

## WHAT IS STEP 1??

---

USMLE Step 1 is an exam in which the knowledge of basic sciences is tested. Every medical student (US graduates as well as international graduates like us) are required to give this exam if they plan on working as a physician/surgeon in USA. The subjects included in step 1 are

- [Physiology](#)
- [Biochemistry & Genetics](#)
- [Anatomy](#)
- [Pathology](#) (bulk of exam questions)
- [Microbiology and Immunology](#)
- [Pharmacology](#)
- [Behavior Sciences & Biostatistics.](#)

The exam itself is one of the toughest exams in the life of a medical student (not because of the exam content, but because of the number of subjects being tested in a single exam). Step 1 is a broadly based, integrated examination. Test items commonly require you to perform one or more of the following tasks:

- Interpret graphic and tabular material (This is heavily tested these days)
- Identify gross and microscopic pathologic and normal specimens
- Apply basic science knowledge to clinical problems

## TEST LENGTH AND FORMAT

---

Step 1 has approximately 322 multiple-choice questions. This is divided into SEVEN BLOCKS OF 60 MINUTES EACH and administered in one EIGHT HOUR TESTING SESSION. For Step 1, during the defined time to complete the items in each block, you may answer the items in any order, review your responses, and change answers. After you exit the block, or when time expires, you can no longer review test items or change answers. The remaining 1 HOUR IS THE BREAK TIME and you can divide it however you like. But once you are inside a block doing questions, you are NOT allowed to take a break until the block is over. If, however, you do take a break during the block time due to an unavoidable emergency, it will be recorded as ABNORMAL BEHAVIOR by the testing center (and the block time will continue on during that break, so you'll actually be losing precious time).

## ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

---

To be eligible to take the USMLE Step 1, you must be in one of the following categories at the time of application and on the test day:

- A medical student officially enrolled in, or a graduate of, a US or Canadian medical school program leading to the MD degree that is accredited by the Liaison Committee on Medical Education (LCME),
- A medical student officially enrolled in, or a graduate of, a US medical school leading to the DO degree that is accredited by the American Osteopathic Association (AOA), or

- A medical student officially enrolled in, or a graduate of, a medical school outside the United States and Canada and eligible for examination by the ECFMG ([this group includes us, the IMGs](#))

## HOW TO PREPARE FOR STEP 1

---

The best material used for Step 1 includes

- [Kaplan Lecture Notes for Step 1](#)
- [Kaplan Video Lectures for Step 1](#)
- [Kaplan Qbank for Step 1](#)
- [USMLE WORLD for Step 1 \(THE BEST PREP MATERIAL\)](#)
- [Goljan Audio Lectures](#)
- A REVIEW BOOK to be used for the final revision ([MedEssentials](#) or [First Aid for step 1](#)). I personally prefer [MedEssentials](#) over [First Aid](#), but the opinion differs from person to person.

The total time required to prepare step 1 is approximately **6-7 months** (if you study 6-8 hours a day for this exam). It took me 6 months to give step 1 after final year by following the pattern given below

- **1<sup>st</sup> Three Months** – 1<sup>st</sup> read of **KAPLAN LECTURE NOTES** and **KAPLAN QBANK**, along with the Kaplan video lectures. Read a minimum of 40 pages of Kaplan lecture notes per day (takes around 6 hours if you do it with full concentration) and watch the videos of the same topics once you are done. After finishing one subject (and its videos), go through the Kaplan Qbank OF THE SAME SUBJECT. Do 100 question per day (takes around 3 hours to do 50 questions, 6hrs for 100). Kaplan Qbank as well as USMLE WORLD is available online as well as in book format (in Pakistan and India). To save money, the Qbank can be done in book format during the 1<sup>st</sup> read. However, it is crucial that you go through either KQB or UWORLD “ONLINE” AT LEAST ONCE before going to the exam. If I had to choose between the two, I’ll go with UWORLD ONLINE for the month before the exam.
- **4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Months** – 2<sup>nd</sup> read of **KAPLAN LECTURE NOTES** along with **USMLE WORLD** (no need to go through the video lectures again). This is the most crucial time period in this exam prep. Things will begin to consolidate and everything makes much more sense. This time, do 80 pages of Kaplan Lecture Notes per day (will take less time as it’s the 2<sup>nd</sup> time you are going through them). At the end of every subject, do 100 questions of USMLE WORLD OF THE SAME SUBJECT. I also suggest doing USMLE WORLD in book format during this time period, as you can save time and money by using this method. I preferred using books as you can make hand written notes on them which are extremely helpful, a few days before the exam (again, it’s a subjective opinion). Keeping in mind that the online version of the same material will be used during the 6<sup>th</sup> month (or 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> months).

- **6<sup>th</sup> Month** – At this point, you have gone through KLN two times, KQB and UW once. Quickly go through the both KQB and UW in 10-15 days, BUT this time, there is no need to go through every single question. Just go through the **NOTES** that you made on them and the questions you got **WRONG**. It's also a good idea to go through the concepts that you came across for the 1<sup>st</sup> time and thought were difficult. Also keep in mind, that a question you got right BY GUESSING is something you actually got **WRONG**. To get a question right, you need to know why you got it right and what the concept behind it was. After you've gone through them (in 15 days max) give NBME 7 (explained separately below). A score of 240+ on NBME means you are ready for the exam. At this point, apply for step 1 exam (also explained below) and get a date within the next 30 days. You should buy **UWORLD ONLINE** at this point (for a month) and start practicing questions. It's necessary for you to do that in order to feel comfortable with the testing format during the actual exam. UWORLD will prepare you well for that. Divide your study time into 3 parts. 2/3<sup>rd</sup> of it should go to UWORLD ONLINE and 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of it should go to one of the review books (MedEssentials or First Aid).
- **7<sup>th</sup> Month** – At the beginning of this month, you should be done with UWORLD ONLINE ONCE and MedEssentials 1<sup>st</sup> read (won't take long because you've gone through all of that material multiple times in the previous months). In the next 15 to 30 days (depending on your test date), you should go through the following
  - ✓ UWORLD ONLINE (2<sup>nd</sup> time)
  - ✓ Kaplan Qbank (book format, difficult concepts and wrong questions)
  - ✓ Your **NOTES** on the books
  - ✓ MedEssentials (2<sup>nd</sup> time, depending on individual's weak subjects)

## HOW TO APPLY FOR STEP 1

---

1. Go to [www.ecfm.org](http://www.ecfm.org)
2. Click on "Online Services >>> IWA"
3. It will ask you if you are a new user. Make a new ID and Password.
4. Apply for the exam you want to take using the same id and password.
5. Have a credit card on hand when applying.
6. ECFMG will send you a confirmation email that your application has been accepted.
7. You will have to print certain documents and mail it to ECFMG (they will be mentioned on the website during the application process)
8. I advise you to read ECFMG information bulletin before applying for the exam.

9. Exam Fee is \$820 (+ \$150 if you are taking your test in a country other than USA).

## PERSONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

---

- ✓ Step 1 preparation should start from 1<sup>st</sup> year MBBS.
- ✓ Students should read Kaplan Lecture Notes and watch the video lectures of the same topics being taught in their medical college at a specific point (to save time and for better consolidation).
- ✓ Know the **CLINICAL IMPORTANCE** of whatever you study. Never forget, ALL USMLE EXAMS are clinically oriented. Even subjects like anatomy and physiology will be tested on these exams in a clinical/practical fashion.
- ✓ Make **SHORT NOTES** of the difficult topics (esp. Biochemistry). Going through these notes during the last few days before the exam can be very productive.
- ✓ If you are still a medical student, do KQB and UWORLD before your professional exams. They will not only prepare you for the USMLEs but will also help you score higher in your professional exams.
- ✓ Go through **GOLJAN AUDIO LECTURES** during 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year of your medical education (and also during exam preparation). They are excellent.
- ✓ Step 1 should ideally be given at the end of 4<sup>th</sup> year. But for this, you need to go through step 1 material during all 4 years of medical college. Give NBME as a self assessment guide after 4<sup>th</sup> year professional exam, and if you score well, that's the best time to give step 1.

## NBMEs: IMPORTANCE & USAGE

---

The NBMEs are a group of **SELF ASSESSMENT EXAMS** which can be bought from the NBME website. Each NBME exam costs \$50-\$60 each. Every NBME consists of about 200 questions in 4 blocks (50 questions per block). The purpose of these exams is to get a rough idea about the exam preparation at one specific point. So if you were to score a 240 on NBME 7, you'll likely end up getting 235-245 on the real exam (more likely 240+). However, it must be kept in mind that they only give you a rough idea about your expected score. Also, getting a low NBME score can be improved by looking at your weaknesses and working on them before taking the exam. For step 1, NBME 7, 11, 12 and 13 are the newest NBMEs, and hence, have the highest predictive value. Every student should give at least one or two NBMEs before taking the exam. One should be taken 1 month before the exam, and the other one should be taken 1-2 weeks before the exam. For Step 1, USMLE WORLD SELF-ASSESSMENT (USWSA) is not very predictive, so it's not necessary to give USWSA. However, USWSA is a very important tool for Step 2 CK and should be used for that exam (explained in the Step 2 CK guidelines document).

## RECOMMENDED WEBSITES

---

<http://www.ecfm.org/>

<http://www.nbme.org/>

<http://www.usmle-forums.com/>

<http://prep4usmle.com/>

**(Best of luck . . . Shahzaib Nabi)**