FREE PREVIEW

USMLE Step 1 Study Guide

A Practical Roadmap from Day 1 of Prep to Exam Day

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1. Introduction

Welcome to the USMLE Step 1 Study Guide. This guide is designed to provide you with clear, practical strategies to take you from the very first day of preparation all the way to walking out of the testing centre with confidence.

I created this resource because, when I began my own Step 1 journey, I was overwhelmed by the sheer amount of advice, resources, and conflicting study plans out there. I often wished for a single, concise, and trustworthy guide that not only outlined what to study but also explained how to study in a way that was realistic and effective.

Everything you'll find here is based on my personal experience preparing for and successfully passing Step 1, combined with evidence-based study methods and high-yield exam insights. My goal is to save you time, help you avoid common pitfalls, and give you the tools to maximize your learning and performance — without burning out.

A quick disclaimer – While I will be sharing what worked for me, my recommendation is always to take all advice – including mine – with a grain of salt. Absorb as much information and advice as you can, but ultimately you need to create the formula that works best for you. There is no single "right" path to Step 1 success. We all have different learning styles, different lives outside of medicine, and different timelines. There's no universal best strategy or perfect time to take the exam — we all have to figure it out along the way. Think of this guide as a starting framework you can adapt and refine to fit your own journey.

Whether you're just starting or already deep into your dedicated prep, I hope this guide serves as a steady companion — something you can return to whenever you need direction, clarity, or encouragement.

All the best as you begin (or continue) your journey — you've got this.

Kenji

3. My Preparation Timeline and Key Takeaways

Typically, most students complete the Step 1 exam during the summer between 3rd and 4th year of medical school (i.e. after your first year of clinical placements). This is because the 3rd year content overlaps with a lot of the Step 1 content and actually, Step 1 content is more detailed, therefore, if you focus on studying the Step 1 content, often times you can get by in your medical school exams. In addition, 3rd year is pass/fail so it would be appropriate to focus on doing as well as you can on Step 1 if you are thinking of applying to the United States.

I took a slightly different route; I did not prepare for Step 1 during my 3rd year. I knew I was going to take a year out of medical school to pursue the intercalated masters (MSc) so I planned to take it at the end of the MSc year (Aug 2024).

During the MSc year, I started by using the ANKING deck which is used as a primary source of active recall for most people preparing for Step 1. However, I was not completely dedicated, I didn't set a strict deadline for myself in terms of studying content, and let myself drag along. When July 2024 came around, I took one of the practice exams (*Kaplan diagnostic*) and got a score of around 50%, realising I was not ready at all. I clearly did not take it seriously enough, I was not proactive with my studying meaning I didn't surround myself with people who were taking the exam or had taken it, and I never reached out to people to get more information and advice.

Important Takeaways from my MSc Year:

1. Set a strict deadline of when you want to take it, and commit to it! Of course, you can have some leeway and adjust the exam dates but at least **set the month of exam** (e.g. August 2026) → This will also give you an incentive to study and forces you to get the job done.
2. If you are unsure with anything → **ASK, ASK, ASK**! There's no harm in asking for info or advice, and I recommend asking someone who has just finished taking the exam so it is fresh in their mind to give you detailed advice. (Or read through this guide and you can always ask me any questions whenever!)

After realising I was not ready in July 2024, I decided to reach out to people in my year group who had just passed the exams. They were of such great help, I got some great advice on how to approach the exams and was able to set up my own plan. And so after a slow start, I extended my eligibility period for the Step 1 exam and I set myself a deadline (Dec 2024) and started studying properly from Year 4 first semester alongside college material.

Started Studying: **26 Aug 2024**

Test Date: **12 Dec 2024** (*16 weeks of prep*)

END OF PREVIEW

USMLE Step 1 Study Guide

That's the end of the free preview.
The full guide is available at
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