

# Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine

## USMLE Step I Boards “What Worked for Me”...and more 2008/2009

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*This NUF SOM “USMLE Step I Boards, What Worked for Me” was developed by Dr. Sandra LaBlance, Director of Academic and Career Counseling of the Augusta Webster Office of Medical Education. Please contact Dr. LaBlance for more information or study strategies support (s-lablance@northwestern.edu).*

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USMLE Step I Boards, “What Worked for Me” 2008/2009

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## USMLE Step 1 Resources

USMLE (United States Medical Licensing Exam) Website: <http://www.usmle.org/>

NBME (National Board of Medical Examiners) Website: <http://www.nbme.org/>

Chief Proctor of the NBME for NUFSSOM: Dr. J.X. Thomas: [jxt@northwestern.edu](mailto:jxt@northwestern.edu)  
NBME Practice Exam (Provided by the OME April 3, 2009)  
Questions Regarding the USMLE  
Transcripts for Board Scores

Registration for the NBME Practice Exam  
Berna Jacobson: [b-jacobson@northwestern.edu](mailto:b-jacobson@northwestern.edu)

Preparing a Study Schedule/Reviewing Preparation Strategies  
Dr. Sandra LaBlance: [s-lablance@northwestern.edu](mailto:s-lablance@northwestern.edu)

### USMLE Step 1 Preparation TO DO LIST

- \_\_\_ Review the USMLE Step 1 2009 Bulletin posted at the USMLE website
- \_\_\_ Register for the Step 1 Exam
- \_\_\_ Schedule Your Test Date
- \_\_\_ Schedule a practice exam at the Prometric site for one or two weeks before your scheduled test date (not required). You may want to wait to schedule this practice exam until you have your comprehensive review calendar prepared. However, don't wait too long as dates fill up quickly.
- \_\_\_ Contact Berna Jacobson to sign-up for the AWOME sponsored practice NBME exam
- \_\_\_ Complete a self-evaluation through the USMLE Step 1 Content Outline
- \_\_\_ Develop a Review Plan for Spring Break
- \_\_\_ Complete the NBME practice exam (AWOME)
- \_\_\_ Plan a comprehensive review calendar
- \_\_\_ Complete the Prometric Practice Exam
- \_\_\_ Complete the USMLE Step I

### Information and a Few Tips...

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**Getting Started:** Go to the USMLE website ([www.usmle.org](http://www.usmle.org)) and click on Step I. Become familiar with everything you need to know about Step I before you do anything. Application information, practice materials, and most importantly, a comprehensive outline of all the topics covered on the USMLE Step I Boards exam is included on the site.

**The USMLE Step I Registration:** Register for Boards in January of the M2 year to get a good date and choice of sites. If you can, (and depending on your personal situation) schedule the exam for the middle of June. This will give you time to decompress before your third year starts...or, if you find as the exam nears that you need padding time because of life situations, the time will be there. Having one to two weeks free before your clerkship orientation begins will keep you from being backed into a corner for time.

**The NBME Practice Exam:** The Office of Medical Education will offer the NBME “Basic Comprehensive Science Exam” which is a simulated Step I Boards Exam. Generally, this is offered on a Friday in April. Look for an e-mail requesting that you register for this exam from Berna Jacobson. YOU MUST REGISTER and **you absolutely should take this exam**. Contact [b-jacobson2@northwestern.edu](mailto:b-jacobson2@northwestern.edu) to register for the exam.

*TIP:* You don't need to study for this practice exam; **you shouldn't study for this practice exam, just show up**. This is a good way to get an idea of where you stand in regard to knowledge base and can be EXTREMELY helpful in preparing for the Step I exam. When you receive your score from the practice exam, you will also receive a break down of each area tested and how you scored on each area. Use this to guide your study plan – really focus on your weak areas at the beginning of your study plan and dig deeper in your studying to make sure you fully understand concepts and pick up details that you may be missing in your knowledge base.

*TIP:* Don't let this practice exam stress you out. Go to the exam and answer all of the questions to the best of your ability, but don't worry if you find yourself struggling to answer the questions. The practice exam is a great diagnostic tool to determine where and how to place your energies for Boards preparation.

**Preparation for the USMLE Step I Exam:** Make a plan, make a schedule, and stick to it! Don't keep changing your approach because someone else is doing something else. Being committed to the plan you make can be the biggest part of your success. Be sure to visit the USMLE website for information regarding the content of the exam, etc. (<http://www.usmle.org/Examinations/step1/step1.html>)

*TIP:* If you are planning on vacationing after boards, give yourself three days to: 1. decompress; 2. attend to life details such as cleaning your home, doing laundry, paying bills; 3. pack and prepare for your trip. You don't want the added stress of needing to prepare for a vacation on the day you take your board exam.

**Keep Yourself Healthy:** Drink lots of water, exercise, and sleep.

*TIPS:*

- Drink lots of water – at least eight glasses a day. If you drink caffeine, be sure to drink more water to offset the dehydration effects. Your brain needs to be hydrated and your body needs to be calm.
- Exercise daily, this could be a twenty minute walk or a hard core workout, just be sure to get yourself moving.
- Get enough sleep on a daily basis. Do your best to keep the same sleep pattern throughout the year, and especially during the month before boards. Try, try, try to be in bed by 11:00 p.m. and get a full nights' sleep. If you know that you get too anxious as exams approach, and anticipate this being an issue before boards, find a good guided imagery CD that will help you relax and get some sleep. You can use this in the middle of the day too, when you just need to give your brain and body a rest. Think of this as an opportunity to start practicing alternative medicine.

**Prometric Practice Exam:** After you complete your Step I exam application and it has been processed, you will be able to register for the Prometric Center Practice Exam which will allow you to take a practice exam at the same place where you will be taking the Step I exam

*TIP:* Taking this practice exam will allow you the opportunity to get to know the Prometric site and practice taking the exam in the actual setting. You may want to use ear plugs when you take the exam, so do this during your practice exam. (Consider studying now with ear plugs, or taking your next SBM exams with ear plugs if it will help to drown out the noise. You don't want to be distracted by the ear plugs on the day of boards).

*TIP:* Schedule your practice exam to be one or two weeks before your scheduled Boards exam. This will give you a chance to simulate the exam experience and leave time to review areas you still find challenging.

## **SELF-EVALUATION FOR EXAM PREPARATION**

**Complete a self-evaluation of your knowledge of the Step I Material. Use different diagnostic tools to complete the self-evaluation. Start by reviewing an outline of material covered on the Step I exam.**

Using an outline of material covered on the USMLE Step I exam, use three different colored highlighters to mark the information outlined. Each color will signify how much time you will need to dedicate to each topic. Use the following guidelines for identifying the information as what:

1. you know but will need to review.
2. you recognize but need to spend more time clarifying, learning some concepts or memorizing details.
3. you have never seen before or didn't understand/learn during your academic work.

A useful outline for all material can be found on the USMLE website:

<http://www.usmle.org/Examinations/step1/content/principles.html>

### **Step 1 Content Description**

**Choices:** General Principles, Hematopoietic and Lymphoreticular Systems, Central and Peripheral Nervous Systems, Skin and Related Connective Tissue, Musculoskeletal System, Respiratory System, Cardiovascular System, Gastrointestinal System, Renal/Urinary System, Reproductive System, Endocrine System

Each of these content outline topics is linked to a comprehensive topic list, for example:

#### **Musculoskeletal System**

Normal processes

- embryonic development, fetal maturation, and perinatal changes
- organ structure and function
- cell/tissue structure and function
  - biology of bones, joints, tendons, skeletal muscle
  - exercise and physical conditioning
- repair, regeneration, and changes associated with stage of life

#### **Abnormal processes**

- infectious, inflammatory, and immunologic disorders
  - infectious disorders (eg, septic arthritis, Lyme disease, osteomyelitis)
  - inflammatory disorders (eg, fibrositis, synovitis, tenosynovitis)
  - immunologic disorders (eg, rheumatoid arthritis, ankylosing spondylitis, polymyositis, systemic lupus erythematosus, dermatomyositis, polymyalgia rheumatica)

**Other evaluation tools include:**

1. NBME Basic Science Exam offered by OME April 3, 2009. Results of this exam serve as an EXCELLENT diagnostic tool to help prepare for boards study. You will receive a breakdown of scores for each area tested.
2. USMLE website sample exam
3. Prometric Center practice exam opportunity (may be the same questions as what you find on the USMLE website)
4. NBME on-line assessments (<http://www.nbme.org/programs-services/medical-students/sas/index.html>), Robbins Pathology Question Book, USMLE Secrets, Q-bank, USMLE World and other question sources

Choose wisely which evaluation tools you will use and at what time in the process you will use each.

## Planning a Study Schedule

### Step 1

Ideally, you should actively learn and review the material five to seven times before the Step I Exam. Consider the first two years of medical school the best opportunity to learn the material and your first review of the material.

### Step 2

Using a calendar, make a comprehensive plan for dates, days and the amount of time you will spend learning the material for class and SBM exams as well as the additional three to five times you will spend reviewing the material in preparation for boards. For example, you may want to spend four hours a week during the academic year reviewing questions or vignettes which are formulated for Boards preparation but also supplement what you are studying in SBM.

### Making a Comprehensive Study Plan for Boards Review

Beginning with the date that you will take Boards, work backwards to determine what needs to be done and when. Consider the following suggestions (and remember these are chronologically backwards!):

1. The day before Boards, DO NOT STUDY. Count this as a day off. Relax. Play basketball, schedule a spa day or a massage, sleep on the beach (SPF 30 please – this is not the time for a sunburn) read a good book that has nothing to do with Boards material. Mark a big “X” through this day so you know you will not have this day to study.
2. The last week of study should simply be review. Spend time doing a comprehensive review of all the material. Understand the full context and links between the concepts. Cement any details that are important. This should be a relaxed review, nothing frenzied. Don’t let anxiety get the best of you. At this point, you know the material because you have prepared well along the way.
3. Using the USMLE website ([www.usmle.org](http://www.usmle.org)) or your results from the NBME practice exam (April) list out all topic areas that will be covered on the exam. For each topic, assess how much time you will need to go over – **in depth** - the material for **your first review** (for example, will you spend two days for gastrointestinal and one day for reproductive system?)
4. Now that you have a plan of how many full days (8-10 hours MAXIMUM) you will need for a thorough first review of the material, determine how many days you would like for your third and fourth, etc. reviews for each topic. (Remember, the last week is a comprehensive review of everything, so you should go through EVERYTHING at least once during that last week.)

5. Determine the total number of full days (again, **8-10 FOCUSED STUDY hours MAXIMUM for each day**) you will need to complete your Boards review plan. For each six days, add one more day (plus one day for your day off before the exam). For instance, if you determine that you will need 30 days to study, add five days for relaxing/padding plus one day for your day off before the exam.... plan for 36 days. In addition, you may want to add a day for the Prometric site practice exam, for the above example, you would need a total of 37 days for study. This will give you one full day each week to take it easy, or catch up if you find that you underestimated the time you needed to prepare.
6. Consider using Spring Break as a time to get started with your Boards preparation. Be generous and realistic with yourself knowing that it could be difficult to focus at this time. Use this time wisely – it can be a critical week for preparation and rejuvenation.
7. Write out a calendar of what you plan to do each day up until the day of the exam. Include practice exams, days off, etc.

After you begin your study plan:

- Do the best you can to follow-the plan day by day. Each night before you go to bed, plan out what you will do the next day. Tweak your plan as needed.
- Once you have a plan that will work for you **STICK WITH IT!!!** Don't worry about what other people are doing, everyone approaches their study differently. If you want to go over your plan with someone, or find that what you planned isn't working, contact Sandra LaBlance to review the details of the plan, any concerns you may have and to re-strategize if needed. Don't wait too long if you find your plan isn't working.

If you would like help mapping out your Boards study plan, contact:

Dr. Sandra LaBlance

Director of Academic and Career Counseling

[s-lablance@northwestern.edu](mailto:s-lablance@northwestern.edu)

312-503-0440

## Study Strategies

**Study Techniques:** Use techniques that have worked for you in the past. Be active in your studying, talk to yourself, talk to your walls, talk to your cat. If you find yourself dosing off while you are studying, don't add caffeine, don't nap, add activity.

**Find Review materials that will work for YOU!** Lecture notes from SF and SBM, USMLE Step I Secrets, Q-book and/or Q-bank, BRS, Robbins, whatever works for your style. Find one place to put all of your summary notes, such as First Aid or another system that works for you.

### Putting Together a Daily Plan:

1. Develop a system that you will use EVERY DAY! For example:
  - a. Wake up at 6:30 a.m. Go for a walk and eat breakfast. From 7:30 a.m. to 8:00 a.m. complete 20 questions in Q-Bank.
  - b. From 8:00 a.m. – 8:30 a.m., review the material covered in the 20 questions from Q-Bank.
  - c. At 8:30 a.m. – take a 15 minute break.
  - d. Start reviewing lecture notes and/or review materials at 8:45 a.m.-noon. Complete First Aid sections while reviewing materials
  - e. Noon- 12:30 p.m. Eat Lunch
  - f. Take a 30 minute break to walk...down your hall, around the library, etc.
  - g. Settle down with Q-bank, 20 more questions from 1:00 p.m. - 1:30p.m.
  - h. Review the material covered in the 20 questions from Q-bank from 1:30 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.
  - i. From 2:30 p.m. – 5:00 p.m., review lecture notes and/or review materials, completing First Aid Sections.
  - j. Take a break for dinner, to work out and to relax, 5:00 p.m. – 7:00p.m.
  - k. Read over your First Aid notes from the day from 7:00 p.m. – 8:00p.m.
  - l. Test yourself with a Q-bank block...50 questions, 8:00 p.m. –9:00p.m.
  - m. Take a break to watch TV from 9:00 p.m. – 10:00 p.m.
  - n. Write out your plan for the next day, 10:00 p.m. – 10:15 p.m.
  - o. Be in bed by 10:30 p.m.
  - p. Next day during breakfast,...spend 30 minutes reviewing First Aid from the day before. Spend 60 minutes reviewing answers from the 50 question Q-bank block from the night before.
  - q. Use your weekend time (maybe Saturday) to review EVERYTHING from the week.

Tip: Find a daily routine that works for you and stick with it! Get up at the same time every day and try to be in bed by the same time every day. Be consistent with where and how you study. Routine comes from organization. This is a time in your life that you want to be highly organized and mindful of daily preparation.

Tip: During your final week of review, consider studying in 50 minute blocks with 10 minute breaks to simulate the exam day. Use a timer to time yourself...this will create the pressure you will feel on the day of the exam and help you prepare.

## “What Worked For Me”

**Currie, Benjamin Class of:** 2010

**Email Address:** b-currie@md.northwestern.edu

### **What Boards preparation materials did you find most useful?**

These are essentially the only resources I used, and I found all of them worthwhile.

1. Kaplan Q-Bank - go through all of the questions and explanations! Most of my study time was spent here, but when I was reviewing the answers after a block, I would refer to my other study resources if necessary.
2. First Aid - you'll become very familiar with this excellent resource. But remember, it's most useful to remind you of what you've studied, and it often doesn't have enough detail in it (so write it in!).
3. Goljan Rapid Review Pathology (with audio) - this book is fantastic, but has more info than you need for Step 1. I followed along in it while listening to the audio. I also referenced it extensively while going through Q-Bank.
4. Microbiology Made Ridiculously Simple - a spectacular micro review (in fact, I wish I had used it in Toolbox). I focused on bacteria and antibiotics. The other sections (virus, parasite, etc) are good to read if you have time, or reference them as needed as you go through Q-Bank.
5. Pharm Cards - I went through these all once, and they're pretty good. Remember, they have way more info than you need to know on them. To be honest, I probably used Silinsky's lectures (and the other SBM pharm lectures) to review pharm more than I used pharm cards.
6. BRS Physiology (Costanzo) - a quick read, very worthwhile refresher.
7. BRS Pathology - somewhat redundant with Goljan's Rapid Review Path, so I didn't use it that much in my 4 study weeks. I used BRS Path a couple times during SBM, and kind of wish I had used it more during SBM. Whatever.

### **If you could prepare for Step I again what would you do differently?**

If I had it to do over, I would make sure to get through every single one of the Kaplan Q-Bank questions (I got through about 75% of them). It takes a lot of time to go through them (do it timed) and then review the answers, but it's worth it, because you will learn a ton. And remember, Kaplan Q-Bank is harder than the real Step 1, so don't be discouraged by low scores.

### **What worked best for you in your boards preparation?**

I'm not a textbook-reading guy. I discovered too late how good Robbins and Cotran (and especially Baby Robbins) actually is. But if you're in my boat, don't worry. Apart from listening to some Goljan audio during the year, I started studying in earnest right after the year ended, using the 7 resources I listed. I gave myself exactly 4 weeks from the Unit 7 exam to Step 1.

Apart from using First Aid throughout my 4 weeks, here's what I did. I read through BRS Physio over the course of a few days at the outset as a refresher (it was remarkably useful). At the beginning of my studying I also read through most of Micro Made Simple (mostly the bacteria and antibiotics, along with the virus morphology

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table). I made sure to get through all of Goljan's audio while following along in Goljan Rapid Review Path. I went through Pharm Cards once. But most importantly, I did lots and lots of Q-Bank practice questions (timed). I did questions steadily throughout my 4 weeks, but the last few days of studying, pretty much all I did was questions. After doing a block of 50, I would review the answers, look stuff up if I wanted more info (in First Aid, Goljan, Micro Made Simple, etc), and write stuff down in First Aid if I thought it would be helpful to review later.

**Words of Wisdom to share:**

During the year, focus on studying for your SBM exams, not the Boards. That said, following along with a Path review book (Goljan's Rapid Review Path and/or BRS Path) during SBM can be helpful to organize the material and expose you to the highlights of what the Boards cares about. (For example, you could read the appropriate chapter/section out of BRS Path just before the lectures on that topic).

I can't emphasize enough how important practice questions are. I went with Kaplan Q-Bank, which was amazing for its explanations (but others say good things about other question banks, too). Q-Bank has over 2000 questions: really try to get through all of them.

Once the year ends and you're studying for Step 1 as your full-time job, don't forget to get some exercise and relax a bit too. It will keep you sane (and will probably even improve your score).

On the day before you take Step 1 DON'T STUDY. I knew this was good advice and planned not to study, but then I felt woefully unprepared for the exam the day before I took it, and tried studying a bit in the morning. But that only started to confuse me, so I stopped and exercised/relaxed the rest of the day, keeping my mind off the Boards. You might feel the same way and be tempted to study the day before Step 1, so promise yourself that you won't do it! You're more prepared than you know. Remember, you'll never know everything, but you will know enough.

Finally, remember that the Boards is an endurance test. Don't let the 7-8 hours of testing wear you out. Do all those smart test-taking things (eat snacks, use your break time, etc). Give each question a fair shot, but if you don't know it, pick an answer and move on (and pray that it was a pilot question anyway). Remember that there are easy questions at the end of the block that you don't want to run out of time on.

And when you're finished, celebrate.

**El-Nachef, Wael Class of: 2010**

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**What Boards preparation materials did you find most useful?**

First Aid

BRS Path

BRS Phys

Levinson's Microbio and Immuno (just for the cases, questions, and summary charts, etc)

UCV series (all of them)

HY Neuroanatomy

RR Biochem

[I had other books but they were not very helpful]

**If you could prepare for Step I again what would you do differently?**

\*\* Do ALL of the officially released Step 1 questions-- some of the Q banks out there are out of touch with what gets covered and how it is asked. It takes time to go through all the official questions and to review the answers, so make sure you make time for all of these instead of wasting too much time on Kaplan Q bank.

1) Do not even attempt to do heavy-duty studying during the school year. At most, follow lecture material in First Aid just to make sure you really nail the basic concepts-- lectures can sometimes get overly detailed or are badly presented, and First Aid can provide some helpful structure and emphasis.

2) Exceptions to the above statement: some of the biochemistry and immunologic diseases that will be covered on Step 1 were either poorly covered or not covered at all in lecture. Give yourself ~4 days (maybe over winter break) to really review this material-- during those 4 weeks of intense studying, you shouldn't be "learning" anything new but just reviewing so getting some of the biochem and immuno out of the way early will be extremely helpful and make more time for other subjects.

**Kakodkar, Samir Class of: 2010**

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**What Boards preparation materials did you find most useful?**

First AID, Goljan Audio Notes, BRS Pathology, BRS Physiology

**If you could prepare for Step I again what would you do differently?**

Exercise regularly and eat well. If you don't, you'll break down mentally and physically. In the end it's one day that counts.

**What worked best for you in your boards preparation?**

Took notes into review books from class. Didn't waste time studying anatomy, histology or pharm that isn't in first aid. I didn't abandon class lectures in the end and I'm really glad I didn't.

**Words of Wisdom to share:**

Take 2 redbulls to the test center in case of emergency!

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**Blum, Christina Class of: 2010**

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**What Boards preparation materials did you find most useful?**

First Aid (had it hole punched and put it into a gigantic binder w/ dividers so I could add my own notes) BRS Pathology, Goljan pathology notes, USMLE Secrets, Robbins! Kaplan Q Bank, Levinson, Microbiology Tables/Microbiology Made Ridiculously Simple tables, Lippincott, pharmacology flash cards.

**If you could prepare for Step I again what would you do differently?**

In my last month (the main month) of studying, I started off by doing Kaplan Q Bank questions each day, studied a little, then did more questions, but I was not scoring well at all and getting very discouraged. Doing practice questions is very important, but then I realized--why not approach boards studying the way I approached studying for SBM? In SBM, I always strove to learn the material as comprehensively as possible and as systematically as possible. So I went back to the basics--for each Step 1 subject, I did the chapter in First Aid, the corresponding BRS or Goljan chapter, but also the corresponding sections in Robbins were always open in front of me to supplement my review. Then at the end of the day, I did a block of 20-40 questions. It was very stressful switching to this method after a week or so of trying others first. But it ended up being the best for me. Doing 100 questions/day may not be what works for you, and in my case, doing 20-40 each day was enough.

**What worked best for you in your boards preparation?**

See above. Also: using the methods that worked for me in the past which included sticking to a study schedule, moving through the material in a very systematic way, using Robbins to supplement all the review books, and taking the time to relearn basic details that I had forgotten, as much as I didn't want to. I also set aside a day or two to do a half-length test off of the NBME website. They calculate a score for you and it takes away a lot of the "unknown". Meeting with Sandy LaBlance in the Spring to develop my approach was extremely helpful and I strongly recommend setting up a meeting with her if you feel lost.

**Words of Wisdom to share:**

1. Consider where you feel most comfortable studying, where you'll feel less stressed, if you want to see your classmates as you prepare. I flew home the day after our last exam and it was completely worth it.
2. Take that 3 hour practice test at your testing center.
3. You'll hear different things about when to start studying but your best moments will be that last month of preparation. Overall, not blowing off SBM is the best thing to do, despite what you might hear. So my advice: around March, if you haven't already done so, formulate a general study plan. Whatever subjects you felt uneasy with in the past conceptually, this is a good time to review. In my case I reviewed Renal & CV over Spring Break. So when I looked at those subjects again later on, it was less overwhelming. Biochem is a long, detailed chapter, so that may be something worth doing in advance. But whatever you study before school ends, you will study again.
4. Keep doing the things that keep you centered. Good Luck!

**Kott, Andrew Class of: 2010**

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**What Boards preparation materials did you find most useful?**

First Aid, USMLERx.com question bank

**If you could prepare for Step I again what would you do differently?**

Nothing

**What worked best for you in your boards preparation?**

I kept the same schedule every day starting at 8 am and studying until 10 pm when I went to bed. Interspersed were breaks for lunch, working out, and dinner. Each weekend while studying I left the city and spent time with family and friends. All in all, I studied 5 days per week and any more would have burned me out.

**Words of Wisdom to share:**

Schedule time for yourself each week. Study no more than 6 days per week because you will burn out very quickly. Try to schedule the exam around 3 weeks upon finishing school. Any more than that and you will find your studying becomes more and more inefficient.

**Lipton, Matthew Class of: 2010**

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**What Boards preparation materials did you find most useful?**

USMLE Step 1 Secrets, USMLEworld.com, First Aid, Case Files Pathology, High Yield Neuroanatomy

**What worked best for you in your boards preparation?**

Study for boards during each unit, starting at the beginning of the year. This way you won't have to cram at the end.

**Words of Wisdom to share:**

Don't wait until the end of the year to study! And get a USMLEworld.com subscription early, hopefully by winter break.

**Lo, Ryan Class of:** 2010

**Email Address:** r-lo@md.northwestern.edu

**What Boards preparation materials did you find most useful?**

Questions, questions, and questions. To learn the first time through, I'd get First Aid, BRS path, and Rapid review. That order goes from least detailed to most detailed. Have those books open or glance through them as you're doing SBM lectures. See what you need to know for the boards that isn't being covered by SBM. When you really start to study for boards, do as many questions as humanly possible. For me, I know that I'm lazy, can't read a book for all that long before I get bored and do something else. Questions for me was what really worked, I'd get really frustrated when I got questions wrong, but that'd be what'd make me remember the answer. And plus, you get this sense of accomplishment after you do a set of questions like you've really done something instead of read the same few pages again.

**If you could prepare for Step I again what would you do differently?**

Take the test earlier. You set the boards date so randomly, but you always give yourself more time than you need. I was dying to take the test a week earlier cause that was the limit of how much I could study.

**What worked best for you in your boards preparation?**

I know I can't focus, so I started early. Learn as you learn with SBM. Learn boards stuff they don't cover as you learn SBM. Like study all of cardio boards stuff even the stuff not covered as you go thru the cardio unit. It'll be better in the end reviewing instead of learning for the first time. At least look at the boards stuff once, know what you're missing. Do lots of questions, do the ones you got wrong again. If you remember the answer to the question, then you'll prolly get simliar questions right.

**Words of Wisdom to share:**

Study your own way. This was my plan, I think it worked pretty well. Other people will study their way and be very confident about it. You will be intimidated. Try your best not to be, stick with your plan and you'll be good.

**McIntyre, Caley Class of:** 2010

**Email Address:** c-mcintyre@northwestern.edu

**What Boards preparation materials did you find most useful?**

USMLE world questions online. First Aid is obviously helpful, too, but you probably already know that

**If you could prepare for Step I again what would you do differently?**

Start the questions earlier. They give you a good feel for what exactly is tested and in what sort of proportions.

**What worked best for you in your boards preparation?**

Practice problems. again and again and again.

**Words of Wisdom to share:**

Stay relaxed, you'll do fine.

**Micev, Alan Class of:** 2010

**Email Address:** a-micev@md.northwestern.edu

**What Boards preparation materials did you find most useful?**

First Aid and BRS Path were my main sources of info. I skimmed over Silinsky's lectures again. Goljan lectures were alright -- he always had information that was clinically relevant (which makes things easier to remember.)

**If you could prepare for Step I again what would you do differently?**

The first time I opened First Aid was the day after the last exam. I had 1 month to go over everything. It turned out to be more than enough time, but it was very stressful nonetheless. I could have had a lot less stress had I started studying earlier and incorporated information into first aid throughout the year.

**What worked best for you in your boards preparation?**

I went to Kinko's and had my copy of first aid hole-punched and put into a binder. That way I could easily add information on a topic that was unclear. The binder eventually turned into my boards-bible.

**Words of Wisdom to share:**

You will be fine, I promise. Everyone will say that to you and you won't believe them but, oddly enough, it's true.

**Pham, Martin Class of:** 2010

**Email Address:** martinpham@md.northwestern.edu

**What Boards preparation materials did you find most useful?**

First Aid, USMLE World Qbank, BRS Pathology, HY Neuroanatomy, HY Behavioral Science, HY Embryology, Goljan Audio. BRS Path was used as a reference, all the HY's I used in the week before to brush up.

**If you could prepare for Step I again what would you do differently?**

Nothing I can think of.

**What worked best for you in your boards preparation?**

SBM prepares a foundation for boards if you study it well, so don't knock too much of it off thinking "it won't be on boards so it's not important." In January I began listening to Goljan Audio regularly. I started USMLE World Qbank and First Aid studying/memorizing in spring break.

**Roth, Ben Class of:** 2010

**Email Address:** benjamin.roth@gmail.com

**What Boards preparation materials did you find most useful?**

First Aid, Rapid Review Pathology by Goljan (a must-have), BRS Physiology. USMLE World and NBME practice tests (I took 2 of them).

**If you could prepare for Step I again what would you do differently?**

I would have memorized ALL of the tables in First Aid inside and out: the genetic diseases, storage diseases, interleukins. I also would have finished the USMLE World questions.

**What worked best for you in your boards preparation?**

I chose to study at home in Pennsylvania. I did not want the stress of other frantic students nor did I want to compare myself to others. I wanted to do my best and not worry about every detail that someone else knew. I balanced studying with USMLE World questions, usually doing 50-100 questions/day. Additionally, for me, I quickly revised my study schedule according to my needs. After reading a chapter in Goljan or First Aid, I could assess how well I knew it and adjust my future studying accordingly. Finally, the most important thing for me was not spending the WHOLE month studying. I burn out easily. As a result, I varied my study schedule, having 1-4 half days off per week. Plus, I rarely studied more than 8-10 hours/day. Because of these adjustments, I could focus much better for the hours I did study.

**Words of Wisdom to share:**

- Study however you study best (don't study how others study best!)
- Maintain a routine of studying
- Take time off if you're burning out!
- Do practice questions, esp NBME tests, to assess the quality of your studying
- Never change your test date.

Sandra LaBlance, PhD

Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine

USMLE Step I Boards, "What Worked for Me" 2008/2009

**Segura, Adriana Class of: 2010**

**Email Address:** a-segura@md.northwestern.edu

**What Boards preparation materials did you find most useful?**

When it came to Boards studying, I was definitely a minimalist. I used the fewest amount of materials possible that I felt comfortable with.

- First Aid: as I'm sure you already know from everyone else, this book is a must
- BRS path/phys: sparingly
- USMLE World Q- bank
- USMLE Secrets

**If you could prepare for Step I again what would you do differently?**

I don't think I would do anything majorly differently.

**What worked best for you in your boards preparation?**

I got First Aid at the beginning of M2 year. (Using last years edition is fine, which is what I did). Throughout each unit, I would go over the appropriate section in First Aid a few times before each test, just becoming familiar with the material in each section before it came down to Boards studying. I also tried to do the same with BRS path, but didn't think this was as helpful and BRS path can be really detailed. Also, especially for some of the units that I knew were my weak points, I would read/skim BRS phys before the start of the unit or at least in the first couple of days.

Don't kill yourself over M2 exams because a lot of the material is way too detailed and not relevant for the Boards; however I felt that by studying hard and doing well on M2 unit exams, it helped me to only have to "refresh" my knowledge when it came to Boards studying.

**Srinivasan, Vidhya Class of: 2010**

**Email Address:** v-srinivasan2@md.northwestern.edu

**What Boards preparation materials did you find most useful?**

I found First aid to be the most helpful and despite what people say, know it stone cold.

**If you could prepare for Step I again what would you do differently?**

I would use less resources, I spent a lot of time going back and forth between Goljan and BRS, and going through High Yields, I honestly think I would have done better if all I did was first aid and a qbank.

**Tang, Stephanie Class of: 2010**

**Email Address:** s-tang@md.northwestern.edu

**What Boards preparation materials did you find most useful?**

First Aid, BRS Path, BRS Phys, Pharm Cards, Micro Cards

**If you could prepare for Step I again what would you do differently?**

Don't stress yourself out and study too much, pace yourself or you'll burn out - 8hrs/day 6 days a week for 4 weeks is a good schedule

**What worked best for you in your boards preparation?**

Do LOTS of practice questions, even if you get a ton wrong and they make you feel horrible. Learning how to answer questions online and building endurance matters.

**Words of Wisdom to share:**

Don't let other people stress you out!!

**Name:** Hans Arora, Class of 2009

**Email:** h-arora@northwestern.edu

**What Boards Preparation Material did you find most useful?**

Books: First Aid, BRS Path and Phys, RoadMap Neuroscience, Step 1 Secrets (different format than first-aid, found it less tedious to switch things up a bit), Goljan's Rapid Review Pathology (didn't use it, but heard great things from everyone who did), Underground Clinical Vignettes, Question banks: USMLE Rx (QBank was too specialized and I didn't feel that it was very representative of the boards), USMLE World was supposedly very helpful for all who used it.

**If you could prepare for Step I again what would you do differently?**

Get your boards books early and use them throughout SBM. They will help you focus on what is important. All too often we waste time while studying for the boards getting familiar with the materials we are using, so it makes sense to familiarize ourselves with materials earlier. Get First-Aid now; there's no reason to wait for the 2008 version.

**What worked best for you in your board's preparation?**

Sticking with my schedule.

**Words of Wisdom to share:**

Pick your date, and don't change it. Schedule something right after boards so you have no choice. Whatever schedule you make for yourself, stick with it and use it to keep yourself on track so that by the time the test comes around, you'll be as prepared on that day as you had planned however many months ago.

Sandra LaBlance, PhD

Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine

USMLE Step I Boards, "What Worked for Me" 2008/2009

**Name:** Charles Osterberg, Class of 2009

**Email:** costerberg@md.northwestern.edu

**What Boards Preparation Material did you find most useful?**

First aid, USMLE World Q bank (better than Kaplan Q bank), BRS path/phys, and high yield for the rest of the subjects.

**If you could prepare for Step I again what would you do differently?**

Take all the NBME practice tests. They are most like the real thing, and worth spending the extra \$45 per test.

**What worked best for you in your board's preparation?**

Questions, questions, and more questions. I thought doing just about every question out there helped me isolate my weak areas and work on them. Plus, there are only so many different ways to write a question about one topic, so the more you do, the better.

**Words of Wisdom to share:**

Make a schedule, stick to it, do a little everyday, do questions everyday, take 1/2 day off per week, and don't change your date (set a date and revolve you next couple weeks around that).

**Name:** Benjamin Paul, Class of 2009

**Email:** b-paul@md.northwestern.edu

**What Boards Preparation Material did you find most useful?**

First AID, BRS Path, High Yields (Behavioral, Neuro, Cellbio/microbio, embryology)

**If you could prepare for Step I again what would you do differently?**

Focus more on neurology - since it comes as the last unit - I figured I would be all set for the test, but in truth - there are topics you must cover for boards which are not covered in SBM. Also, look at brain imaging in depth.

**What worked best for you in your board's preparation?**

Do an organ system a day... make days in your schedule to catch up. Personally, I loved my notecards, but you just have to find a system that works for you. Personally: I reviewed SBM 1 + 2 over winter break, did microbio over winter (as it is poorly covered in SBM), SBM 3+4 over spring break, and started in on First Aid during spring/MDM. I had made notecards for First Aid by the end of SBM 7. I reviewed my cards, other sources, and did questions each day. I took 1 month to study before boards and felt like that was an appropriate amount of time. I would not suggest taking boards sooner.

**Words of Wisdom to share:**

1. Take the practice examination at the site you will be taking the real examination - it is a great way to get comfortable in testing milieu.
2. Use the white boards given to you during the test effectively. Write mnemonics down or any lists you feel would help you.
3. Pacing on the exam is key, do practice problems to learn the pace. The prompts for boards questions tend to be longer and less nit-picky than practice problems. Get used to taking a test looking at a computer screen.
4. Mark up your first aid book as you go through the SBM unit. Look at the chapter before a given unit to see what will be the really high-yield and important ideas. Go through the book after the unit to get comfortable with the presentation of the chapter.
5. Do not freak out. During the test, you will encounter problems that are in none of the review books - but are in Robbins or in SBM lectures. You will feel happy you went to NU and worked so hard during M2 year. Good luck!

**Name:** Tom Brinton, Class of 2009

**Email:** tbrinton@gmail.com

**What Boards Preparation Material did you find most useful?**

- First Aid & BRS Path - you know about these.
- Practice exams - do at least 2.
- Q-bank - use early and regularly. Don't fret about poor scores on it.
- Kaplan books - too much detail, but good. Use early if at all.
- Micro made simple - excellent review. Memorize micro out of First Aid though.
- BRS phys - easy read, too simple a good review. Kaplan's was better.
- USMLE Secrets - excellent. Good bathroom read/first pass.
- High Yield Biochem – excellent, concise and helpful.
- Review of medical micro and immunology by Levinson - Excellent for Immuno
- Road Map Gross Anatomy – great with good depth.
- Road Map Neuroanatomy - wish I'd done that one instead of High Yield.
- Road Map Pharmacology - Good for what is in it. Doesn't cover all Pharm.
- BRS Pharm flash cards - nice for a change up in pharm.
- Goljan audio lectures - great change of pace, loved these lectures.

**If you could prepare for Step I again what would you do differently?**

I would have started writing in my First Aid earlier... And I would have reviewed more throughout the year. On a side note: Go to Kinkos downstairs. Have them chop off the spine and three hole punch it. Then put it in a binder. Also, get all your other review books spiral bound. It's relatively cheap and makes your books much easier to use.

**What worked best for you in your board's preparation?**

Repetition and lots of different sources - Make a schedule so that you can check things off a list and know you've covered everything. Do tons of practice questions (and practice tests). Memorize First Aid and BRS path. Study everything else well.

**Words of Wisdom to share:**

Whatever you did for the last 3 days before all your SBM exams you'll be doing for the month and a half before your USMLE. Try to schedule in adequate review time and also recreational time. Don't put off all your studying until your last unit exam is over. Start mixing it in now. USMLE Secrets is a great first pass. BRS Path should be used all along. Taking notes in your First Aid is good too. If you haven't started studying yet, don't freak out. You'll forget everything you study now anyway. But still, you'll forget most of the things you study at least a couple of times before you take the test, so it's better to get the process started. Repetition is money.

**Name:** Justin Reif, Class of 2009  
**Email:** j-reif@md.northwestern.edu

**What Boards Preparation Material did you find most useful?**

First Aid Rapid Review  
Pathology BRS Physiology  
USMLE World question bank

**If you could prepare for Step I again what would you do differently?**

I wouldn't buy Kaplan's QBank--USMLE World was much better. (more rigorous questions, less randomness). Cheaper too (or at least it was).

**What worked best for you in your board's preparation?**

Do 50-100 questions everyday, and make sure to review the questions you got right and wrong, no matter how painful/time-consuming it may be. Read First Aid through as the first thing you do and learn what is in there, so you know what the other review books can add. Review First aid thoroughly as the last thing you do before the test. Use multiple review books for any subject you need work in, but make sure they are short--you won't have time to make it through multiple long books. Ideally, I would have a book ~100 pages on any given subject (except path), read through it in 1-2 days, and then move onto the next subject.

**Words of Wisdom to share:**

Get to the test center early if you want to, they will let you start whenever you show up. The added advantage here is you have a better chance of getting the nice quiet computer in the back and not the one in the middle of the room sandwiched in between the people whose test is seemingly made up of furious typing for 8 hours. Make a plan for how you are going to study for the test early, and do what you know will work for you. It is tempting to do what everyone else is doing, but you won't make it through a month of intense studying if you aren't studying in the way that makes you most productive/relaxed. The same goes for books, outside First Aid, use those books that work best for you, not anyone else. First Aid is the only book I would recommend for everyone, just because it is such a high-yield overview of most step 1 material.

**Name:** Catherine Chen, Class of 2009  
**Email:** c-chen-1@md.northwestern.edu

**What Boards Preparation Material did you find most useful?**

First Aid  
BRS Physiology  
BRS Pathophysiology  
Kaplan Lecture Notes Series  
USMLERx

**If you could prepare for Step I again what would you do differently?**

More question bank questions!

**Name:** Caroline Kalember, Class of 2009  
**Email:** c-kalember@md.northwestern.edu

**What Boards Preparation Material did you find most useful?**

I used First aid, BRS pathology and BRS physiology, and Kaplan Q bank. Then if there was a subject that I didn't know as well from these books I'd supplement with "subject" books like immunology text.

**If you could prepare for Step I again what would you do differently?**

I really wouldn't do anything different.

**What worked best for you in your board's preparation?**

I studied for 4 weeks. In the first 2 1/2 weeks I did a subject a day and read about the particular subject in BRS physiology, then BRS pathology. Then I would read the First aid section on the subject. During this time I would outline the key points or the points I thought I'd have difficulty remembering. Then I would end the day doing a Q bank test on that subject. I did this for all of the subjects. Then for the next 1 1/2 weeks I reviewed the subjects (2-3 per day) but going over my sheets and first aid. At the end of those days I would do comprehensive Q bank tests on all of the subjects at once.

**Words of Wisdom to share:**

Take time off!!!! There were some students who took the boards right before 3rd year started and I don't recommend this. The questions on the test I didn't know I wouldn't have known by studying for the test any longer and the break was very important for mental sanity. Trust me...1 extra week really won't make as much difference as you think.

**Name:** Lakshmi, Class of 2009

**Email:** l-tummala@md.northwestern.edu

**What Boards Preparation Material did you find most useful?**

First Aid, BRS Physiology, BRS Pathology, Kaplan QBank, Clinical Neuroanatomy made really easy (or something like that), practice tests from NBME.

**If you could prepare for Step I again what would you do differently?**

I would start Qbank earlier and read through every answer explanation. Second, annotate First Aid while we did the SBM units and also, not skip all the psych lectures for SBM.

**What worked best for you in your board's preparation?**

Repeating first aid (my annotated copy) over and over again and practice questions.

**Words of Wisdom to share:**

Don't move your test back. Don't. You'll panic two weeks before and want to change the date, but don't, trust me. Give yourself at least one week off. Don't skip unit 7 SBM lectures to study for boards. Don't go to the boards review sessions unless you think you need to (I mean, don't go to all of them just to go - go because you feel like you need some help in that particular area).

**Name:** Rajeev Mehta, Class of 2009

**Email:** r-mehta@md.northwestern.edu

**If you could prepare for Step I again what would you do differently?**

While First Aid has many good items within it - it is by no means a primary source or the most important tool as many people fable it to be. Anyone who tells you "all you need is First Aid" has amnesia about what they studied, or is delusional about what needs to be done. First Aid is good - but it is not the most important thing. Make sure to do questions - any questions - USMLE world, Q bank, Q book, anything - on a regular basis from the very start.

**What worked best for you in your board's preparation?**

My score jumped 40 points in ten days once I started doing lots of questions regularly.

**Name:** Ellie Bly, Class of 2009

**Email:** eleanorbly@gmail.com

**What Boards Preparation Material did you find most useful?**

First Aid Qbank

**If you could prepare for Step I again what would you do differently?**

I would have tried to remember that NO ONE leaves the test feeling like they did well.

**What worked best for you in your board's preparation?**

It was important to me to have a 2 week vacation, so I decided to give myself three weeks of studying before I took the boards. Since that is on the shorter end of study time, I did not really take any days off and instead just studied pretty much all day for 20 days in a row. I would get up really early because I was more efficient in the mornings. I think this study schedule was only possible because I had a trip to look forward to!! Also I worked out every single day which was absolutely necessary for keeping balance and feeling good.

**Words of Wisdom to share:**

I knew that a written schedule would only stress me out, so instead I just played it by ear in terms of what I studied each day. I just tried to get through First Aid in great detail as many times as I could. I got through it about three times. If you know First Aid cold then you will most definitely do well on the test. When I needed to do something more active I would do Qbank questions. Good luck with studying! It is NOT as bad as everyone makes it seem! I am so glad I took it early so if you feel like your study style would make that possible, go ahead, take it early, and enjoy your vacation:)

**Name:** Romie Gibly, Class of 2009

**Email:** romie@northwestern.edu

**What Boards Preparation Material did you find most useful?**

BRS path (all of it), BRS physio (digestive and renal sections) high yield anatomy, neuro and biochem, First Aid, and Qbank.

**If you could prepare for Step I again what would you do differently?**

Not much.

**What worked best for you in your board's preparation?**

Didn't do anything until after the neuro exam. Then I spent 5 weeks, 8-12 hrs/day studying from the above resources, NOT my SBM notes. Schedule was set up to cover all topics twice (except neuro and physch, which we had just done in the final unit of the year, I only covered it once). Tried to do about 1-2 hrs of QBank at the end of every day. I used about 45 minutes to review the previous day's material in the mornings before starting the new material too. I took two of the practice tests, and a day off before the exam.

**Words of Wisdom to share:**

Hide your SBM notes, they contain way more detail than you need for the USMLE, and will only cause you endless frustration.

**Name:** Jonathan Park, Class of 2009

**Email:** j-park10@Northwestern.edu

**What Boards Preparation Material did you find most useful?**

BRS pathology - I read this in excess of 5-6 times I don't regret it at all. Read it over and over and over again. Practice tests - NBME online assessments, predicted my score on the dot. Microcards. Microbio made ridiculously simple. Lange medical microbio and immuno - great immuno section, great questions. First Aid - I didn't find this to be the bible it was advertised to be, but it was a comprehensive source, not something to throw all your dice into. Used this almost exclusively for pharm and biochemistry. Board simulator series - demoralizingly hard. Doesn't hurt, but not necessary. Pharmcards - I used these all year to learn SBM, but not necessary at all for actual boards. Goljan audiolectures - great for a conceptual framework. Embryology - high yield Gross anatomy - high yield. Loved this book, probably read it 3 times.

**If you could prepare for Step I again what would you do differently?**

I wouldn't freak out the way I did, ideally. Someone told me, falsely, that you needed a 260 to get into the specialty I wanted. First of all, entirely untrue. I came very close to meeting that score, but I spent my whole year completely freaked out. Make time for your personal life - significant others, exercise, family. I didn't do this enough. Would have started BRS path earlier. As in day 1. Would not have studied at Galter library. Seeing classmates going at it freaked me out.

**What worked best for you in your board's preparation?**

I think I did micro the right way. I absolutely nailed it during SBM, and used microcards, very simple, and Lange questions early on. Repeated this in the spring, and felt completely prepared for that section. Repeated BRS path ad nauseum. This I believe was key.

**Words of Wisdom to share:**

Don't surround yourself with people who freak you out. Talk to older students who will both calm you and give you advice. Match your target score to your long term goals. Don't listen to people who say 'everything works out.' Everything works out when you put in your best effort, not through serendipity. You will most likely feel hopeless at multiple points. Keep your head up and keep pushing.

**Name:** Melissa Marinelli, Class of 2009  
**Email:** m-marinelli@md.northwestern.edu

**What Boards Preparation Material did you find most useful?**

BRS pathology and physiology Kaplan Qbank Robbins' Pathology Question Book (uncertain of official name) First Aid.

**If you could prepare for Step I again what would you do differently?**

I am not sure. I completely melted down at the end and on one hand I regret that, but on the other I think it served (after wasting ~4 hours!) to motivate me further. However, I wouldn't recommend this to anyone else! My system worked well for me, especially after I established a rhythm to the studying and a systematic approach to each subject.

**What worked best for you in your board's preparation?**

I did the same thing for each subject. I read through First Aid quickly, then read BRS Path and Physio, then did the Robbins questions for that subject. Then I repopulated First Aid from memory. (I copied the headings on the first pass through, then made myself regenerate the material. This was incredibly helpful!)

**Words of Wisdom to share:**

Gather information and ideas from people who have taken this exam. Then try to think about how you study and use the ideas that might work for you. Allow yourself the first couple of days for trial and error and accept that it will take a bit of time to figure out what works best for you. Also, don't take too much time to study (i.e. 6 weeks) You probably won't do that much better, and it will be at the cost of mental health! Finally, go see Sandy!

**Name:** Arjun Venkatesh, Class of 2008  
**Email:** avenkatesh@md.northwestern.edu

**What Boards Preparation Material did you find most useful?**

QBank Lanhe Pharm Review Questions Lange Microbiology Review Questions BRS Biochem BRS Phys BRS Path.

**If you could prepare for Step I again what would you do differently?**

Read Robbins between January and June in its entirety I would also limit my books and try to read a few review books twice, rather than multiple books

**What worked best for you in your board's preparation?**

Focusing on my weaknesses, ie biochem, genetics, pharm - rather than my strengths such as anatomy.

**Words of Wisdom to share:**

Repetition is important, so keep rereading and redoing questions.

**From David Salzman,MD, 2005.....**

Here are some of my suggestions, thoughts, etc, for what worked for me. Keep in mind that there are probably some new study aids available which may be "better" than the ones I used. Just take some time in the book store to look at some of the books and find the ones you think look comparable to your learning style.

**Books that cover all topics:**

1. **First Aid for Step 1.** Good broad coverage of all the topics covered on Step 1. Topics are presented separately. Did a good job covering side effects of drugs,
2. **Boards and Wards for Step 1.** This is another good review book that integrates all of the topics associated with each disease. The book is divided by organ system. Thus for any given disease you can learn about path, pathophysiology, pharm, micro etc. Not as detailed as First Aid but great resource.

**Books/Study aids for each individual topic. I thought it was helpful to just have one for each topic.**

1. **Pharm - Pharm cards**
2. **Micro - Micro cards**
3. **Path - BRS pathology**
4. **Physiology - BRS Physiology**
5. **Neuro - High yield -** I thought the diagrams and short amount of writing was helpful
6. **Anatomy - First Aid**
7. **Embryology - First Aid**
8. **Histo - First Aid**
9. **Genetics/Molecular Biology -** Learned the diseases and mechanism of disease from First Aid
10. **Behavior/Psych - BRS**

**And then.....**

1. **Qbank.** Great practice for the test.

I hope this is helpful

David

**From Maria Monge, Class of 2007....**

**What material?**

Pathophys for Boards and Wards, First Aid. Both very good, but probably need more anatomy review from another source.

**Wisdom?**

There is no substitute for going to lecture, studying and doing well during the second year. You retain so much more and aren't looking at things for the very first time when it comes to studying for the boards. Save helpful study sheets that you make or are given to you throughout the year for quick review. There were questions on Step 1 that I definitely did not "study" but had learned from lecture.

From Hubert Benzon, MD, 2005...

Okay, here is my advice and info on books.

1) **Q-bank**. This is great for active learning. There are several hundred questions that force you to think and the questions are always a great way to reinforce your reading. I recommend doing them in 50 question blocks to mimic the actual test day. And the format is just like the actual exam.

2) **First Aid**. A great comprehensive book that tried to highlight all the important concepts you would need to know. Also good as a definitive source to jot notes in and look back at. The section that rates books is also a good way to find other reading material.

3) **BRS pathology**. The majority of your 2nd year education is pathology and this book has all the basics in it. After First Aid, I thought this book was the most important. Pathology is the focus, and this book is a good comprehensive source for that.

4) **Clinical Vignettes**. Good to use with a study buddy or group. One person reads the scenario and the other person(s) guesses the disease.

5) **MicroCards and PharmCards**. Pretty good comprehensive source for those 2 topics.

6) **Buzzwords for the Boards**. Again, good for times like when you're half watching television or doing something else. Just good buzzwords/questions to study.

**Advice**: Just study hard and do activities outside of medicine and hang out with your family and friends to keep you sane. You will all do well, every class does.

Hubert

From Myttle Mayuga, Class of 2007.....

- Histology → SGS Sessions! High Yield  
Anatomy, Embryology, Neuroanatomy → Lecture Material  
(Learn Block 7 Well) High Yield
- Pathology → BRS
- Physiology → BRS
- Pharmacology → First Aid, If you have time...read Lippincott
- Biochem → High Yield
- Behavioral Science → BRS/High Yield
- Epidemiology → First Aid + MDM Review Sheets
- Immuno/Hem → Toolbox → Learn it well and make study sheets → Kaplan

Sandra LaBlance, PhD  
Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine  
USMLE Step I Boards, "What Worked for Me" 2008/2009

**From Swetha Kowsik, Class of 2007....**

**What boards prep materials did you find most helpful?**

First Aid, BRS PATH, BRS PHYS, MICROBIO MADE RID. SIMPLE, BIOCHEM MADE RID. SIMPLE, QBANK

**If you could prep for Step I again, what would you do differently?**

There's not too much I would do differently. Perhaps I would do Qbank questions over again.

**What worked best for you in your boards preparation?**

Focused studying for 7-8 hrs per day, with no distractions. Do questions during the morning, after lunch (to deal with postprandial slumber) and around 3-4 pm to simulate the test environment. Do all of the questions on Q-bank and then do the ones you missed again.

**Any words of wisdom to share?**

Make sure you learn from the questions. Don't ignore the ones you got right. Make sure you repeat the questions you missed. Don't just study topics that you enjoy or are good at. It's very easy to keep studying something you enjoy and do well in, but ultimately, you have to focus on your weak points (which you should identify as soon as possible) and most importantly, SET AN EARLY TEST DATE! There is nothing you can learn in an extra two/three days and an early test date will motivate you to schedule your studying earlier.

**From Geoff Marecek, Class of 2007...**

1. What boards prep materials did you find most helpful?  
**First Aid, BRS Path, BRS Phys, Micro Made Ridiculously Simple, QBank**
2. If you could prep for Step I again, what would you do differently?  
**I would start doing questions earlier so that I could take time to go back and review - the explanations in qbank don't do justice to the topics**
3. What worked best for you in your boards preparation?  
**Make a schedule.**
4. Any words of wisdom to share?  
**Stick to your schedule - no pushing it back. An extra week won't help you. Start earlier if you must. Most importantly, learn it the first time in SBM. It really came down to whether or not it stuck when we first saw it. Use boards studying to refresh your memory and to learn minutiae.**

**From Adam Romeiser, Class of 2007...**

1. What boards prep materials did you find most helpful?
  - **BRS pathology**
  - **M2 notes (seriously - I learned so much reviewing the SBM precis b/c I had written and highlighted all the important stuff in them. I find that it's always easier to relearn something in the same way that I learned it first (provided that I learned it well the first time). To supplement these notes, I used BRS pathology.**
  - **Q bank**
2. If you could prep for Step I again, what would you do differently?
  - **I would have spent more time reviewing Biochem and Cell-bio, or at least I would have made sure to have done all the Q bank questions on those topics.**
3. What worked best for you in your boards preparation?
  - **Discipline - stay faithful to your schedule, but take some time off every now and then.**
4. Any words of wisdom to share?
  - **Don't push back your boards date.**
  - **Don't stay up until 3 am studying. Go to bed at a reasonable hour and wake up early. --"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make straight your paths." (Proverbs 3:5-6) To lean on the Lord, to be dependent on Him, is a great virtue and blessing, especially for those of us who can't carry all the load by ourselves.**

**From Jeremy Law, Class of 2007...**

*What boards prep materials did you find most helpful?*

**First Aid First Aid First Aid, Qbank**

*If you could prep for Step I again, what would you do differently?*

**Start around Spring Break (instead of after school was over)**

*What worked best for you in your boards preparation?*

**Qbank questions, and then looking up stuff that I got wrong in First Aid and other books**

*Any words of wisdom to share?*

**Don't worry too much about anatomy and histology, just know the limited amount of info that First Aid reviews for those subjects**

From Sarah Laabs, Class of 2007...

1. What boards prep materials did you find most helpful?
  - First Aid, BRS Path, BRS Phys, High Yield Gross Anatomy, High Yield Neuroanatomy, Pharmacology for the Boards and Wards, QBank
2. If you could prep for Step I again, what would you do differently?
  - I would focus earlier on synthesizing the material rather than going over painstaking details. I would start using First Aid in the beginning of the year and add info as presented in SBM curriculum. I would review the normal physiology/anatomy before each SBM unit. I would spend a lot more time in the last month using my Qbank and even use Qbank to quiz myself on SBM during the year.
3. What worked best for you in your boards preparation?
  - Making a schedule based on First Aid that ensured I got through all the material at least once. Setting high goals with built in time cushions. Taking a few weekends off and going home!
3. Any words of wisdom to share?
  - The earlier you start looking at First Aid in the year and adding in your own addendums, the easier and better the review at the end of the year. Find an M3 that you trust and listen to what they did. Don't try to take everyone's advice because it will overwhelm you.

Hope this helps,

Sarah Laabs

M3, NUF SOM Class of 2007

## From Jeff Lin, Class of 2007

- FIRST AID for STEP-1 and STEP-UP to USMLE STEP-1 are both really good overall review texts. During the year I would recommend going over both while studying for exams. But during the year, try to highlight minimally and write down only really good mnemonics or glaringly absent facts, not trivialities of Dr. XYZ's research.
  - **Pathology** - BRS and Lange pathology flash cards.
  - **Physiology** - BRS.
  - **Pharm** - a lot of the pharm review books are incomplete. Even amongst different series edited by katzung there are some drugs/classes that are completely left out of one but not the other. I would not recommend getting pharm cards - the way the information is organized makes them less of flashcards but more like mini-outlines. Silinsky notes were also good.
  - **Anatomy, Embryology, Biochem** - HIGH-YIELD series.
  - **Genetics**: I couldn't really find a good one.
  - **Cell/Mol Bio**: I wish there were a good review book for this, since I had quite a few of these questions, as did some of my friends. I would say to keep that in mind and maybe do more questions for these sections from PRETEST or something.
  - **Micro**: the big kaplan review books (2-book series that cover everything usmle step-1) has really good microbio/immuno sections. Also, CLINICAL MICROBIOLOGY REVIEW by Warinner is VERY GOOD. MICROCARDS are also golden.
  - **Behavioral science**: borrow your buddy's HIGH YIELD... you'll get most of it during SBM-Psych and BES units, as well as MDM.
  - **Questions**: QBANK is key. I thought QBank simulated the exam pretty well, except maybe some of the pharm stuff was more detailed than the questions I got on my exam. Different people will say different things about what you should shoot for on qbank... I think you should shoot for around 50% in the beginning and higher (80s) by the end. The main point though is to read every answer explanation. PRETEST series (esp PRETEST pharm, clinical vignette) are good.
  - Get a good night's sleep the night before the exam!
  - Don't obsess over making a study calendar if you're not that type of person. I went without a calendar and still got everything done.
  - It's ok and normal to get anxious while you're studying. Re-center yourself every now and then.
  - Really, get a good night's sleep!
  - Going through lots and lots of questions. Make sure you finish going through all of qbank. There are several internet posts on various forums talk about a big difference in scores in those individuals who go through all of qbank vs. not.
  - As to the actual review, for most subjects I would have at least two books to go through (e.g., BRS path and Kaplan notes), reading one chapter in one book and then the same topic in the other book to reinforce learning.
  - I also found carotid sinus massage to be helpful when you're freaking out about the exam. But you should know the dangers associated with it (passing out, dislodging a clot, etc)...
  - Don't go to the test center too early, or if you do, don't go to the computer testing stations too early: I thought I'd go in around 7:30AM to get situated for my 8AM exam, but once I sat down to the computer and went through the intro screens the test started!
  - Getting your heavily-used books (e.g., BRS path, First Aid, etc.) spiral- or comb-bound. Go to any Kinko's (Office Depot actually won't do this) and have them slice out the spine and bind it.
  - You will probably study harder than ever before, but at the same time feel like you're forgetting most of the stuff you've studied. Don't be discouraged!

Jeff

### **From Cory Simpson, Class of 2007....**

In general, I think three or four weeks of dedicated Boards study time after the last exam will be plenty for almost any student. Doing much more will lead to fatigue and unproductive study time. Importantly, be honest with yourself and acknowledge your limitations: (1) Don't force yourself to study during the Spring if it only frustrates you and causes you to do poorly on unit exams; (2) Don't plan to study 12 hours daily if you know you can't; (3) Use an appropriate study aid, i.e. MicroCards may be sufficient if you have a solid understanding of bugs, but something like Micro Made Ridiculously Simple may be necessary if you're not confident; (4) Find a study partner or group to hold you accountable if you have a history of procrastination or hypersomnia.

That said, I suggest finding an appropriate review book for each of the major subject areas and working through each at least once, leaving time to re-read those that cover challenging areas for you. The sources I used are listed below, but these are by no means the only ones available. Importantly, when you become tired of reading, take a break to do questions. This breaks up the monotony and also gives you some feedback to know whether you're concentrating on the appropriate subject areas.

#### Overview

**First Aid:** Read entire book through a few times; re-read chapters for subject areas that are perceived as weak via Q-Bank scores.

**Underground Clinical Vignettes:** Helpful for group study; used the books to quiz each other on the presentation of various diseases and syndromes. This was helpful since most Boards questions give a clinical scenario that you must recognize.

#### Questions:

Keep a record of 50-question block scores to see which areas are showing improvement and which areas are lingering below your target percentage.

**Q-Bank:** Complete in 50-question blocks to simulate the test format. To me, Q-Bank questions seemed very detailed and required two or three "jumps" to arrive at the answer, unlike the true exam, which seemed more straight-forward.

**Q-Book:** Cheap access to additional 50-question blocks.

#### Pathology: BRS Pathology

Read entire book early during Boards study period—this is a dense resource. It will take several days to work through, so plan accordingly.

#### Physiology: BRS Physiology

This is a pretty quick read if you have a decent understanding of physiology. The book presents broad concepts rather than factual minutia. Requires perhaps two days to work through the whole book.

#### Microbiology: MicroCards

These cards are really helpful, especially the diagrams that depict each species and how they are differentiated. Read through these a couple times if your schedule allows. Concentrate on *unique* characteristics, e.g. the only gram-positive bug with LPS, the only bug cultured on charcoal-yeast extract, the only single-stranded DNA virus, etc.

#### Pharmacology: PharmCards and First-Aid

The cards are good if you already understand the basic classes and mechanisms. I didn't try to memorize all the side effects of every drug in the stack, but rather just read over the cards and used them to quiz with study partners to see if we knew the class, the basic mechanism, and the *unique* side effects. First Aid covers the vast majority of drugs you'll need to know and has a great list of commonly tested side effects.

For the remaining subjects (Biochemistry, Immunology, Embryology, Anatomy, Neuroanatomy, and Behavioral Science), I read through **High-Yield** once or twice to pick up the frequently tested facts. These didn't seem as heavily tested as the above subjects, so I didn't allow as much time for them. They are also covered pretty well in First Aid.

It's not nearly as bad as everyone might tell you. You'll be surprised how much you can learn and memorize over just a few weeks and how much returns to your memory when you review material you haven't seen for a while. Best of luck...

Cory Simpson, M3

From Ramona Bhatia, Class of 2007....

What boards prep materials did you find most helpful?

- First Aid

If you could prep for Step I again, what would you do differently?

- DO NOT think that Qbank is like the real test! In terms of content the NMB 150 question test is MUCH more applicable. Qbank could still be useful for studying but don't read too much into it.

Any words of wisdom to share?

- Start early! The more times you go over stuff, the better.

Ramona

**From Mark Haupt, Class of 2006....**

Books:

1. First Aid: If you can understand and memorize all that is in here and supplement with the books listed below, you will do well on Boards.
2. BRS Path: An absolute must. 'nough said. Memorize this book and you will rock Boards and do well in SBM.
3. BRS Physiology: More detailed than first aid, and probably more than you need to know but it will get you through with flying colors.
4. High Yield Embryo: Again, probably more info than you need to know. Make sure to get the most recent edition.
5. High Yield Anatomy (Way too detailed and way too many eponyms but will get you through no problem).
6. High Yield NeuroAnatomy
7. High Yield Behavioral Science
8. Kaplan's Q-Bank and Q-Book
9. Netter's: You should flip through this a number of times, especially the cross sectional images.

Advice:

The best advice I received about studying for Boards was to find out what worked best for me. Meaning, figure out how I learn best and run with it and to not get caught up with what everyone else is doing.