.usmle-rx.com/>

- **\$149 for one month, \$199 for 3 months, \$329 for 6 months, \$399 for 12 months, \$449 for 24 months, \$499 for 36 months; special discounts may be available for purchases of 3+ month subscriptions.**
- **Emory School of Medicine offers USMLE Scholar Rx Step 1 subscription FREE for the Foundations phase as part of the curriculum.** USMLE Scholar Rx has five different resources in one—Rx bricks, Step 1 Qmax, Flash Facts, Express Videos, and Digital First Aid. Their question bank for Step 1 was created by the authors of *First Aid*.

STRATEGY OF QUESTION: QUESTION BANKS (QBanks)

Question Format

Step 1 questions all follow a specific formula. Please see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ov8UhrB64sw> for a quick overview of the NBME question structure. Also, access last year's [Deconstructing Step-Like Questions Workshop](#) from Klevi Gollosi, MD, Class of 2024.

Your clinical vignette test taking strategy matters. Students have opportunity to improve how they approach questions each and every day.

Finding your question rhythm

As you are going through Step 1 questions, give each question consideration, but if you are unsure, pick an answer and move on or skip the question and plan to return to it. A subsequent question may help to trigger the answer to a previous question that you skipped. There may be what you find to be easier questions at the end of the block, so you do not want to run out of time.

Practice, practice, practice

Question Banks are a valuable resource to improve the speed and effectiveness by which you reinforce content and improve your test taking ability.

By practicing question types, you can also improve the ways in which you can (1) identify distracters, (2) see what the question is truly asking, (3) work through the best possible answer, (4) choose it and (5) move on. It is both an art and a science.

Qbanks can play various roles in your studying:

- During courses, Qbanks can reinforce newly acquired knowledge through questions.
- During dedicated, Qbanks can be used to:
 - Reinforce content review through spaced repetition and learning from missed questions.
 - Give you a 360° view of how questions are asked around certain concepts.
 - Improve timing per question.
 - Give you a pattern of question types you are missing to see if you are able to improve blind spots.
 - Simulate testing environment.
 - Improve endurance of exam taking through the gradual addition of question blocks over time
- For content review purposes, you may consider single-subject or single-system blocks on tutor mode, namely in areas of great weakness.
- To improve your strategy of question, endurance of the exam, and synthesized knowledge across systems and subjects, your goal is always to move from single-system blocks towards mixed, timed blocks, even if you do so in a stepwise approach.

To optimize Qbank use:

- Identify ways to gain optimal benefit from this essential resource for your own personal learning style.
- Integrate high yield topics gleaned from questions and reading answer explanations into your own list of high-yield topics for additional review (i.e., Anki cards, *First Aid* annotation, Excel spreadsheets or other creative way you have identified).
- Review incorrect questions. Should you read the explanation for each answer option for every question? For the sake of efficiency, probably not. Rather, read the explanation for any answer option you get wrong, “guessed right” or considered as possibly correct.
- Plan to do a set number of questions per day during dedicated study time. While it is true that there is an advantage to completing as many questions as possible, be sure you do not rush through questions at the expense of learning from the questions.
- Reflect on your strengths and weaknesses regularly. Compare your equated percent correct (EPC) by practice test to measure your progression in areas in which you have been putting your energy.

Question Banks for Step 1 (organized by recommended question banks)

1. UWorld - www.uworld.com

30-day (\$319), 90-day (\$439), 180-day (\$479) or 360-day (\$559) subscriptions.

Emory School of Medicine provides a 6-month subscription during second year to the UWorld 3700 + question bank. (If necessary, any renewal costs are the responsibility of the student).

2. AMBOSS - <https://www.amboss.com/us>

Full Qbank access is in addition to the \$14.99 monthly/\$129 yearly membership; \$149 for 1 month; \$189 for 3 months; \$229 for 6 months, \$299 for 12 months.

3. USMLE-Scholar Rx - <https://www.usmle-rx.com/>

QMax (2300 questions) - 1 month (\$129); 3 months (\$159); 6 months (\$249); 12 months (\$299); 24 months (\$349); special discount pricing may be available on 3+ month subscriptions.

Emory School of Medicine offers USMLE Rx Step 1 subscription for first- and second-year medical students as part of the curriculum. Students who choose to use it further may purchase on their own.

USMLE Rx has five different resources in one—Rx bricks, Step 1 Qmax, Flash Facts, Express Videos, and Digital First Aid. Questions, videos, and flashcards with First Aid integration produced by the authors of *First Aid*.

ENDURANCE OF EXAM: PRACTICE TESTS

Taking practice tests is the best way to improve your endurance for an 8-hour exam. For each student, they will need to build their endurance through smart test-taking strategies and planning.

It is recommended to plan practice tests when it can be optimal for your own personal learning. Speak with CHSS and small group advisors to decide how many and when practice tests make the most sense for you.

Practice test quantity and timing

- **Minimum:** At least 3 practice tests at the beginning, middle, and end of dedicated.
- **On Average:** Students take approximately 7 practice tests before taking the official Step 1 exam. Students often take many more over the course of their Step 1 journey. Every other week is ideal to provide enough time to show progress from efforts.
- **High:** Some students will decide to take a practice every week. I always remind students it typically takes two days to do a practice exam—one to take it and one to review it. If you take all the NBME, Free120s, UWorld, and Scholar Rx practice exams, you will complete approximately 14 practice exams.

Assessing value of practice question blocks

Reviewing material repeatedly through questions also helps to consolidate information and helps with retention. A low score may lead to undue anxiety while a high score may contribute to a false sense of security. **Do not get fixated on your UWorld block score.** Instead, focus on doing your best each block and using what you missed to guide what you will focus on learning. It is with practice exams that you improve your endurance and time management skills. The equated percent question produced by the practice tests is much more indicative of test readiness than the UWorld block percentage correct.

Practice environment

When taking a practice test, ensure your testing environment simulates the test site as closely as possible. You may want to consider taking a practice test at the Prometric test site. Details are at <https://proscheduler.prometric.com/scheduling/testInformation>. Within your 90-day eligibility period, Prometric offers a practice session with a brief tutorial section and three, one-hour blocks of approximately 40 multiple-choice test items each. Upon completion, a printed percent correct score is provided. The opportunity to become familiar with the testing site may help decrease anxiety on the test day. Contact your local Prometric Testing Center for costs.

For those who do not choose to use a Prometric practice space, it is important you still simulate your testing environment when taking practice tests. An optimized test site will need to be a quiet place with no interruptions or excessive noise – likely outside of your home. This might be the library, a reserved classroom, or other reserved, quiet space with “testing in progress” posted on the door. Note that your actual testing site may not be 100% distraction free. There will be people walking in and out of the room, and some students have reported issues with AC in the past.

Practice test resources

EUSOM students recommend fully completing a single question bank rather than switching between multiple. EUSOM provides **6-month UWorld subscription that includes 3 UWorld self-assessments, as well as 2 NBME in-person or self-assessments**. All other practice tests will be purchased at the student's expense. These expenses were included in students' cost of attendance for the 2024-25 EUSOM academic year.

- **NBME Comprehensive Basic Science Exam (CBSE)**

Four blocks of 50 questions practice exam (**Only administered by the medical school at \$59/student**)

- **NBME Comprehensive Basic Science Self-Assessment Exam (CBSSA)**

Four blocks of 50 questions practice exam. (**\$60**)

- **NBME Free 120 (Free)**

There are 2 versions: old and new. Both have relevant questions. Note that in addition to the 2021 (old) and 2024 (new) versions, there may be a 2022 version floating around that has significant overlap with the 2024 version. If using a PDF, make sure to check the year. The NBME Free 120 includes several examples of long question stems which are representative of the length of long question stems on the actual Step 1 exam. This is a great resource to practice your timing, but it is **advised to wait to take the NBME Free 120 until ~1-2 weeks before your actual exam date**.

It is also helpful to review the concepts tested in the NBME Free 120 (as well as the concepts tested in the USMLE Practice Examinations) in detail given those topics could be asked in another form on the actual Step 1 exam. Unlike the CBSSAs, you will not receive any kind of score report or predictor of how likely you are to pass. Once you finish the exam, it will only report the percentage you got correct without the ability to review your answers. There are no explanations provided. It can be helpful to pair the Free 120s with a third-party explanation, such as this one from Boot Camp: <https://bootcamp.com/blog/new-free-120-nbme-step-1-explanations>

- **UWorld**

Four blocks of 40 questions practice exam (included in **EUSOM UWorld 6-month subscription**).

STRUCTURING STUDY SCHEDULES

Following a study schedule will help you to stay on track. That being said, you may not reach all the goals you set out to meet in the beginning. Be flexible, adapt throughout, do not beat yourself up, and move on. Include several flex-days for “catch-up” or more time on a particular topic. Allow more time for review toward the end of dedicated study time; reviewing material helps with retention and more rapid recall during the exam itself. It is easy to get stressed and to ignore the importance of food, sleep, exercise, family, and friends if you get behind schedule. A daily routine helps to maintain mental health and decrease burnout.

Ordering and balancing time on topics

Begin with your weaker topics and/or those more heavily emphasized on the exam so that you can schedule accordingly to allow more time for these topics. To guide the stratification of your topic areas, please see [Tables 1, 2, and 3](#) on page 8 in this guide for the percentages of items by systems, physician tasks, and disciplines. Also see [“How to Study”](#) on page 4 to further identify how to balance your strengths and weaknesses in each topic. Please know this is not necessarily an effortless process, so please reach out to the CHSS to help to identify those strengths, weaknesses, and the best approach for you to balance your study plan.

Sample study schedules

- Additional tips and sample schedules are **FREE** at <https://firstaidteam.com/schedules/>
- Many students also like **Blueprint’s Med School Study Planner** for a daily Step 1 study schedule.
 - **FREE** (<https://blueprintprep.com/medical/med-school/study-schedule>).
 - You enter all the resources you will use, the time you have before the test, and it gives you a daily schedule. If you do not finish something in one day, it rolls over and updates daily.
- Your mentors and student success resources can support you in outlining your Step 1 schedule for dedicated as well as throughout the curriculum.

FINDING BALANCE AMID THE STRESS

- **Follow your energy flow.** Schedule the most challenging part of your study day when you are most alert (i.e., are you a morning or evening person) and schedule accordingly.
- **Study environment:** Find a good place (or places) to study. What setting is least distracting and absent of anxiety-triggers? Home, library, school, coffee shop, etc. For some, varying your place of study is the best strategy. For others, they find their “one place” of study and make it their primary site.
- **Silence your notifications.** Turning off all phone and computer notifications will aid in your ability to concentrate. Plan to check your phone and email at specified times as part of your study schedule.
- **Do not be an island.** Humans need connection and dedicated study time can be very isolating. Make sure that you are engaging with others in some way throughout the entire dedicated study time. This can include connecting with family and friends who know nothing about Step but know the best way to support you, and/or venting with your medical school friends who are going through the same thing. Near peers who have completed the exam will also be on campus and are typically happy to get together and provide some advice or support if needed. What is important is paying attention to what your needs are socially during this time. If explaining what you are going through with a family member is exhausting, then do not do it. If venting with your med school friends is getting you down, then step away. It is about knowing yourself and your needs.
- **Study partners:** Many students benefit from a study partner. For example, plan to meet with a classmate to review a topic (e.g., ask one another questions, present a topic to one another, find a white board, and give “lectures” to one-another, etc.). You could also time your study breaks concurrently and take a walk together outside.
- **Time off from studying:** A study schedule **must** include breaks. Time off makes for more effective study. Take at least one full day off a week (i.e., one full day, two mornings, or two afternoons). Schedule a five-minute break at least every 45 minutes as this simulates the testing scenario and is also proven to improve retention. Go outside for breaks, when possible, to get fresh air and sunshine.

During a break, remove yourself from any study materials and do your best to truly relax – no flash cards or podcasts on the treadmill. It is better to study 8 “good hours” than 12 “non-productive hours.” Respect your limit and stop studying.

Do not sacrifice your health; make time to exercise, meditate, hydrate, refuel with nourishing food, engage in your spiritual life, and soak up some sunshine. A session of physical activity every day is good for your body, mind, and soul! If you feel like you have hit a wall studying, not feeling well mentally, or just need a break, do not be afraid to take an extra day off completely (outside of the one that you may have scheduled). Be forgiving and flexible with yourself and your timeline.

- **Sleep:** Get on a sleep schedule that will model the wake time on test day. Practice like you play.
- **Comparing self to others:** There will always be someone studying more than you (and less than you). While you should listen to the advice of others, you know yourself best and the way(s) in which you are most productive studying. Do not be stressed by how other people are studying – be confident and do what works best for you. Do not place blanket trust in Reddit; it

is advisable to avoid it altogether. There are many different things that people will say to do but might not work well for you.

- **Additional study time: Avoid the urge to push back the test date.** There comes a point in time where additional study is counterproductive. Although the thought of an additional week of study time may be tempting, be confident in your ability and in the effectiveness of your study schedule. Changing the test date can negatively impact your confidence and contribute to anxiety. You will never feel totally prepared; most students “peak” at 5-6 weeks of dedicated study time.
- **Reach out to Emory School of Medicine resources.** You are not alone in this journey—it takes a village—and we are here to support you! Please feel free to reach out to:
 - **Christen Hairston, Ph.D.**, *Associate Dean of Student Success*, Center for Holistic Student Success
 - **Emily Generally, MSM**, *Senior Program Coordinator*, Center for Holistic Student Success
 - **Rana Van Voorhis, MS**, *Learning Specialist*, Center for Holistic Student Success
 - Small Group Advisors
 - **Stacy Higgins, MD**, *Associate Dean of Student Affairs*, Clinical Services at smhiggi@emory.edu
 - **EUSOM Tutors** via <https://med.emory.edu/tutor>
 - [CAPS Embedded Psychologists](#)
- **Waiting for your score.** After completing Step 1, your score will be available two to four weeks after your exam date. Scores arrive on Wednesday mornings. Administration will have access at 8:00 a.m., and you will receive an email between 11 a.m. and Noon. If you have failed the exam, someone (typically Dr. Hairston or Dr. Higgins) will text/call you to let you know the results and strategize next steps. If you have passed the exam, Dr. Hairston will reach out via email or text to congratulate you. It can be nerve-racking to wait for the results of the exam. Just know that there are people there to celebrate and support you, whichever way the result goes!

FEELING STUCK?

Hitting a plateau in your scores is **normal**. While your UWorld score should increase over the weeks of studying, individual question blocks are not directly predictive of your NBME/Step 1 performance. It is totally normal to get 60% on one block and 40% on the next. UWorld is a **learning** tool. (See [Assessing value of practice question blocks](#))

Ideally, your NBME scores should increase by ~5 points every 1-2 weeks. If after several weeks (2+ weeks) you feel like your scores are not improving, reach out to the CHSS for help.

Some possibilities:

- If you are **burnt out**, you might need to take a couple of days of break to recharge. Do not feel guilty - if you keep going it will not be effective. It is better to **take a couple of days off** studying and get back to it with a refreshed mind, body, and spirit.
- **Make a list of concepts** that you are missing consistently and gear your studying toward your weaknesses.

- Alternatively, sometimes a **plateau** in scores may be due to test-taking skills rather than content. It may be useful to go through your incorrect questions, either by yourself or with a peer to see if there are **patterns you can identify** (i.e., changing your answer last-minute, missing an "except/not etc." in the prompt).
- Take a step back to make sure you have a consistent framework for **approaching questions**. It may be worthwhile to watch a video about test taking strategy (AMBOSS, HyGuru, USMLE GUYS, etc.) to see if there may be a strategy that works better for you. Keep in mind that there are a variety of approaches, and it is okay if the first one you find does not end up working for you. **Do not be afraid to switch it up.**
- Join fellow Emory students for studying. Studying for this exam **can be very isolating**, and sometimes sharing or hearing others **express those feelings can be helpful**.
- Connect with a Step 1 tutor from the **Emory School of Medicine Tutoring Program**. These tutors can help you identify areas of weakness, review content, be a sounding board for picking a test date, and improve test-taking skills.
- Reach out to the **CHSS** to chat about what you are noticing.
- You do not need to make **big decisions** on your own!
- If you need to **move your test date** or revamp your study schedule, reach out to a few people to hear their opinions. Getting input from a combination of students and faculty will help you make informed decisions.
- Connect with friends, family, or whatever support system you rely on, during your break/break days to get you out of the Step spiral. Perspectives and experiences outside of your everyday studying can go a long way in **recharging your battery**.
- At the end of the day (regardless of how you perform on this exam), you are going to make it to the other side and will be a doctor someday! This process can be extremely overwhelming but know that **you are not alone** in these feelings. Reach out to your near peers if you need to vent or just want a listening ear.
- If you are struggling with your mental health, reach out to administrators and in-house CAPS counselors. These are tools that medical students can benefit from during dedicated, which can sometimes be intensely isolating and anxiety-provoking. When the going gets tough, just remember, as Dr. Hairston says, "**We can do hard things!**"
 - CAPS: <https://counseling.emory.edu/>
 - Mental Health and Wellness @ SOM: <https://med.emory.edu/education/center-for-holistic-student-success/student-counseling/index.html>

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