

AMA and AEC Study Strategies

Step 1 Student Panel—February 23, 2009

M3, 267

1. General Advice about Step 1

It is the middle of February. If you haven't already, I would start studying for Step 1 NOW. The most important advice that I can give is to NOT use too many sources. I learned this before second year even started as I had seen how my girlfriend prepared for the exam (she is a year ahead of me) and I had also read an email composed by the late great Brett Williams (class of 07- now at Harvard- low 270's on step one). After reading through his bulky email- this guy was a big jokester- he finally outlined what books are essential for Step 1. I'll put these in the beginning of my strategy advice too emphasize their importance- **FIRST AID for STEP 1, BRS Pathology, BRS Physiology**. He mentions two others but I will get to those later (Katzung Pharm, Robbin's Review).

At the end of the year you will see all of your classmates go and buy these bulky review books that are way too much to get through in the short 5-6 weeks that I would recommend taking to study for this exam. If it were me, and I was in your position wanting to know what I should do to prepare for STEP 1 from today forward here is what I would do.

Buy the three key books from the 1st paragraph. I would study for my classes during the week using class notes. The weekends, I would devote entirely to boards (like 8 hrs on sat and sun). I would go chapter by chapter and paraphrase everything from BRS path into the similar sections in First Aid until all the info in BRS path is in First Aid. This serves two purposes- it helps you memorize the information as you write it for yourself and it eliminates the need to go through BRS path as you are studying for boards during the summer so that all you need is your First Aid.

On the weekends I would also go through BRS physiology section by section and then go through the corresponding physio sections in First Aid. You want to make sure you know the concepts in BRS physio like the back of your hand because on the exam they don't test physio concepts just as standard questions. The questions involve a lot of graphs and data tables and you have to be able to **APPLY** the concepts. I would not attempt to paraphrase BRS physio into First Aid because it is entirely too much info. First aid sticks to more clinical concepts.

For pharmacology I would simply only use First Aid. You need to really put time into the pharm sections in First Aid because all of the sections are just basically huge lists- which should be memorized.

For all other subjects (micro, anatomy, biochem, immuno, etc.) I would only use FIRST AID- put time into these chapters and memorize everything because it is all high, high yield.

So essentially when you start studying you should hopefully have made it through everything once and really only be using BRS physiology and First Aid since all of the path is already paraphrased.

2. If you formed study groups, how did you go about forming them, and how effective were they?

NO

3. What books did you find essential for preparing for this exam?

First Aid, BRS Pathology, BRS physiology

4. What other books did you use?

As you can tell I believe strongly in sticking to the three books I have listed.

Books that personally I would not use:

1. High yield/BRS anatomy- Actually pretty low yield. The first day that I started studying after school was over I tried going through a section and it took me like 2 hrs and I felt like I hadn't learned

anything. Use First Aid for anatomy- the neurology section has a bunch of high yield anatomy that is actually tested along with the GI section. Rely on First Aid and your Q-bank for anatomy.

2. Embryology books- biggest waste of time, only use section in First Aid
3. Micro Made Simple- once again much too thick. Put more time into memorizing everything in First Aid micro section- it is a lot more high yield. I would personally throw this book in the trash today, along with Robbin's if you are planning on using them.
4. Robbin's path- either big boy, baby or questions- useless, too time consuming, see above
5. High Yield Behavioral- once again too much- just memorize psych and behavioral/stats section in AID
6. Any other books- probably useless, everything is in the AID and BRS path/phys
7. Pharm books- way to detailed- First Aid has it all
8. Goljan Path- Very thick and I would think it would be tough to get through if you haven't used it from beginning of year, use at own risk, some people swear by it

5. Do you have any recommendations or general comments about Question Banks? How useful were they in your studies? Which ones did you use?

I used USMLE world for 1 month. I would suggest starting right when school ends because it takes awhile to get through. I would suggest timed, random blocks of 50 because it helps you to continually think about all topics and is like the real exam- as opposed to doing like a block of 50 cardio ?'s. Overall, I would say the u-world helps you in preparing for test day and gives you a break from studying your first aid, but as far as how many more questions I got right because of it I can't say. I think the bulk of correct questions you get are going to be from studying First Aid- so don't use u-world as primary source.

6. How early did you begin studying? How early did you REALLY begin to study? Would you go back and change that if you could?

Up to this point I have been talking hypothetically about what I would do if I started studying from mid-Feb forward. I actually started studying the from day one of class 2nd year as I would paraphrase every class note into First Aid and then only use the AID to study for organ systems exams. Some would say I actually started studying the summer before second year because I had gone through a couple of sections in BRS physio. So I was not in your position if you have not started to study yet. With that said, I do believe that you can do excellent on this exam if you stick to these three books and use the method that I have outlined. Essentially I ended up doing this myself as I had to rewrite a lot of notes in first aid because some of the chapters I had paraphrased were very sloppy.

7. How long did you prepare for?

I would suggest a 5-6 week preparation. I would take the first three weeks and get through First Aid and BRS physio once. Then I would study just First Aid again all the way through for 2 weeks. Then I would give myself one more day to hit all drugs the day before the exam. Then take the exam.

I actually went through things three times as opposed to two in six weeks, but the third time through I think I forgot a lot more than I learned. So five weeks I think is optimum.

8. What was your everyday schedule like once you really began to study?

Start at 7:30a and study until 5p. Hit a dinner meal and then hit a session from 6-10p of either questions from Q-bank or pharmacology. Sorry folks, not many days off- a half day I think for dinner with a visiting aunt.

9. How did you plan your schedule?

Just went through AID sequentially.

10. How many days did you dedicate to each subject? What was the breakdown?

One day per organ system. Micro and biochem were like 2 days a piece.

11. What did you do a week before the exam? A few days before the exam?

10 days before the exam I took a practice exam. I would suggest taking one after you make it through all of the material in the first three weeks. I wouldn't take more than two practice exams because they take a lot of time and you don't get to see the answers. And they are expensive.

12. How did you deal with difficult questions? ☐ Thoughts on changing your answer and avoiding fatigue?

You are not going to know everything. I don't think fatigue was a big factor.

13. What was your strategy at reading and answering the question in the allotted time?

Just go as fast as you can while still paying attention. Time maybe a problem so practice with your q-bank.

14. Closing remarks? If you were going to do it all over again, what would you do differently, and what would you keep the same?

KEEP THE SAME- First Aid, BRS Path, BRS Physio- that is my best advice- it is streamlined, but the better you know all of this material the better you will do. Don't go study some obscure topic if you don't know your basic path, pharm, phys, micro, immuno and biochem.

15. Please fill out the following 2-month schedule based on your study recommendations:

MAY

SUN	MON	TUES	WEDS	THURS	FRI	SAT
					1	2
3	4	5 LAST DAY OF CLASS	6 Cardio	7 Endocrine	8 GI	9 Hem/Onc
10 Musculoskeletal	11 Neurology	12 Psych	13 Renal	14 Reproductive	15 Respiratory	16 Behavioral Science
17 Biochem	18 Biochem	19 Embryo	20 Micro	21 Micro	22 Immuno	23 General Path
24 General Pharm	25 Practice Exam	26 Endocrine	27 GI	28 Hem/Onc	29 MS	30 Psych
31 Reproductive						

JUNE

SUN	MON	TUES	WEDS	THURS	FRI	SAT
	1 Renal	2 Respiratory	3 Neurology	4 Cardio	5 Behavioral science	6 Biochem
7 Biochem/embryo	8 Micro	9 Micro/Immuno	10 Gen Path and Pharm	11 All drugs	12 Test	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30				

M4, 230s

- General Advice about Step 1** My advice, take it or leave it, it worked for me, but might not work for everybody. Make a schedule and stick to it. Leave yourself days to catch up or relax. Find Goljian's notes. They are awesome. Don't waste time learning every little detail. Learn basics first and then build on that. Stick with it day by day. Everyone is stressing, but don't let it overwhelm you. Just relax and take it a little at a time.
- How did you approach this exam?** I wanted to go into orthopedics so I knew that Step 1 was very important as some programs have cutoffs of 220, 230 and even 240 to even look at your application. Know what field you're going into and what the scores are needed to be a competitive applicant and set a reasonable goal (mine was 220-230). Know your strengths and weaknesses when it comes to studying and adapt to it (I'm better studying on my own, but I am also easily distracted, so I went to my uncle's cabin in Michigan for 1 month to start studying and I know I am a procrastinator so I forced myself to make a schedule). Leave a few open "review" days to catch up because things happen (friend's weddings, illness, etc.) or just to relax.
- Did you use a subject review or a systems-based approach, and how well did that prepare you?** I did one go through with a subject review approach and then the second time through did systems-based so that I would get a different view of the same subject and hope it would stick better. See Schedule.
- If you formed study groups, how did you go about forming them, and how effective were they?** I studied on my own mostly or would occasionally form a group of two and quiz each other on certain topics we felt weak on.
- What is your advice on:** ☐ Mnemonics, ☐ Memorizing, ☐ Faculty review sessions, ☐ Commercial courses, etc. Whatever helps you remember best. I wouldn't know the colors of the rainbow, planets,

or the classification of organisms without mnemonics. Know what works best for you. I'm easily would easily go golfing, out to dinner, or whatever if I stayed in Toledo with my roommates so I went back to Michigan. I study on my own so I don't like courses or review sessions, because they aren't adapted to my own personal needs, run at a slower pace, and usually filled with people asking questions I don't care about or don't matter.

6. What books did you find essential for preparing for this exam?

- a. Goljian Notes (Greatest thing ever)
- b. Step Up (Good basic information. More information than First Aid in my opinion)
- c. USMLE Recall: Buzzwords for Boards (Quiz book I would take on walks or during down time)
- d. Deja Review (Quiz book I would take on walks or during down time)

7. What other books did you use?

- a. Microbiology and Physiology Made Ridiculous Simple
- b. Robbins Path Book (Good for clarification or to learn in depth about something you're having a rough time with, but I mostly just used the Q book that came with it)
- c. Goljian Audio (Good for gym, runs, or car rides)
- d. First Aid (Good on Basics, leaves room for notes, but I thought it was too basic and didn't use)

8. Do you have any recommendations or general comments about Question Banks? How useful were they in your studies? Which ones did you use?

- a. USMLE World (Best question site, gives great explanations)
 - b. Kaplan (Good questions, but crappy explanations. Good for the full-length exam option)
- I study best by doing lots and lots of questions either through pocket Q books or the online Qbanks so I did more questions than book reading. I would then go over areas I got wrong on my review days.

9. How early did you begin studying? How early did you REALLY begin to study? Would you go back and change that if you could? Started really studying the day after last exam. During Organ Sys tried to learn material so it would stick. I would like to have started earlier, but in reality I would never have done it even if I had to do it again. You get burnt out towards the end.

10. How long did you prepare for? Day after last exam until step 1. About 5 ½ weeks. See Schedule.

11. What was your everyday schedule like once you really began to study? See Schedule

12. How did you plan your schedule? Talked to 4th years about their schedule/recommendations and then made my own

13. How many days did you dedicate to each subject? What was the breakdown? See Schedule

14. What did you do a week before the exam? A few days before the exam? See Schedule

15. How did you deal with difficult questions? □ Thoughts on changing your answer and avoiding fatigue? I would think about them for a few seconds, pick the answer, marked it for review and then after I had made it through all the questions. I would go back over the questions I had marked and would spend more time thinking about them after making it through all the questions first. Not worth wasting time over one difficult question to hurriedly guess at and miss easy questions later in that block because you're crunched for time. Avoid fatigue by resting day before, going through practice full length exams, and take breaks when you need it.

16. Can you think of any other question that you yourself had before taking this exam? How would you answer them now? I asked around for any study aids/notes that friends had and also shared anything that I had with them.

17. What was your strategy at reading and answering the question in the allotted time? Take the half-length or full length practice exams once or twice. When doing Qbank questions you can do them timed as well.

18. Closing remarks? If you were going to do it all over again, what would you do differently, and what would you keep the same? I wish I wouldn't have had to attend the mandatory review course after classes were out. I thought it was a waste and I could've used that time studying better on my own. I thought at the time that I could've used another week of studying, but in retrospect I don't think it would've made a difference. I was burnt out at the end and it was nice to get a little break before starting 3rd year.

19. Please fill out the following 2-month schedule based on your study recommendations:

I ran through once based on subjects than ran through everything again based on systems.

Pathology – 5 days, Physiology – 3 days, Pharmacology – 4 days, Immunity and Infection – 5 days, Histology – 1day, Biochemistry – 2 days, Anatomy – 2 days, Neurology – 1 day, Behavioral – 2 days, Systems – 6 days, Behavioral/Ethics – 1 day

Review days every 5-7 days and a day of nothing before the exam

Example Daily Schedule

7am – Run & Breakfast
 8am-noon – Subject 1
 Noon – Lunch
 1pm-3pm – Subject 2
 3pm – Break: Run, Work out, Walk the Dog, Something
 4pm-6pm – Subject 2
 6pm – Dinner
 7pm-9pm – Questions (100-200)
 9pm – TV or Movie then bed

Example Study Calendar

MAY

SUN	MON	TUES	WEDS	THURS	FRI	SAT
					1	2
3	4	5 LAST DAY OF CLASS	6	7 Pathology -Basics - Cardiovascular	8 Pathology - Hematopoietic -Respiratory	9 Pathology -Musculo- skeletal -Renal
10 Pathology -GI & Liver - Reproductive	11 Pathology -CNS - Endocrine	12 Review Day	13 Physiology -Cell - Cardiovascular -GI	14 Physiology -Renal -Respiratory	15 Physiology -Endocrine -Neurophys	16 Review Day
17 Pharm -Pharma- cokinetics -Chemo- therapeutics	18 Pharm -ANS Drugs -CNS Drugs	19 Pharm - Cardiovascular -Anti-inflams & Pain Drugs	20 Pharm -Endocrine -Other	21 Review Day	22 I&I -Bacteria	23 I&I -Bacteria
24 I&I -Viruses	25 I&I -Viruses	26 I&I -Fungi -Parasites	27 Review Day	28 Histology	29 Biochem	30 Biochem
31 Anatomy						

JUNE

SUN	MON	TUES	WEDS	THURS	FRI	SAT
	1 Anatomy	2 Neurology	3 Behavioral	4 Behavioral	5 Review Day	6 Systems - Cardiovascular
7 Systems - Hematology	8 Systems - Respiratory	9 Systems -Renal	10 Systems -GI & Liver	11 Systems -CNS & Musculoskeletal	12 Behavioral and Ethics	13 Review Day
14 Review Day	15 Relax!!!	16 Exam	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30				

M4, 239/99

1. General Advice about Step 1

It is an important exam, but don't think of it as the most important decision maker for residency matching---this just puts more pressure on yourself. Think about it as a way to review the information you learned throughout the past 2 years that you will need to know in a few months when you're on the floors.

It is a marathon, the hardest part was staying focused for 8 hours. Put this into your study strategy....include full-length practice exams (7 question blocks) in your calendar.

Above all, DON'T FREAK OUT! You will be well prepared, remember that UT students historically do very well on this exam 😊

2. How did you approach this exam?

The first step is knowing how you best learn/study. For example, I tend to learn best from questions and applying the information to clinical scenarios. I went for understanding concepts and disease processes over simple memorization.

Picking a date: Most people in the class ahead of me took 4-6 weeks to study, so I picked a date at 6 weeks after the last exam to all some flex time. This was a great time to take the exam, but I may have even been able to take it a week earlier.

How much to study: I don't remember much from long, drawn out sessions, so I did many short bursts (2-3 hours at a time), with frequent scenery changes. I probably visited every coffee shop and public library in Toledo at least once! I also used question banks as my primary study source.

3. Did you use a subject review or a systems-based approach, and how well did that prepare you?

Systems based. I found this to be a good approach to integrate material. I chose to study biochem and I&I as individual subjects, but everything else was tied into organ systems. I found systems-based studying to be a great way to integrate and apply the subjects to the types of questions asked on the exam.

4. If you formed study groups, how did you go about forming them, and how effective were they?
Did not use.

5. What is your advice on:

☐ **Mnemonics** – can be very helpful, but I always have a hard time remembering what the mnemonics stand for ☺ Use them if you like them, but then know more than just what the mnemonic stands for

☐ **Memorizing** – some things you just have to memorize (micro, biochem, epidemiology equations, psych), but I think having an understanding of the material is better so you can then apply concepts to questions when you don't know the specific answer.

☐ **Faculty review sessions** - the few offered in the spring were good reviews, but I wasn't in the Step1 study mode yet

☐ **Commercial courses**, etc.- did not use; they are very expensive and a huge time commitment; may be helpful if you need direction in your studying

6. What books did you find essential for preparing for this exam?

FirstAid; Questions, questions, questions

7. What other books did you use?

Step-Up was good to organize by systems (older FirstAid's were arranged by subjects)

BRS Path, BRS physiology

High-Yield for first-year subjects as needed.

8. Do you have any recommendations or general comments about Question Banks? How useful were they in your studies? Which ones did you use?

I used Kaplan QBank. It was very detail-oriented, so I learned a lot of facts, but the questions were a different style than the actual exam. USMLE World does a better job of asking questions that you will see on the exam. I used it as my soul source for step2 and loved it.

Definitely take the time to read the explanations and take notes on the concepts/facts that you missed or guessed to be correct. Review the notes frequently.

You can arrange blocks of questions to be random (like the exam), or subject/systems based. I did both. I started every morning with a block or 2 of questions from the subject/system I did the previous day. This solidified the information I had recently studied. Then at the end of the day, I did a block or 2 of random questions.

9. How early did you begin studying? How early did you REALLY begin to study? Would you go back and change that if you could?

I was 'reviewing' throughout 2nd year as a tutor for first year classes, but did not "really" start studying until the spring. I took the week after the last organ systems exam off from any studying...my brain needed a reboot. It's challenging to stay focused for 4-6 weeks of reviewing cumulative material, so give yourself at least a few days to breathe after classes end before diving in!

10. How long did you prepare for?

I think I had a good 4 weeks of dedicated studying. Increasing the amount of questions and decreasing the actual book studying by the end of the 3rd week.

11. What was your everyday schedule like once you really began to study?

Variable start and end days depending on other commitments throughout the day.

*Started the morning with a block of questions in the subject I was studying to direct my reviews. Studied/reviewed from FirstAid/StepUp/BRS late morning and afternoons. I always had a mid-day break, either for working-out/recreation or to run errands. (My brain shuts down after a few hours of studying, so I needed frequent breaks to refresh)
After dinner I did a block or 2 of questions and reviewed my notebook of answer explanations.*

12. How did you plan your schedule?

I planned by systems, starting with my least favorite/least successful. I also made sure to schedule a "review day" after studying 2 topics (a day devoted to reviewing what I had just relearned and to do additional questions on those topics).

13. How many days did you dedicate to each subject? What was the breakdown?

2-3 depending on the subject/system. Some I only spent 1 day. I spent more time on the "major" systems: Cardiology/Heme, Respiratory, Renal, GI (the systems with a lot of physiology concepts). I spent less time on the more recently studied systems (endocrine, musculoskeletal, skin).

Your schedule should be very individualized to what you think you need. The "diagnostic" exam we took as a class in April was helpful in identifying my weak areas.

14. What did you do a week before the exam? A few days before the exam?

Week before: I did a full-length practice test (7 blocks of questions from the Qbank). I also did an NBME self-assessment exam.

https://apps.nbme.org/nsasweb/servlet/mesa_main Comprehensive Basic Science Self-Assessment. 6 Forms to choose from, \$45.

Few days before: concentrated on the topics that were weaker on the self-assessment exam; read and re-read FirstAid. Also did the USMLE Released questions:

http://usmle.org/examinations/practice_materials.html and explanations:

http://www.kaptest.com/pdf_files/med/S1-2008-Released.pdf

Day before: Relaxed!

Day of: Woke up early and did a short set of 10-15 questions just to get my brain in test-taking mode before heading to the test center. Only do this if you won't freak out about not knowing an answer on one of the morning questions. This is only meant as a warm up!

15. How did you deal with difficult questions?

I tried to first understand what the question was asking, and then eliminated the answers that were clearly wrong. Sometime there were 2 or 3 that seemed they could be correct. Then I tried to figure out what I did know about the concept in the question and find the best answer that applied.

If it was taking more than a minute or so, I picked an answer, flagged it, and went back if time allowed.

I think the challenge is being able to move on after a question that you didn't know. You have to let each past question go to think clearly for the next question.

Thoughts on changing your answer and avoiding fatigue?

Changing answers: I did find some clear mistakes in my answers when going through each block, but if it was a question that I reasoned my way to an answer, I generally left it alone. Avoiding fatigue: take frequent small breaks, I took a break after 2 blocks throughout the day. Lunch after 4 blocks.

16. Can you think of any other question that you yourself had before taking this exam? How would you answer them now?

17. What was your strategy at reading and answering the question in the allotted time?

Tried to pick out the important information from the stem. Sometimes I highlighted “buzz words,” but often the questions were 2 or 3 level questions (they give symptoms, then ask about the pathophys of the diagnosis).

18. Closing remarks? If you were going to do it all over again, what would you do differently, and what would you keep the same?

Overall, I was pretty happy with my study plan and exam performance. I probably could have done even more questions; I would have used USMLE World instead of Kaplan.

I probably would have been more selective of what I added to FirstAid. The pages became rather cluttered.

19. Please fill out the following 2-month schedule based on your study recommendations:

This was my personal study calendar....not necessarily my recommendations. My days also shifted around, but I stayed fairly close to this guide.

MAY

SUN	MON	TUES	WEDS	THURS	FRI	SAT
					1	2
3	4	5 LAST DAY OF CLASS	6 <i>Dr. Francis sessions</i>	7 <i>Dr. Francis Sessions</i>	8 <i>Dr. Francis sessions</i>	9
10	11 <i>Faculty review session / Off</i>	12 <i>Faculty review session / Off</i>	13 <i>Faculty review session / Off</i>	14 Off	15 Off	16 Off
17 AM: Off Evening: Biochem	18 <i>I & I</i>	19 <i>I & I</i>	20 <i>I & I; especially antibiotics</i>	21 <i>Heme</i>	22 <i>Heme</i>	23 <i>Off (out of town)</i>
24 <i>Off (out of town)</i>	25 <i>Cardio phys & pharm</i>	26 <i>CV path & pharm</i>	27 <i>REVIEW Heme and CV</i>	28 <i>Respiratory phys & pharm</i>	29 <i>Respiratory path</i>	30 <i>Renal phys & pharm</i>
31 Off						

JUNE

SUN	MON	TUES	WEDS	THURS	FRI	SAT
	1 <i>Renal path</i>	2 <i>REVIEW Resp and Renal</i>	3 <i>CNS</i>	4 <i>CNS & MSK</i>	5 AM: <i>review pharm</i> PM: <i>off (Graduation)</i>	6 <i>GI</i>
7 AM: <i>Off</i> PM: <i>Review & Questions</i>	8 <i>GI/endocrine</i>	9 <i>Endocrine/ Reproductive</i>	10 AM: <i>Psych/ Biostats</i> PM: <i>NBME Practice Exam</i>	11 <i>Behavioral/ Biostats</i>	12 <i>(flexible)</i>	13 Review; Full length “test” (7 blocks)
14 AM: <i>Off</i> PM: <i>USMLE released questions</i>	15 <i>FirstAid review</i>	16 <i>FirstAid review</i>	17 <i>RELAX</i>	18 TEST DAY	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30				

M3, 233

1. General Advice about Step 1

If I am going to give anyone advice on Step 1 preparation, you should know what type of student I am. That way, you can judge if my advice is worth the time to read everything below.

- a. Step 1 score: 233
- b. Grades from first and second year: Honors and High Passes

During my first two years of school, I focused on learning the classroom material that the instructors were trying to teach me at the time. I didn't read any Step 1 preparation material. I didn't annotate or even read First Aid before May 6th (the last day of class), nor did I do any practice questions online before that date. Perhaps I should have annotated my First Aid during Organ Systems so I could have been more familiar with that book before May 6th arrived. It might have made my life a little easier.

I should also tell you that I failed the practice NBME test that you all will take this spring. I scored one point below the failing mark. I think that translates to a 175 score. I didn't study for that test and neither should you because it is a good measure of where you are starting from. Receiving that score was discouraging, but I used it as motivation.

2. How did you approach this exam?

For me, I approached Step 1 as a task similar to training for a marathon. You must be disciplined every day. Set challenging, yet achievable goals to be completed daily. You need to pace yourself and stick to your goals.

I think one of the first things you'll need to do is decide what score you want. Dr. Metting e-mailed us the "Charting Match Outcomes for 2007," and in that you can see what most students who matched into specific residencies scored on Step 1. Plastic Surgery matching students had an average of 243, whereas Family Medicine applicants had a score of 209. (I find that fact ironic. I think Family Medicine docs know a wider breadth of medicine than Plastic surgeons.) I wanted a score that was competitive for Anesthesiology; the average score for students who matched was 220. I set a goal to get into the 230s to be competitive.

Having said all this, my advice is to score as high as possible so that you **don't shut any doors on yourself**. I can think of one good friend who thought that he was destined for Family Medicine and put enough effort to achieve a score that was competitive for that field. After third year rotations, he lamented that he didn't try for a higher score because he found another field, more competitive than Family Medicine, a better fit for him.

Once you set your goal score, you need to decide how much time you will need to prepare to achieve that score. I set aside 6 weeks to prepare, which I think most of my classmates did as well. Della says it is important to have good vacation time before the beginning of third year clerkships, so this time frame gave me about 2 ½ weeks off. Now with 6 weeks to prepare, how many hours per day will you need to study to get your goal score? With all that in mind you should write out on a blank calendar the topics that you will study each day. This is key. I don't know of anyone who didn't do this, but I can imagine if you didn't you might forget to cover important subjects and be unprepared. You can see an example of my study calendar at the end of this paper.

3. Did you use a subject review or a systems-based approach, and how well did that prepare you?

I did an Organ Systems based approach because that is the way it was taught to me.

4. If you formed study groups, how did you go about forming them, and how effective were they?

I did not participate in any study groups.

5. What is your advice on: Mnemonics, Memorizing, Faculty review sessions, Commercial courses, etc?

I went to all the faculty reviews and the PASS program. I think they are worth going to. If you don't think they are helpful, you can slip out the back. (If you fail the NBME practice test you will be required to attend all of the PASS lectures, so you may not have the option of slipping out.) I don't want to say that the faculty lectures were useless: some were helpful and some were not. I won't tell you which ones because for some students the lectures that I found not helpful were quite the opposite for them. Attend them and figure it out for yourself. **Don't forget to put faculty lectures on your study calendar as most of them take up an entire morning and you will need to account for that in your scheduling.**

6. What books did you find essential for preparing for this exam?

I studied from **First Aid**. As it says in the book itself, it should not be used as your only source of study. Use it more as a guide and a place to keep your study notes. I used the chapter titles as the topics that I would study on my calendar.

In the back of First Aid, there is a resource review section on each organ system. I used that section when I decided what books to study from. These are the books I used.

- a. Pathology – BRS and Rapid Review (by Goljan)
- b. Physiology – BRS
- c. Biochem – BRS, but mostly the First Aid section.

- d. I & I – Clinical Microbiology Made Ridiculously Simple and High Yield Immunology (I generally found the “High Yield” series to be so-so, but the Immunology edition isn’t that bad. Behavioral Science edition isn’t bad either)
- e. Pharmacology – Flashcards. I am sorry but I don’t remember the author of the cards I used. I gave them away to one of your classmates already. First Aid gives high review scores to the cards authored by Brenner. Those are probably the ones I used.
- f. Anatomy – I had the BRS book, but I ended up only reviewing the anatomy found at the first of each chapter in First Aid. Anatomy is not heavily covered on Step 1.
- g. Behavioral Science – High Yield and the First Aid Section.

7. What other books did you use?

I didn’t use other books.

8. Do you have any recommendations or general comments about Question Banks? How useful were they in your studies? Which ones did you use?

Call me strange for buying both Kaplan and USMLEworld, but I wasn’t the only one in my class who did. This is what you should know about the two:

Kaplan is a good program. I liked how they kept stats on your progress. Their internet interface is **not like** the interface that you will use on test day. The questions are tough, though many of my classmates thought that it asked questions that were too “detail-oriented.” I’ll give you an example: one question tested if you knew the name of an antigen that is found on a sheep’s red blood cell used on a monospot test for EBV. How knowing that helps you treat a teenager who you think has EBV is beyond me. (The answer is the Paul-Bunnell antigen.) On the other hand, USMLEworld was generally regarded by my classmates as being superior. Many felt that the level of difficulty was on par with the actual test. Its interface is **exactly like** the interface that you will see in the testing center. They, too, keep stats on your performance.

Why and how did I use both Kaplan and USMLEworld? I took two 50 question practice tests everyday. Both companies allow you to modify your tests to be either specific or general. The question banks each have 2,000+ questions (maybe more...I can’t remember), but they may only have about 150 in one subject, such as cardiology, for example. If you study cardiology for three days doing 50 question tests each day, you will soon run out of cardiology questions that could be used in the general tests (that you will be taking throughout your study preparation weeks). Therefore, I would use Kaplan to do the specific questions on each daily subject. I would use USMLEworld for the second general test. Did I go overboard? That’s for you to decide. It worked for me.

9. How early did you begin studying? How early did you REALLY begin to study? Would you go back and change that if you could?

I answered this in question #1. Basically, I don’t regret not studying for Step 1 before May 6, 2008. But I do wish that I would have annotated a copy of First Aid during the year with what I was learning in Organ Systems.

10. How long did you prepare for?

6 weeks, 6 days a week.

11. What was your everyday schedule like once you really began to study?

I would start the day exercising at 7:30am. While exercising, I would listen to the Goljan lectures on my iPod. I liked them. If you haven’t heard of those yet, you will. They will be passed around your class from student to student. If you can’t get them, I am sure that there are few in my class who still have them. Goljan is a pathology professor who gives pre-Step 1 lectures and I guess one year they were recorded. He is also the guy who wrote the Rapid Review book on Pathology. I usually listened to the topic that I had studied the previous day.

At about 9:00am I would go to the Mulford and study the topic that I had scheduled for that day until about 2:00pm, having lunch sometime in that block. As an example, if I were studying respiratory that day I would first read the respiratory chapter in BRS physiology, then start the BRS Pathology chapter for respiratory diseases, and then study the respiratory chapter in First Aid, adding notes to it from my readings in BRS. Doing those three things at a level deep enough to retain the information would usually take me two days. On my calendar, I blocked out generally two days for each topic.

At 2:00pm, I would take a practice test of 50 questions from Kaplan. I would set the parameters of that test to specifically test the topic that I studied that day. I would make it a timed test lasting one hour, basically trying to make it as much like the real test as possible. From 3:00pm to 4:00pm, I would go over that last test while making notes in my First Aid on the questions I answered incorrectly and questions I thought were tricky. From 4:00pm to 5:00pm, I would take another test of 50 questions on USMLEworld. That second test would be set as a general test and would be timed as well. From 5:00pm to 6:00pm I would go over that test. Taking two tests a day helps you get into the rhythm of how the test blocks will be on test day. The test is a day divided into seven blocks of one hour each where you must complete 50 questions per block.

From 6:00 until bedtime, I would not look at anything even remotely related to medicine, except I would try to memorize 5+ flashcards on pharmacology with my wife each night when I got home. That brings up another thing: I studied only 6 days of the week. You have to have one day off or else your brain will crack. Do whatever you want on that day, just don't look at anything medical. You will love that day. Spend it with family or friends because they need to know you are still alive.

12. How did you plan your schedule?

I looked at what other people in the year before me had done.

13. How many days did you dedicate to each subject? What was the breakdown?

Behavioral – 2 Days

I & I – 5 Days

Cardiovascular – 2 Days

Respiratory – 2 Days

Renal – 2 Days

CNS – 2 Days

GI – 2 Days

Endocrine – 1.5 Days (on the other half of the day I took the free NBME 150 question test.)

Hematology/Oncology – 2 days

Pharmacology – 1 Day

Reproductive and Musculoskeletal/Connective Tissue – 1 day. (I should have allotted more time to this, but there just weren't enough calendar days. I also felt confident after one day on these subjects.)

Anatomy – 2.5 days (one full Saturday and 3 half days after going to faculty lectures in the mornings and early afternoon.)

Biochem – 1.5 days (3 half days after going to faculty lectures in the mornings and early afternoon.)

I spent one day to take a full length practice test. Kaplan offers a full length test as part of their program. As mentioned above when talking about endocrine, I took a 150 NBME test.

14. What did you do a week before the exam? A few days before the exam?

I took a full length practice test one week before the exam to experience what a 7-hour test is like. After that day, my final studying week was spent reviewing all of First Aid again. By that point, I had written many notes and highlighted many things that I had missed on my practice

tests. I dog-eared the pages that I wanted to cram the day before (things like the glycogen storage diseases and the anti-arrhythmic drugs.) My test day was on a Tuesday. I took Sunday off like I usually did, and then Monday I studied all the pages that I dog-eared. I only did that for the morning; in the afternoon, I relaxed.

15. How did you deal with difficult questions? Thoughts on changing your answer and avoiding fatigue?

The first day of the PASS program the speaker will give tips for doing standardized tests. I felt that his advice was useful. I also found doing one or two practice tests useful. After doing multiple 50 question tests over six weeks, doing seven in one day doesn't seem so bad.

Lastly, go with your gut instinct when you don't know. With the time allotted you won't be able to review all the questions. So go with your gut and keep moving on in the test. You want to make sure that you have enough time to do all the questions. The PASS speaker will tell you that most people are right on their first choice when guessing rather than what they choose second. I found that to be generally true when I did my practice tests.

16. Can you think of any other question that you yourself had before taking this exam? How would you answer them now?

No, sorry. If any of you have questions for me you can email at Andrew.Curtis@utoledo.edu. I am happy to help.

17. What was your strategy at reading and answering the question in the allotted time?

As I mentioned in question 15, the PASS speaker gave us good strategies for standardized test. He will talk about going with your first guess when you don't know. He will also talk about how to approach "Clinical Case" questions. Specifically he said to read the last sentence of the case which normally has the question that you are to answer. Then read the case looking for things to help you answer that question while sifting out data that is distracting and not relevant. Just go to the PASS program, he will explain it.

18. Closing remarks? If you were going to do it all over again, what would you do differently, and what would you keep the same?

As I said earlier, perhaps I would have benefited from annotating my FIRST AID while in Organ Systems. If you haven't, you are like I was. You will still be OK.

Have confidence in yourself. Put in the work and be disciplined when it comes to your study goals and regimen. Finally, you may be tempted to push the test back from your original date. I would not recommend that. I don't think I would have done better. You will be ready if you stick to your calendar.

Finally, don't pay attention to how others are scoring on their practice tests. It is stress you don't need. After all, it may not even be true.

19. Please fill out the following 2-month schedule based on your study recommendations

MAY

SUN	MON	TUES	WEDS	THURS	FRI	SAT
					1	2
3	4	5 LAST DAY OF CLASS ----- ----- Biochem	6 PASS Program ----- ----- Biochem	7 PASS Program ----- ----- Biochem	8 PASS Program ----- ----- Anatomy	9 Anatomy
10 Day Off	11 Faculty Lecture ----- ----- Anatomy	12 Faculty Lecture ----- ----- Anatomy	13 Behavioral	14 Behavioral	15 I&I	16 I&I
17 Day Off	18 I&I	19 I&I	20 I&I	21 Cardiology	22 Cardiology	23 Respiratory
24 Day Off	25 Respiratory	26 Renal	27 Renal	28 CNS	29 CNS	30 GI
31 Day Off						

JUNE

SUN	MON	TUES	WEDS	THURS	FRI	SAT
	1 GI	2 Endocrine ----- NBME test	3 Endocrine	4 Reproductive/ Musculoskel/ Connective Tissue	5 Hematology/ Oncology	6 Hematology/ Oncology
7 Day Off	8 Pharm	9 Full Length Test	10 Review	11 Review	12 Review	13 Review
14 Day Off	15 Review	16 TEST DAY	17 Don't think about Step 1. You are on vacation.	18 Don't think about Step 1. You are on vacation.	19 Don't think about Step 1. You are on vacation.	20 Don't think about Step 1. You are on vacation.
21 Don't think about Step	22 Don't think about Step	23 Don't think about Step	24 Don't think about Step	25 Don't think about Step 1.	26 Don't think about Step	27 Don't think about Step

1. You are on vacation.	1. You are on vacation.	1. You are on vacation.	1. You are on vacation.	You are on vacation.	1. You are on vacation.	1. You are on vacation.
28	29	30				

MS4, 220's

1. General Advice about Step 1

If you only have time to do one thing, questions are the most important thing. I used QBank, but I have heard very good things about USMLE world. If you have time for two things, do First Aid for step 1. BRS books are also very good, but use more as a reference.

2. How did you approach this exam?

Unfortunately, step 1 is a very important exam. It is used by residency programs as cutoff points in applications. Knowing this, I realized the importance of the exam. But at this point, you know what study method works best for you. Don't be deterred by what others say they are doing. Study in a way that works for you. I would begin my study days at noon, and end them at nine or ten because this is the time I function best. A schedule is very important, but use it more as a guideline. You may fall behind if you try to keep a strict schedule which can lead to panic. Once you begin to realize that you will probably never feel completely prepared, you can relax more.

3. Did you use a subject review or a systems-based approach, and how well did that prepare you?

I began with a subject review. I felt biochemistry was one of my weaker areas and I concentrated on that early. However, I felt my time was better spent when I switched to a systems based reviews.

4. If you formed study groups, how did you go about forming them, and how effective were they?

I did not form a study group

5. What is your advice on: ☐ Mnemonics, ☐ Memorizing, ☐ Faculty review sessions, ☐ Commercial courses, etc.

Use whatever technique works best for you. You know how to study.

6. What books did you find essential for preparing for this exam?

First Aid was essential.

7. What other books did you use?

I used all of my BRS subject reviews.

8. Do you have any recommendations or general comments about Question Banks? How useful were they in your studies? Which ones did you use?

I used the Kaplan Qbank, and I loved it. I felt that it was very worthwhile. By halfway through my studies, it was main source of studying.

9. How early did you begin studying? How early did you REALLY begin to study? Would you go back and change that if you could?

I took one week off at the end of the year. I scheduled my test to give me six weeks to study. If I could change one thing, it would be to schedule my test after five weeks. I feel that that was when I was truly ready to take the exam. I was burned out by my sixth week and I was not efficient during that week.

10. How long did you prepare for?

Six weeks

11. What was your everyday schedule like once you really began to study?

I would wake up at around ten, read a little bit of whatever system I was working on. I would then do some questions for a few hours. When I was tired from questions, I would read more. I would finish my day with a couple more hours of questions.

12. How did you plan your schedule?

I tried to give myself more time for any system or subject I felt I was weaker in. I would give myself four days on my weakest subjects, two days on subjects I felt better about. However, when doing questions, I would always do questions over all subjects rather than on the subject I just studied.

13. How many days did you dedicate to each subject? What was the breakdown?

Between two and four depending on my comfort level

14. What did you do a week before the exam? A few days before the exam?

The week before the exam, I took it easy. I continued to do questions, but I attempted to stay as calm and relaxed as I could. Lots of tv during this time.

15. How did you deal with difficult questions? ☐ Thoughts on changing your answer and avoiding fatigue?

16. Can you think of any other question that you yourself had before taking this exam? How would you answer them now?

17. What was your strategy at reading and answering the question in the allotted time?

For me, I have never had difficulty with the time constraints of exams. Just be confident in your answers. Don't dwell on questions for too long. If you're unsure, mark it and return to it if you have time.

18. Closing remarks? If you were going to do it all over again, what would you do differently, and what would you keep the same?

I would have taken the exam one week earlier than the date that I scheduled it. Studying for this test is not fun, and it would be very easy to be burned out. Take this into account when making your schedule.