



Peer Mentoring

Step 1 Survival Guide

2025-2026 Edition

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Comments or suggestions? Drop us a message at peermentoring@umassmed.edu

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Survival Guide

*Disclaimer: Although we have tried to provide a diverse range of ideas and opinions, we recognize that everyone's experience is different and that a general guide cannot address the full range of possible experiences. We highly recommend that you also utilize other academic advising resources (e.g. your Peer Mentors, **the CAA**) to help develop a personalized plan that will work for YOU!*

Sooo, when should I start?

The million dollar question.

First Year Summer

The summer between first and second year is a confusing time for this, as many students are anxious to get started but still haven't completed many of the system-based blocks.

Some students prefer to begin light content review and question based review over the summer between first and second year, or keep up with review cards from the previous year's hard work.

Other students see this as their "last summer ever!" and prefer to relax after a grueling first year, or pick up a non-medicine related summer job.

Other students dive head first into research projects or other activities to further their learning or support community endeavors.

So, in the end, how to manage the summer after the first year is a personal decision and will look different for everyone. **You certainly do not have to start studying over the summer.**

If it makes you more anxious *not* studying, then by all means hit the books, or set your anki cards to a low number of cards per day about a half an hour in the morning . But if you are feeling burnt out after the first year and need to focus on other things as mentioned above, **you are not going to be behind.**

Just remember, if you do get started, take some time to enjoy your summer, don't burn yourself out too early, and be nice to yourself as many questions probably incorporate topics you haven't covered in the curriculum yet:

Second year Fall

The biggest challenge is balancing second year responsibilities (class, extracurriculars, leadership roles) with executing your plan. But remember, the systems you are going through in the curriculum **IS** teaching you things that will help you with STEP 1. You have been preparing since you got to med school.

Here is one rockstar student's advice about when they started:

“People will differ on this, but I started doing review in January for my test in April, and that was probably not the best idea. If I could do it again, I'd start light in like November for a test in April, and then slowly build up as the time progresses. I wouldn't start [at the very beginning of second year] or September, because you'll just burn yourself out and you need to get into the swing of second year.”

Take this with a grain of salt, as sometimes people feel they need to start earlier than this or find that slower gradual prep works better. In this instance as you can see, this student felt they would have benefited from at least an additional month. So in general, it seems getting started with part-time studying and with executing your plan about **6 months** before you plan to take the test is ideal. Remember that everything you have done in class and for school up until this time was helping you prepare.

OK, Step 1 time is finally here?!?! WHAT DO I DO?

RELAX.

Being mindful and aware of your mental state is KEY to success. **We cannot stress this enough!** It sounds cliché, but it's essential that you remain in control of your emotions. Everyone unravels a bit while preparing for Step 1, and it's okay to be nervous. **Start planning early** with the help of the CAA, your teachers, and your peers. **Make a daily routine**, but don't beat yourself up if you need to take time to reset. **Be kind to yourself.** Be confident in your knowledge. Be honest about what you're good at (and what you're struggling with). Stop beating yourself up for those extra few minutes you spent chatting with a friend you saw in passing. **Stop comparing your study habits to those of everyone around you!**

That last piece about comparison is HUGE. Let's be honest - we all do it. **STOP FOCUSING ON THE APPROACHES OF OTHERS.** As you start to plan your dedicated time, realize that this time is *very personalized*. It is meant to suit you and your needs, and it should not be identical to anyone else's. You cannot compare yourself to your classmates or get nervous whenever you see someone studying something you haven't started on yet. There is so much material on Step 1, and you're bound to walk by a friend in the library crushing renal physiology 3 days before you plan to do it. Don't. Worry. You'll get to it. **This is why having a rough schedule is so important.** You can rest assured knowing that although you have no clue how ADH affects urea absorption (it's a useless fact anyway) right now, you're going to know it all too well in a few days.

Schedule thoughts from a student:

“So this is where you have to be 1000 percent honest with yourself. As I looked back at the material from my first year, I asked, how much do I feel like I know this. Anything that was like whoa I don't know where to start, I dedicated myself to relearning it (as opposed to reviewing). Things that I felt a little wobbly about, but not too bad, I dedicated some time to specific topic review within that category. Like for pharmacology, I felt decent, but not amazing, so I reviewed the common sympathomimetic drugs, common anti-muscarinic, etc (rather than reviewing the whole thing). Then everything else can be reviewed randomly as it comes up.

So for topics that I was completely lost (hematology tbh), I dedicated time to relearning from Boards and Beyond or Pathoma (I did B&B for most things, but Pathoma is better for heme/onc). So I went online and saw that there were like 20 lectures for all of heme (making numbers up), so I factored in a list of all 20 of those.

For topics that I felt good on, but not amazing, I chose specific sub-topics within them. Like I felt great about GI physiology, anatomy, and pathology, but I struggled on histology, so I added GI histology to my list.”

TL;DR

- Relax. Being aware of your mental state is KEY to success.
- It is okay to be nervous. Studying and taking STEP 1 is a big milestone in your medical career. Taking breaks is okay and important!
- Making a daily routine will help keep you on track.
- Try not to compare yourself and your study habits to others! Everyone studies and prepares differently.
- The test has changed to pass/fail for a reason - try to keep this in mind.

Okay, thanks for the fluffy emotions talk. Let’s get to business. What resources do you recommend?

DO NOT RESOURCE OVERLOAD.

You gain nothing from seeing the same material in 50 different books and videos. **You DO gain something by sticking to the few resources that work for you and continually reviewing them.** That way you begin to remember the material in a structured way that can help when you’re racking your brain for a small detail mid-exam. **Don’t add new resources unless you’re replacing an existing one that isn’t working for you.**

Also, remember that picking a resource and using it is only half the battle. Make sure that you’re using the resource in a way that promotes active learning, whether that’s making flashcards, filling out empty tables, labeling diagrams, etc. Your Peer Mentors and the CAA (as well as other academic advisors) can help you with this!

POPULAR RESOURCES

This is a non-exhaustive resource list to provide some ideas if you have not already identified resources that work for you. Please reach out to your Peer Mentors or the CAA for personalized assistance with selecting appropriate resources.

LEARNING AND REVIEWING MATERIAL: These are resources students traditionally use to learn and review material. They include textbooks and online videos.

QUESTION BANKS: Students use these resources TO LEARN MATERIAL and test knowledge, build endurance.

UWorld (A+, ESSENTIAL):

- **Gold standard of question banks**, considered to be the most similar to Step 1.
- **When to start: a case-by-case basis.** Some students like to start it early and go through all the questions more than once, other students prefer to start it later and go through the questions one time. The CAA can help you make an individualized plan.
- Useful as both a **learning tool and test of knowledge**. If time allows, **HIGHLY RECOMMEND** reading through and studying through the explanations.
- Essential for **building up endurance/stamina for 280 questions on test day**.
- One student's experience:
 - MS1: No UWorld use
 - MS2: Consistent, but low volume question sets when possible [untimed, tutor mode], goal to finish first pass by dedicated period.
 - Dedicated period (4-6 weeks before test date): finish UWorld QBank.
 - If additional time, reset QBank and repeat questions for more practice/endurance. Closer to the test date, we recommend timed, test mode with sets of 40 questions to mimic test day conditions.
- **Amboss (A-, pretty good, not necessary):**
 - Recommended use: additional questions if you exhaust UWorld QBank and start remembering answers after resetting. Or more targeted topic-specific questions.
 - Newer question bank that is considered to be harder than UWorld by some.
 - It has become more popular over the years since it was first released. Some use it for targeted questions for topics they want more review on. Amboss lets you also create practice tests by question difficulty in addition to the usual content categories.
- **USMLERx:**
 - This question bank correlates with First Aid, so it makes it easier to review questions. Some prefer to use this question bank earlier in the year when they are trying to get acclimated to the Step 1 question style.
- **Kaplan:**
 - This is another question bank that is commonly used. The questions can be more nit-picky and some students feel like it requires the knowledge of random facts instead of concepts.

TEXTBOOKS

- **First Aid (FA):**
 - **High-yield, low detail review textbook** written specifically for students preparing for Step 1
 - This is a **REVIEW resource** and is **not sufficient for learning new material** or more in-depth review
 - Use the version for when you entered second year in the Fall or the one for the year you will take it in the Spring- try not to use earlier versions
 - Students using this **often supplement with additional resources** (like the ones below)
 - **Everyone uses it differently:** some people just sit down and read every word; for others, it is more useful as a place to consolidate notes on UWorld questions and as a reference to provide reminders about random facts. You'll be amazed when you return to it after raging about some question on a UWorld block and see the answer clear as day in the middle of a paragraph, totally unassuming, laughing in your face for not seeing it before.

- One student's ('24) experience: "The USMLE Rx website has a digital copy of First Aid with linked easy-to-process articles, (relatively simple) practice questions, videos, and flashcards. I found this very helpful!"
- *Quick tip: use the PDF version to quickly locate specific topics!*
- **BRS Physiology:**
 - High-yield, in-depth textbook
 - Use the latest edition if using
 - 2021 edition of this guide cites this student's thoughts: "This book carried me through first year, and I put my trust in it second year. I used it as an adjunct during my review days when I felt the physiology in FA wasn't enough." Not a book fan? Boards and Beyond (see below) contains much of the same material.
 - 2024 update:

ONLINE TEXTS

- **Amboss:**
 - Online informational resource and question bank
 - The format is in the style of wikipedia articles that are also linked to questions so you can quickly go to articles from the question bank. Some students use this for revisiting topics they find challenging.
 - Many of the learning materials are viewable without a subscription.
 - 2024 update:

VIDEO/TEXTBOOK COMBO

- **Pathoma:**
 - **High-yield pathology** covered in ~10-20 minute long online videos with an accompanying small textbook
 - Students can use the book, videos, or a combination of both
 - One student's experience: "I watched this a lot. Super helpful when I was doing a question to just hear his voice. He has a lot of great memory hooks and really focuses on the high yield topics. This is a little bit more bare bones as compared to Boards and Beyond."
 - 2024 update: Pathoma is an incredibly helpful tool for learning the various blood disorders (anemias, leukemias, platelet disorders, etc.). **Highly recommend.**

VIDEOS

- **Boards and Beyond:**
 - **In-depth videos covering high-yield physiology and pathology**
 - Some students use this as their primary resource for learning/refreshing topics not covered in 2nd year (ie biochemistry and immunology)
 - If you've been using this all year, you already know that it's fairly comprehensive for physiology and pathology. There are also **videos on high-yield biochemistry and immunology topics that you'll want to hit once dedicated starts.** This is useful for the first year topics that you probably haven't looked at in a while.
 - **Highly recommend.**
- **12DaysinMarch Videos:**
 - This has since turned into the Principles 4 course in the new Vista curriculum
 - Dr. Sachs' review videos that approach material with test-taking strategies in mind
 - If you like his lectures, you will probably like these videos
- Mehlman Medical

- High-yield quick videos and pdf documents by system that some students have found helpful-take a look!

○

AUDIO RECORDINGS

- **Divine Intervention:**

- **Audio podcasts** that review Step 1 topics and test-taking skills.
- One student's ('24) experience: "Divine Intervention is one a lot of people recommend. He has made like 500 podcasts on all different topics. Would be tough to listen to all of them, but great resource to find high-yield reviews of specific topics, and he has a Step 1 "rapid review" series that covers a variety of items."

- **Goljan Audio:**

- More of a review source than primary learning source, not used by many students anymore as the test had changed a lot since these recordings were made
- Audio recording of Dr. Goljan's review lectures from 2002 that can be found online.
- One student's experience: "Very entertaining guy. I downloaded them onto my phone and would listen to it first thing in the AM while I was getting ready and walking to school. I also listened in the car."
- Another student's experience: "I listened to Goljan but was never able to really retain the material. I should have stopped listening earlier and just accepted that it wasn't working for me!"

RETAINING INFORMATION: These are resources that students use to help them memorize and retain information. They include flashcards (Anki decks) and Sketchy videos.

SKETCHY: Short cartoons full of visual memory aids to help you remember all the nitty-gritty details that can be difficult to memorize. These could also be considered informational resources, especially Micro and Pharm.

Quick tip 1: Sometimes watching these videos a few times isn't enough to remember them well.

Some students use anki decks (ie Pepperdeck) to further engrain the sketchy videos into their heads. You can start with all cards in the deck hidden, and unhide the ones corresponding to the videos you have watched so that you gradually build a deck of all the sketches. This way you end up reviewing Sketchy videos you've already watched each day and you won't need to go back to rewatch.

Quick tip 2: Do the questions at the end of the videos to check your comprehension. Go back to the review cards on the Sketchy site to revisit the material in a connected manner. You can see how all the information and multiple videos are related in a way that you may not recall from card decks.

Quick tip 3: If you plan to incorporate Sketchy into your study schedule, try to set aside time to do 3-4 videos per day rather than watching them all towards the end (or beginning) of your dedicated period.

- **Sketchy Micro:**

- Short, simple videos. Most widely used of the sketchy series
- There are many different ways to incorporate these videos into your studying! Figure out what works best for you and stick with it.
- One student's experience: "I watched 3 daily with breakfast. I also reviewed bugs pertinent to the system I was working on. Other times, I watched this whenever

my brain was begging for a break, on the bike at the gym, and even sometimes when I was going to bed.”

- **Sketchy Pharm:**

- Longer videos than Sketchy Micro, but worth trying out if you like Sketchy Micro
- If you use this, you might consider watching each video more than once, or pairing it with the Sketchy Pepperdeck, to make sure you remember the longer videos.
- FA can be a succinct alternative for reviewing pharm.

- **Sketchy Path:**

- The longest of the Sketchy videos
- Understanding the pathophysiology of diseases is important so that you can reason through questions when you don't immediately know the answer. These videos don't provide enough detail for that.
- However, some students find this resource helpful for studying specific topics that require you to memorize many minute details (e.g. gynecologic tumors, nephritic and nephrotic diseases).
- One student's experience: “If I came across a certain topic that I was having difficulty memorizing, I would watch the Sketchy Path video to see if their memory hooks helped me. That being said, I only used it for the memory hooks and not to learn the actual pathophysiology.”

ANKI DECKS: These are pre-made flashcards covering a variety of high-yield topics

- **Sketchy Pepperdeck:**

- Covers all of Sketchy Pharm and Micro.
- One student's experience: “It was absolutely essential for helping me memorize everything covered in Sketchy. If you use Sketchy, you should absolutely use this deck; it will allow you to get the absolute most out of Sketchy, and you will be amazed at how easy it is to memorize the small details. After watching a sketch, I would add those cards to my deck and review my cards every day.”

- **Zanki:**

- A deck designed for students to review the information covered in First Aid.
- Provides a detailed review of organ systems, but does not cover micro or pharmacology.
- Question answers are short, and broken down into small chunks of information, so there are many cards to review in this deck.

- **AnKing:**

- This deck organizes cards from Zanki, as well as Lolnotacop and Sketchy Pepperdeck (both cover micro).
- Designed to be a comprehensive Step 1 review deck and has become popular recently.
- Questions tend to be short and close-ended (similar to Zanki).
- This deck also has information and screen captures from First Aid.
- Students generally choose to use AnKing or Lightyear, not both decks.

- **Lightyear:**

- Newer deck that correlates to the videos of Boards and Beyond.
- Helpful for those who like to watch the videos and reinforce the content of each video with the corresponding sections.
- Also contains information and screen captures from First Aid.
- Students generally choose to use AnKing or Lightyear, not both decks.

- **Maimonideck:**
 - This Anki deck covers many concepts on one card - fewer cards to review overall but each card is fairly detailed.
 - It has not been updated recently so it may not be a great deck to use going forward
 - One student's experience: "This was a great resource for me during OSD but by the time dedicated rolled around, it was too time-consuming. I dropped most of the cards from OSD that I felt good about and only kept some of the pharm cards in my deck. I did use the cards for first year material (biochem, immuno, etc.) and thought they were great. It really helped me nail down all the different cytokines and other small details without taking too much time. Remember that you won't do as many cards a day as your classmates using some of the other decks, and that's okay."
- **UWorld Cards**
 - Can easily make your own cards from questions - can copy/paste within the website and use images from questions to make the cards
 - Can use spaced repetition or your own system
- **How to use Anki:**
 - Suspending / Unsuspending Cards
 - **Suspend Cards:**
 - Select cards in the **Browse** window.
 - Press **Ctrl + J** (or right-click → Suspend).
 - Suspended cards appear *grayed out* and won't show in reviews.
 - **Unsuspend Cards:**
 - Select suspended cards (they'll be yellow).
 - Press **Ctrl + J** again (or right-click → Unsuspend).
 - **Suspend in Bulk:**
 - Search → Select All (**Ctrl + A**) → **Ctrl + J**.
 - Add-ons (features that help make your life easier!)
 - There is an add-on that helps you search for cards related to a particular UWorld Question ID# called "Better Search"
 - **Install Add-on:**
 - Go to Anki → Tools → Add-ons → Get Add-ons.
 - Paste this code: **1052729161** (BetterSearch) → Click "OK".
 - Restart Anki.
 - In the search bar type "xx" until a new window comes up, then type the UWorld ID# and click enter to reveal cards related to that question.
 - On the left hand side of the "Browse" tab, you can search for cards by "Tag"
 - Cards can be tagged according to which Boards & Beyond, Sketchy, or Pathoma etc. video they correspond to.
 - Cards are also tagged by subject matter if you do not use third party resources.
 - Color your cards!
 - Command 1, 2, 3, or 4 will color cards selected if you like to color code
 - Can mark cards as "never unsuspend" (red), or "unsuspend later" (orange) for example.

TL;DR

A general guideline is to choose:

1. A **primary resource** (ie Boards and Beyond) for detailed explanations
2. A **review resource** for high-yield, quick review (ie FA)
3. One or a few **retention resources** to help with memorization (ie sketchy, anki decks),
4. **UWorld** with or without an additional qbank to test your knowledge, get you accustomed to the question style, and improve your test-taking skills

Primary Resources

- Pathoma (popular)
- Boards and Beyond (popular)
- First Aid Organ Systems
- BRS Physiology
- Kaplan Biochemistry

Review Resources

- First Aid (popular)
- Divine Intervention
- 12DaysinMarch

Retention Resources

- Sketchy Micro (popular)
- Sketchy Pharm (popular)
- Sketchy Path
- AnKing (popular)
- Zanki (popular)
- Sketchy Pepperdeck (popular)
- Lightyear
- Brosencephalon
- Maimonideck

Question Banks

- UWorld (popular, **really essential resource**)
- Kaplan
- AMBOSS
- USMLERx

What do I do at the end of second year?

There is no “perfect” study schedule. Students will structure their schedules in every which way with similar results. However, we are including one student’s plan because looking at an actual schedule can help you think about how to structure your time.

One student’s experience: “I made some mistakes, but I listened to my scores and my needs, and I tweaked my approach accordingly. JUST BE REAL. Don’t waste extra time on cardiology if you’re

beasting it on every UWorld block. Some people will do this because it feels good to see a good score, and we all need a confidence boost here and there, so I get it. But your time would be better spent on whatever you struggle with.

My plan:

January/February: When we started the spring term, I began incorporating embryology and anatomy pertinent to the systems being presented at that time. I didn't persevere on them, but I did look at them. I did not buy UWorld until January. I started trying to do 40 question blocks covering all systems here and there, excluding biochem, embryology, anatomy, and biostats. I focused heavily on solidifying GI, even when we moved on to Repro. GI is a huge portion of Step 1. It is one of the largest sections in FA, and the sooner you get comfortable with the physiology, the easier it will be to return to when you're in dedicated. Around the end of second year (mid-February), I made a schedule leading up to the last NBME that had time dedicated to reviewing the old systems, with time at the end for GI/Repro since I wanted those freshest in my mind. I did at least 1 40 q block daily (I used up my Kaplan questions too). It was something like this:

8 days before NBME: Derm/MSK *(you can do Derm very quickly, e.g. by watching Pathoma)*

7 days before NBME: Respiratory

6 days before NBME: Cardiology

5 days before NBME: Renal

4 days before NBME: Endo/Repro

3 days before NBME: GI

2 days before NBME: Lots of questions with in-depth review

1 day before NBME: Revisited problem areas identified from previously seen questions"

Enjoy yourself post-NBME - Your Step 1 performance will not change significantly because you continued to crush 500000000 Anki cards after your exam (and told all your classmates that you did).

What is the Principles 4 (P4) course?

Many students aren't class goers because the class structure just doesn't work for them, there's too much material all at once, etc. That being said, Principles 4 is an online course focused not only on high yield facts but also on really helpful techniques and approaches to Step 1 questions. These videos were made by Dr. Sachs and were designed not only to review high-yield topics, but also to teach you *how* to take Step 1.

How do I schedule my dedicated period?

How you schedule this time will vary greatly depending on your strengths and weaknesses. An example schedule is provided below. However, we **strongly recommend** that you work with your Peer Mentors, the CAA, or other academic advisors to develop a personalized schedule.

I'm still lost. Can you show me your schedule?

Disclaimer: These schedules were made in the previous curriculum which included the "Patients" course. That content has now transitioned to the "Principles 4" course.

Some students use **Blueprint** which is, per one student's report, a free website that can organize a study plan for you based on which resources you want to use and how much time you have. It can factor in vacation time and missed study days. It creates a checklist every day for study items that you should complete in order to finish your resources by the specified date.

Example Schedule 1

KEY:

Black text = Patients topic covered that day

Green text = what I studied that day

Orange text = notable dates

Anything in italics = something I decided to study based on CBSSA performance

Sun	Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat
	Hepatic and Pancreas GI review	GI Heme	Heme I Heme	MSK anatomy Biochem	Endo Biochem	Biochem
Biochem	Cardio I Path FA	Cardio II Path + Onc	MSK Immuno	MSK, Pulm I Neuro anatomy Catch-up day	Pulm II Pharm basics	Micro (abx)
Micro (abx)	Renal Micro basics	Renal Heme II Heme onc drugs	Prep for patients NBME (blocks of q's)	Patients NBME	Official start of reading period Public health	Neuro path

3w to test CBSSA	Review test	<i>Anatomy – MSK and nervous</i>	<i>Anatomy – all the rest</i>	<i>Embryo</i>	<i>Cell biology</i>	<i>Genetics</i>
2w to test CBSSA with 2 blocks from the website	Review test	<i>Immuno</i>	<i>Genetics</i>	<i>Cell biology</i>	<i>Path</i>	<i>Heme</i>
1w to test <i>GI and repro</i>	<i>Neuro anatomy Immuno</i>	<i>Psych Bugs and drugs</i>	<i>Biochem, cell bio, genetics</i>	<i>Anatomy Embryo</i>	<i>Biostats Pharm basics</i>	DAY OFF BEFORE EXAM

Example Schedule 2:

Notes from CAA (*specific to my study style and needs at the time):

- During Patients you will get Q's during lecture so it is okay if you don't do Q's during weekdays - option is to do a set of 20-40 on weekends, mixed or covering Patients topic.
- During reading period - each day you can assign yourself a topic based on your practice test feedback (and your experience). If all items seem equal then start each day with 80 mixed UWorld (everything that will be on exam) and direct your studying in the afternoon based on challenging topics that came up.
- SOM 1 Step 1 Content - after complete a SOM 1 topic - do a set of UWorld focused Q's - when incorrect look up in the moment and track in your charts
 - Biochemistry - B&B (9 hrs.)
 - Genetics - B&B (3 hrs.)
 - Microbiology basics (more than just specific bugs and drugs) - goal starting February 21 30 mins. per day of table
 - Pathology basics – neoplasia, inflammation - Pathoma
 - Pharmacology – kinetics, dynamics, and drugs addressed during SOM 1 - review as comes along in Q's
 - Immunology - Pathoma
 - Hematology - Pathoma
 - Oncology - Pathoma
 - Public Health Sciences (biostats, ethics, legal, behavioral science) - Dr. Kneeland, FA, B&B (2hrs)
 - Anatomy - with Organ Systems - FA - as you do Q's highlight in table
 - Embryology - Dr. Das
 - Cell Injury and death - Pathoma
 - Histology - Dr. Das

- UWorld Q's - when get incorrect refer to FA - add it to your chart and highlight as feedback - studying for NBME 3 or Step 1 - highlighted topics will priorities

Sun	Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat
			Cardio I Pathoma Ch 1 + UWorld	Cardio II Pathoma Ch 2 + UWorld	Endo Pathoma Ch 2 + UWorld	Pathoma Ch 3 + UWorld
Pathoma Ch 4 + UWorld	Pulm I Pathoma Ch 5 + UWorld	Pulm II Pathoma Ch 5 + UWorld	MSK Pathoma Ch 6 + UWorld	Pathoma Ch 7 + UWorld	GI Biochem + UWorld	Biochem + UWorld
Biochem/ genetics + UWorld	GI Genetics + UWorld	GI II Catch-up day + UWorld	Renal Catch-up day + UWorld	Review Catch-up day + UWorld	Review 3w to test CBSSA	Review CBSSA
Rest Day	Patients NBME	UWorld 80-120qs per day Topics focused on need	UWorld	UWorld	2w to test CBSSA with 2 blocks from USMLE free 120	Review test
UWorld	UWorld	UWorld	UWorld	UWorld	1w to test CBSSA	Review test
UWorld Psych Bugs and drugs	UWorld Biochem, cell bio, genetics	UWorld Anatomy Embryo	UWorld Biostats Pharm basics	DAY OFF BEFORE EXAM	Step 1	

Example Schedule 3:

Below is a link to an excel-stylesheet that is one way a student organized content review using some of the above resources! Some students do this, other students use programs such as Microsoft OneNote to organize content in a similar way, use whatever feels most comfortable to you!

 [Study Tracker Blank](#)

What was the first practice exam like?

Terrifying. But that is kind of a good thing. The real test will be terrifying too, and that stress will drive you to do your best every time. This is normal! Try to stay in control (be mindful!), and remember it's not real. If it goes poorly, don't lose your mind. No one needs to know! Remember, these practice tests are for your individualized planning only! Use the results to tailor the rest of your studying.

What do I do after the first practice exam?

Use the results of your practice exam to guide subsequent studying. This may be a good time to connect with your Peer Mentors, the CAA, or other academic advisors to help interpret the results and adjust your plan.

One student's experience: "Feeling ok with my first score, the next week I just did UWorld questions, block after block with no structure. I took another practice exam the following week. My score didn't really change (in fact it went down a little bit). That's when I realized (again) that I needed structure. I looked at my exam results and picked what chapters I was struggling with and always had a focus for every day but still ALWAYS made it a point to be doing 2-3 40q blocks."

The closer you get to the test date, the more you need to be honest with yourself. Do you know cardiology physiology like the back of your hand? Awesome! **When you get that question right on a QBank, don't sit there reviewing it for 20 minutes. Skim it, move on.** On the other hand, do you completely hate all the auto-antibodies for Rheum and tense up whenever you see a question with them? Spend time there.

How do I study first year material for Step 1?

ANATOMY: The anatomy content on Step 1 is generally focused on topics with clinical relevance. Anatomy is really hard to learn again, and given that there's not a lot of time to re-learn it, **you should consider focusing on the high-yield aspects that you're most likely to be tested on.** Learning the brachial plexus is going to be a lot more efficient than memorizing the origin and insertion of every single muscle in the leg. Honestly, you're almost guaranteed to get some anatomy questions on the test that you just don't know how to answer. Don't dwell on these (maybe they're the experimental questions!) and move on. **High-yield topics include MSK (brachial plexus, nerve roots and reflexes,**

muscles involved in pathology of the legs/gait), neuroanatomy, cardio, and GI (especially the vasculature). There are many anatomy resources out there and none are really complete, but the more comprehensive ones are the Boards and Beyond videos, the anatomy sections of First Aid, and Step 1 Secrets.

BIOCHEMISTRY: Many students worry about covering biochem for the exam. The material can be challenging and require lots of memorization, so it is important to focus on high-yield concepts. **First Aid and Boards and Beyond provide fairly in-depth coverage.** 12DaysinMarch videos provide the highest of high yields. All of the big Step 1 anki decks (AnKing, Zanki, etc) have biochem cards that some students find helpful for memorization.

BIO-STATS: You will get at least a few bio-stats questions on the exam, but these can be easy points if you review the material. Boards and Beyond, First Aid, and anki cards are all good resources.

Quick tip: Most students will set aside the last couple days of dedicated to going over biostats. Don't underestimate the power of knowing you got the biostats questions right when you're in the middle of an 8-hour test.

Where can I find practice exams?

National Board of Medical Examiners (NBME) exams can be found on mynbme.org. You must make an account with the system. Click “purchase,” then “view self-assessments,” then “self-assessments for USMLE,” then “Comprehensive Basic Science Self-Assessment (CBSSA).” There are currently seven exams, known as “forms,” available from the NBME. Each “form” has four sections of 50 questions each, for a total of 200 questions.

UWorld also has two practice exams, known as SIM1 and SIM2. As soon as the exam is activated, it can be used for 14 days, after which point you can no longer take it. Each exam consists of four sections of 40 questions each, for a total of 160 questions.

United States Medical Licensing Exam (USMLE) has a free, three-section, 120 question test online. Link to this exam can be found here: <https://orientation.nbme.org/Launch/USMLE/>.

Quick tip: Many students will use these free blocks to supplement one of the NBME self-assessments (CBSSAs) to simulate a full test day of 280 questions.

How many practice exams should I do? When should I do them?

At least 3. Doing a practice test early in your studying can be beneficial to see what areas you should prioritize to begin your studying. Some students choose to not do a practice exam one week out because they fear it will damage their confidence. Others take one because they want to set their expectations appropriately. It's up to you. If you feel comfortable with just doing 2, do that. If you think you are emotionally strong enough to take another exam one week out, then do it, **but make sure you're going to be able to bounce back if it isn't exactly what you want to see.** If you can't make up your mind, talk to your Peer Mentors, the CAA, or your other academic advisors.

A tip: do your first practice exam as is (they're shorter than the actual exam). **On the second practice you take, add 2 UWorld or USMLE blocks to the end of the exam to simulate the real timing.** Don't look at the NBME score before you start the UWorld blocks!

UWorld also has practice exams. The UWorld scores don't always correlate well with the NBME practice exams, but you can mix and match the two for more practice.

How to best utilize UWorld/question banks?

When doing review questions, here are some things to keep in mind:

In general, it can be helpful to do a mix of both random, mixed-content blocks as well as subject-specific blocks.

Mixed blocks

Mixed content blocks allow you to test your knowledge without any pre-existing knowledge of what subject a particular question falls in which may influence your thinking. Of course, this is what the test will be like so it allows you to simulate testing conditions as closely as you can.

Subject-specific blocks

Where subject specific blocks shine is addressing areas of gaps in your knowledge or continuing to learn about specific subjects. Doing question banks on untimed, tutor mode of solely that subject rather than mixed content blocks allows you to learn as you go and have the opportunity to apply knowledge from recent previous questions to really solidify the concept. You learn a concept or disease process, and often that concept you learn will appear again in that block as a possible answer choice, allowing you to solidify your knowledge of this topic by thinking through why that may again be the right answer, or why you know it is not the correct answer this time based on the data provided.

In the Fall:

- Do these untimed on tutor mode (where they will give you the right answer immediately after the question)
- If a topic is way over your head, then just add it to the review/relearning list
- Spend more time on reviewing why you got the question wrong. Ask yourself if you just guessed, if you thought something was X when it was Y, because that will help address the underlying concern.

In the Spring (not Dedicated):

Start to do these in a timed manner, so you can get the pace down. The pace is about 1.5 minutes per question.

Dedicated:

- Try to get to do blocks of 40 at a time, timed and untutored (meaning it won't give you the final answer until you finish the entire block). This is how Step 1 is actually set up. It's like 8 blocks of 40 at a time.

Students have typically utilized Uworld blocks in the fall/spring to study for the relevant curriculum material as well (using cardiology uworld sets to study for the cardio nbme for example) which will certainly be helpful.

What do I do if I can't finish all of UWorld?

It's okay. UWorld is a beast. Not everyone finishes it, and not everyone needs to. UWorld questions are great prep for Step 1, so consider doing as many as you can **without getting overwhelmed and burning out**. Some people will do all of UWorld twice, some will get through it once, and some will take Step 1 with hundreds of questions still unused. This is a very personal decision, so please contact your Peer Mentors, the CAA, or your other academic advisors if you need help with this.

My CBSE score was not good. What should I do?

The CBSE is a highly stressful experience, and many students see their scores and immediately become concerned about their future prospects. **It's okay to feel anxious, but please ask for help if it's preventing you from moving forward in your preparation.** A low CBSE score just means that you haven't yet finished your studying. Remember that the CBSE is **SO** early in your studies. There is nowhere to go but up! You haven't had dedicated studying yet to really solidify and integrate concepts, so please look at this as an opportunity to see where you should focus your studies rather than a marker of future success.

One student's experience: "Personally, I was very disappointed with my CBSE grade. It sucked to go through. I wanted to drop out of UMMS. I may have even cried. But then I stopped pitying myself, and I owned my low bars and geared my focus towards that. This helped me prioritize, and motivated me to crush those blocks during Sachs's review. As an aside, my actual Step 1 score was 46 points higher than my CBSE score. Plenty of people have similar stories of their score jumping 30-50+ points. I know people who failed the CBSE and got stellar Step 1 scores. I hope that helps!"

What should I do for fun?

Despite the stress and endless hours of studying and preparing for STEP 1, it's important to realize that you also should have moments during your 'dedicated' where you should relax and have fun! It gives you some time to reset your brain and to refocus. Here's some suggestions for things to do:

- Taking a walk/going on a short hike
- Exercise
- Cooking
- Trying that restaurant you've been wanting to go to
- Baking
- Calling friends/family/your support system (and NOT talking about STEP 1)
- Yoga
- Meditation
- Video games

Will I ever feel ready for Step 1?

Probably not. Many of us sometimes still can't believe it happened. People usually don't ever feel ready for it. Recognize that you're not going to get a 100%, and no one ever ever does. Accept that you

might not know a thing or two here and there. If you are a couple weeks out, and you know you're bad at something, try to focus your time on that tough topic.

One student's experience: "I hated Epidemiology and Biostatistics and thought it was dull and boring. I was never good at it, but everyone said it was so easy. I took it for granted, barely ever focused on it, and convinced myself I would just know it. Turns out that isn't how life works, and the worst bar on my actual exam was epibio. Probably the dumbest thing I ever did. Please learn from my mistakes!"

On the other hand, if you feel super ready, trust in that! There is a fabled "personal stride" that people will allude to as the date nears. It's when you're scoring your best, know the maximum amount of information without losing more than you gain, and have just the right amount of confidence with questions. The dream is to hit this right on exam day!

Should I delay my exam?

Choosing to delay your exam is a difficult decision, however it may be necessary or helpful based on your individual situation. Delaying your exam **DOES NOT** mean that you are a failure or that you are "not smart enough" or that you are lazy or that your graduation is in dire straits. You may choose to delay your exam if it looks like you will not pass. You may choose to delay if you have a personal or familial issue that is more important than an exam right now. You may choose to delay for a reason not listed here. Whatever the reason, it is a valid one and we want you to make the best decision for you.

If you are considering delaying your exam for any reason, please contact the CAA. They will be able to review your overall year 2 average, NBME scores, and CBSE, to help predict how you will perform on Step 1. The Center for Academic Achievement (CAA) also offers tutoring and management of study schedules to help assist you on your journey.

What tips do you have for actually taking the exam?

1. **Take your practice exams the way you plan to take the actual exam.** Make a plan for breaks, see if it works, and stick with it if it does. One student's experience: "I knew I could do 2 blocks right off the bat with no break but would need more breaks the closer I got to lunch time. I did all my practice exams similarly."
2. **When you feel yourself panicking, remember that you have studied well and that there are experimental questions.** It can also be helpful to remind yourself that some of the questions in the exam are experimental questions that don't count toward your score. Use this as a defense mechanism if you're feeling yourself panicking mid-exam.
3. **Don't do what you're being told you "should" do.** There is literally no "right" way to spend your breaks and no "right" way to schedule them. Do what works for you, even if it's not what your friends are doing. Listen to your gut. Talk to the CAA if you need further help structuring your breaks.
4. **Check out the tutorial before the exam.** Step 1 looks a lot like UWorld (not the NBME practice exams...which makes no sense).
 - a. *Quick tip: If you do the tutorial in advance, you can skip it on test day. The time allotted to the tutorial (15 minutes or so) then gets added on to your overall break time instead.*

5. **Take a drive by the testing center before the test date.** You will eliminate a lot of unnecessary pre-exam anxiety if you know where you're going, where to park, etc.
6. **If you're taking the exam in Worcester, park across the street.** Designated parking for examinees is at 66 Millbrook Street. This seems silly, but there have been students who didn't park there and had to move their cars before they could start the exam.
7. **Consider going outside to get some fresh air during your breaks.** Just be mindful of the time!

How did you feel coming out of the test?

Everyone comes out of Step 1 feeling differently, so the most important thing to remember is that **your feelings are valid, no matter what they are**. A few people will walk out feeling great, and that's awesome! You've worked hard for months and just crushed the longest and most difficult exam you've ever taken. Be proud of yourself and all that you've accomplished.

Most people, however, will come out feeling awful. This is also a completely legitimate feeling because Step 1 is really hard. Remember that the UMass pass rate for this exam is excellent. In fact, the first time pass rate was 100% for the Class of 2020 and the Class of 2021. Remember that you did your best. Try not to dwell on it too much, and enjoy your time off!

When will I get my results?

Scores are released on Wednesdays, and you'll get yours either the 3rd or 4th Wednesday after you take the exam. Check the USMLE bulletin for the most up-to-date information. You will likely get an email around 10 am saying your score will be available at around 11 am. This may happen during your Transition to 3rd Year week; you will have breaks between sessions that you can use to check your performance. If you would prefer to see whether you passed alone, seek out a private space before you read your email and see your score.

Any other advice?

You will survive, just as the rest of us have! Don't forget to do all the things that make you happy, like sleeping, eating food, or watching a couple hours of TV on a Saturday night as a reward. You need planned breaks in your weeks! **You should take at least 1 half day off per week - put this in your schedule!** Honestly, it's the small things that will get you through it. None of this is fun, but it's doable. Once you develop a routine, you can be sure that you're getting your studying done without sacrificing your personal wellness. You're going to be amazed by how intelligent you become (and how quickly it will escape you after!). When you feel you can't possibly fit anything else in your head, spend some time fantasizing about whatever beautiful thing you have planned for afterwards. Lean on your friends - you may get closer to people in your class who you've never really talked to! We (as a collective institution) are all here for you and want to see you succeed! This too shall pass.

If you are having trouble fitting in break time, please talk with the CAA, Student Counseling Services, your mentors, or any other of your supports in order to make a plan. We all want you feeling your best as you go through this process.

TL;DR

- You will survive, just like all of us have!
- Take time to do things that make you happy as a reward
- Plan breaks!
- Develop a routine
- Lean on your friends as support
- Don't be afraid to ask for help. Talk to the CAA, Student Counseling Services, Peer Mentors, or any other supports if you need it!
- Remember, you are more than just a 3 digit number!

Further Questions?

Contact your Peer Mentors, the CAA, or other academic advisors if you have questions about:

- Topic specific questions. For example: “How did you study antibiotics?” or “What resources were helpful for MSK anatomy?”
- When (and if) to stop using flashcards
- Which practice tests to do
- How to review your practice tests
- Where to take your post-Step vacation
- **Anything and everything else** you have questions about!

Credits

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