



University of Queensland/Ochsner Clinical School USMLE Step 1 Study Plan for MD: 2023

Introduction

To be licensed in the United States, physicians must pass the United States Medical Licensing Exam (USMLE) series. The exam is divided into three parts: The Step 1 Exam, the Step 2 Clinical Knowledge Exam, and the Step 3 Exam. The Step 1 Exam is a multiple-choice exam that you are required to take before beginning Year 3. The Step 1 Exam is now Pass/Fail, but this does not mean the content or difficulty of the exam has been modified in anyway. Instead, this change was made in an effort to reduce the stress during Years 1 and 2 of medical school and encourage residency programs to use a more holistic approach when evaluating applicants. The Step 2 Clinical Knowledge Exam is a clinically focused multiple-choice exam with results reported as a three-digit numerical score. Since Step 2 is now the only graded licensing exam that will be completed before applying to residency, its importance cannot be overlooked. The best predictor of a student's performance on the Step 2 Exam is their performance on the Step 1 Exam, so it is important that students prepare to the best of their abilities, beginning in Year 1 of medical school. The Step 2 Exam should be taken no later than April of a medical student's fourth year of school. The Step 3 Exam must be taken before the end of the internship year.

The USMLE website is an important reference that students should regularly review (www.usmle.org). Another very important resource is the Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates website (www.ecfm.org) which will direct you appropriately as a University of Queensland student.

The University of Queensland (UQ)-Ochsner Clinical School revises this study plan annually with the input of prior students who were successful on the Step 1 examination. Because the Step 1 Exam is usually the most difficult of the steps, preparation should begin from the first day you begin your studies at UQ. **It is impossible to do well on the Step 1 Exam if you wait to begin your preparations one or two months before the test.**

Every year, successful students emphasize the relevance of the UQ curriculum to Step 1 study. Year after year, our data clearly shows that students who perform well on the UQ clinical science courses perform well on Step 1. While the UQ courses do not completely cover all the material required for Step 1, good performance on these clinical science courses is associated with good performance on Step 1. Align your Step 1 study plan with your UQ curriculum during the first two years and you will achieve high grades in your courses and on your licensing exams. Classroom work will help solidify and clarify topics you review in the USMLE resources.

Study Resources

There are an overwhelming number of resources available for Step 1 study. Focus on 3-4 resources, rather than using too many. The resources listed in the table below have been recommended by students in years past. If a resource is listed as essential, you must completely master this resource. Textbooks can be very expensive and may not be readily available in Australia; you may wish to purchase these in the US. The Book Depository (www.bookdepository.com) is a good site to obtain references and texts while in Australia, and many good texts are available electronically through the UQ library (http://guides.library.uq.edu.au/medicine/clinical_science).

UQ will provide First Aid for USMLE Step 1 and a 2-year subscription to Boards and Beyond (<https://www.boardsbeyond.com/>). A subscription to the USMLEWorld QBank will be provided to you sometime in your second year as part of the USMLE Step 1 Preparation course (see below).

Preparation for US Medical Licensing Examination (USMLE) Step 1 (MEDI7282)

This 2-unit dedicated preparation course provides students with protected time and structure to support intense study leading up to the Step 1 Exam at the end of Year 2. Co-designed by successful Step 1 Exam takers, this course predominantly consists of tutorials led by near-peers who have passed the exam, with a focus on “high yield” topics and approaches to assessment. The course is compulsory for all UQ-Ochsner students, and attaining a passing score on the [National Board of Medical Examiners \(NBME\) Comprehensive Basic Science Exam \(CBSE\)](#) is required to pass the course and progress to Year 3.

Recommended resources:

Text resources:

First Aid for USMLE Step 1 (essential). This is the **key text** that most effectively covers all areas tested. Many students use this as their primary note-taking resource.

Amboss Knowledge Bank (essential). This is a browser and app-based knowledge library that covers all topics essential to medical education at all levels of medical school. Amboss integrates into the Anki Flashcard program (more on this below) to instantly fill knowledge gaps on desktop and mobile.

Question bank resources:

UWorld (subscription provided) and UWorld self-assessments (essential). Most useful for the last six months of study. UWorld assessments often over-estimate Step 1 score.

AMBOSS is the second-best question bank with challenging questions. This can be expensive, so consider splitting an account.

USMLE Rx Qbank – A good Qbank to start; tests more general concepts

Kaplan USMLE Step 1 QBank

Pastest USMLE Step 1 Qbank <https://www.pastest.com/usmle-step-1/exam/>

MedBullet USMLE Step 1 Qbank (Free, 1000 question Qbank, Optional) <https://step1.medbullets.com/>

Video Lectures:

Boards and Beyond (essential). Use this to supplement topics in the UQ curriculum. Watch relevant videos when completing UQ material.

Pathoma – considered essential by most students for pathology specifically.

Sketchy Micro, Pharm and Pathology – considered essential by most students, especially pharmacology and microbiology.

Flashcards allow repetition:

ANKI (essential) - notecard spaced-repetition software. Do your reviews every day. There is an excellent YouTube [video tutorial](#) and a dedicated channel to help guide you through the setup process and an entire [channel](#) dedicated to Anki in medical school with an active community on Reddit.

The AnKing deck is free to download and tags flashcards by system (e.g. cardiology, renal), resource (Boards and Beyond videos, First Aid chapter), and specific questions from UWorld. They offer a service, AnkiHub, for \$5/month that will auto-update your flashcards in a fashion similar to a shared Google Drive.

Zanki is a premade deck available on Reddit. It includes Boards and Beyond, First Aid, Sketchy, UWorld and Pathoma content.

Secondary resources (you may need to copy and paste the URLs into a browser):

Firecracker <http://firecracker.lww.com/students.html>

UQ Anatomy Notes

Goljan Audio – entertaining lecturer; free recordings on spotify

<http://JGMalcolm.com/tactical-test-taking-skills> provides a fascinating approach to test-taking

Cram Fighter (<https://cramfighter.com/>) helps you create a schedule and keep you accountable to a study plan.

Available in the UQ library online resources:

Guyton and Hall Textbook of Medical Physiology (13th ed)

Robbins Basic Pathology (10th ed)

Clinical Anatomy by Systems

Neuroanatomy: An Illustrated Colour Text (6th ed)

The Developing Human (11th ed)

Medical Pharmacology at a Glance (8th ed)

Review of Medical Microbiology and Immunology (15th ed)

A Primer of Clinical Psychiatry (2nd ed)

Timeline for Study

Year 1

During Year 1 at UQ, your study plan should coordinate USMLE study with the topic you are studying that week. Prepare prior to CBL/TBL sessions! Actively participate in all your case-based learning tutorials. Watch Boards and Beyond videos correlating to information in the UQ curriculum to reinforce the information, be sure to watch all videos, including those not specifically covered by UQ, prior to finishing a block so you are not skipping USMLE material. Then unsuspend the corresponding cards in Anki by accessing their tags (this process is explained in detail in the Youtube videos in the above table under Anki). These follow UQ material but go into USMLE depth. Sketchy pharmacology and Pathoma videos can also help with preparation.

Join an Ochsner Medical Student Association (OMSA) peer tutoring group where you will learn study methods and material from 2nd year students to aid with your case-based learning (CBL)/team-based learning (TBL) and preparation for the Step 1 Exam. Your tutors are also a great way to get connected with your Ochsner classmates who you will be with for the next 4 years.

Summer

While summer is a great time to enjoy some traveling, make sure you continue to study. Most students recommend keeping up with your Anki cards over the summer, watching any Boards and Beyond videos you missed, and supplementing knowledge areas you may be lacking in (e.g. watching Sketchy Pharm videos on antidiabetic drugs).

Year 2

During Year 2, you will steadily intensify your study preparations. For the first semester, you will still be learning new material, so it is important you apply the same study methods that brought you success during Year 1 to new subjects. In addition, it is important to begin getting exposure to the style of questions asked on the USMLE Exams, they are quite different from UQ questions. USMLERx is a good resource for questions. Target 20 questions per week on a mixture of subjects you have already covered to help revisit this content and identify knowledge gaps. Coordinate your UQ study with First Aid for USMLE Step 1, Amboss, and Boards and Beyond. When working with question banks, read the explanations for both correct and incorrect answers ([How to Approach Missed Questions](#)). Add notes to First Aid. Use Anki cards every day to reinforce information you've learned. If you've done well during your first year, consider volunteering as a tutor for first years – this helps solidify your knowledge.

During semester 2 you are mostly consolidating your knowledge from the prior 3 semesters. In this time, the UWorld question bank is an indispensable resource. You should target completing the question bank in its entirety at least once before taking the Step 1 Exam. This likely means completing one 40-question block six days a week throughout the semester. It may seem daunting but making these questions a priority will guide your study, build your test-taking stamina, and make you comfortable with the material so you can enter exam day with minimal stress.

The Step 1 Exam is about eight hours long and requires prolonged mental and physical concentration. For this reason, you should train for this endurance event by sitting for at least one eight-hour simulated exam from the USMLEWorld question bank. Consider making a list (or an Anki Deck) of “stupid mistakes” which you seem to consistently make and bring this with you to the exam site to review up until the start of the exam.

Scheduling the USMLE Step 1 Exam

The [Program Rules for the UQ-Ochsner Doctor of Medicine](#) state that students enrolled in the UQ-Ochsner MD program must attempt the USMLE Step 1 examination prior to commencement of Year 3. Successful completion of the Step 1 Exam is required to participate in research at OCS, to serve as an officer in OMSA, and to enter the Match in your fourth year.

As Step 1 is not offered during the first two weeks of January, this means taking the exam prior to December 31st before your third year so that you can be settled in New Orleans for the week of mandatory orientation events that take place prior to the start of Block 1.

You should plan your schedule so that you can sit for the exam in the US, because scheduling the exam in Australia can be difficult and is about \$100 more expensive. Actively plan and manage the time between arriving in the US and sitting for the exam. You will require at least 4 weeks of dedicated study time. Do not plan anything other than Step 1 study during December of Year 2. Family and friends must understand and not interfere. Ensure that your environment for study is: 1) without a lot of distractions; 2) conducive to studying; and 3) near your Prometric testing center.

The Faculty suggests you register for the December 2023 – February 2024 Step 1 eligibility period. This eligibility period will not be confirmed until mid-September. You must have completed all your Phase 1 requirements by the start date of your examination eligibility period. If you select an eligibility period that begins before you have completed Year 2 coursework, the Faculty will not approve your application, and you will suffer significant delays in your application. Schedule and confirm your exam date ASAP so you can get your first-choice option. Refer to [UQ-Ochsner USMLE Step 1](#).

ECFMG Certification

All details about the ECFMG certification process are available in the [ECFMG 2023 information booklet](#). Read the booklet before starting the certification process. The first step of ECFMG certification is registering for a USMLE/ECFMG Identification Number, which can be done using ECFMG's Interactive Web Applications (IWA). Register with ECFMG at the beginning of Semester 2 of Year 2.

March-July of Year 2

No later than March of your second year, you should begin a question bank, like USMLERx. Some students recommend starting as early as January because the question banks are very large. When doing the question banks, you should be sure that you understand the rationale for all the correct and incorrect answers. Take your time reviewing questions.

The **UWorld QBank is your best question bank resource**, as it has many questions that are similar and, in some cases, identical to those on the real Step 1 exam. You should begin using the UWorld Qbank no later than early August. There are approximately 3400 questions in this question bank. Aim to complete at least 40 questions per day, every day on tutor mode, reviewing every question in detail. If time management is an issue for you, do the questions on timed mode instead of tutor mode.

A consistent question-intensive study plan results in better performance than study plans based on reading texts or viewing videos. When reviewing questions, take your time reading all the answers and take notes, particularly on questions you miss. Ensure your focus is on completing questions and learning the high-yield topics associated with those questions. The focus should NOT be on watching hours of videos. **Plan to review the UWorld question bank twice, a first pass on all questions and a second pass concentrating on questions you missed the first time.**

July-November of Year 2

As part of the USMLE Preparation course, you will be **REQUIRED** to sit THREE NBME CBSE/CBSSA exams. While passing the first two of these exams is not required to pass the course overall, you should **aim to achieve a passing score in the first practice exam**. Passing the third (final) CBSE is required to pass the course and progress to Year 3. These exams report a percent likelihood that you will pass the Step 1 Exam if you were to take it in one week and are highly accurate, **trust them**.

You should use the results of each of these NBME exams as a guide for topics for future study.

One week prior to your scheduled Step 1 Exam, you should utilize the free 120 USMLE tutorial test questions offered by USMLE (<http://www.usmle.org/practice-materials>).

You will be spending October and the beginning of November studying for your final UQ exams, which typically occur in the second week of November. During this time, you will have little time to study for USMLE. **Do not defer and try not to fail the end-of-semester exams**, as this will severely limit the remaining time available to study for the Step 1 Exam.

November

You should have completed the UWorld question bank before the start of the final exam period. Intensify your preparation following final exams in November by completing a second review of the UWorld question bank, being

sure of the rationale for answers to the questions. Consider accessing one of the other question banks for fresh questions if necessary. You should be spending about eight hours a day studying. In the last two weeks of study, you should be answering about 150-200 questions per day as you ready yourself for the testing conditions on exam day.

Once your NBME practice exam scores are >63%, you should be confident that you will pass. If your practice exam scores do not reach this level, reach out to your Society Head for advice BEFORE taking Step 1. Do not take the exam until you are ready to achieve a passing score.

One week prior to the exam, consider taking a shorter practice exam at the Prometric testing center where you intend to take the exam. Drive to the center so that you have no surprises on the day of the exam. The exam questions will be the same as the free 120 USMLE tutorial test questions. This Prometric center practice exam will familiarize you with the site, the testing conditions, and the identification requirements at the site. This preparation will help remove surprises about the testing conditions during the real exam so that you can focus your full attention on the exam and not be distracted by other events.

General advice

Successful students from prior classes have emphasized the importance of being honest with yourself regarding strengths and weaknesses. Work very hard on your weaknesses. Start studying early and understand that repetition is essential.

Your classmates are your friends, not your competition. No one better understands the position you are in than the ~100 other people covering the exact same material as you every day. Talk with them, study with them, support them, and they will do the same for you. Establish a small study group as soon as you can. This group can hold you accountable and help you with your review.

Reflect on why you're struggling. Are you having trouble with recall questions? Make or purchase flash cards. Are you having trouble with problem-solving? Re-read First Aid or watch Pathoma, DIT or Kaplan to figure out why.

If you cannot figure out why you are struggling, talk to your peers or faculty - they are always here to help. This is where the small group tutors are most valuable. Consider working question banks in groups to talk out successful critical thinking patterns that you can emulate.

Beware internet forums like the student-doctor network and USMLE forum. While there might be an answer there, information is often inaccurate. Moreover, conversations there might increase your anxiety and impair your performance.

It is extremely important to incorporate exercise and good nutrition into your lifestyle during your study preparations. Relax the day prior to the exam. Don't cram and get yourself stressed just prior to the exam. Get plenty of rest two to three days prior to the exam. Have a plan for nutrition and fluids during the exam. Think positively and be confident in yourself! You have put in the hard work and now it is time to show off!

Please contact Dr. G Dodd Denton ([gdenton@ochsner.org](mailto:g Denton@ochsner.org)) or your society head (med.ocsStudentAdmin@enquire.uq.edu.au) should you need advice or have any questions. This study plan will be updated as new information becomes available.

Timeline Summary 2023

| Year 1 Students 2023 |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate your Clinical Science study with First Aid (using the study links provided), Boards and Beyond videos, and Anki flashcards |

| Year 2 Students 2023 | | |
|-----------------------------|--|---------------------------------|
| Month | Action | Approximate Cost |
| Semester 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider purchasing USMLE Rx and start reviewing • Continue coordinating UQ curriculum with Boards and Beyond | \$160 |
| Beginning Semester 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • USMLE Preparation course begins • UWorld Subscriptions are distributed as part of USMLE Prep course; also purchase the UWorld self-assessments • Attempt to pass the required NBME CBSSA | Usual UQ fees Nil Nil |
| Before September | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Register with ECFMG through IWA (allow a minimum of 5 business days to process your request) • Generate your Form 186 and submit via NotaryCam • Take the required mid-semester CBSSA | \$135 |
| Mid - September | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Register for USMLE via IWA | \$985 |
| Early -- October | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Faculty of Medicine will receive a request from ECFMG to verify your eligibility to sit the exam. | Nil |
| October | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reach out to your Society Head about progress | Nil |
| November | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Third NBME CBSE administered as final exam for prep course. | Nil |
| December | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sit the USMLE Step 1 before starting Year 3 | Nil |

The Final Push

| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| 8 weeks before exam date | Take a practice NBME exam |
| 6 weeks before exam date | Take a practice NBME exam |
| 4 weeks before exam date | Take a practice NBME exam |
| 3 weeks before exam date | Take an 8-hour simulated exam |
| 2 weeks before exam date | Take a practice NBME exam |
| 1 week before exam date | Take the UWorld self-assessments |
| 5 days before exam date | Take the 120 question USMLE tutorial Consider going to your Prometric site for a practice exam |

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Nathan Au-Yeung

Gracy Juba

Jale Manzo

Mackenna Moore

Nate Untch