

WHAT IS STEP 2 CS??

USMLE Step 2 CS is an exam in which the clinical skills are tested. This exam assesses whether you can demonstrate the fundamental clinical skills essential for safe and effective patient care under supervision. 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. This exam can only be given in USA. There are three subcomponents of Step 2 CS:

[Integrated Clinical Encounter \(ICE\)](#)

- Data gathering - patient information collected by history taking and physical examination
- Documentation - completion of a patient note summarizing the findings of the patient encounter, diagnostic impression, and initial patient work-up

[Communication and Interpersonal Skills \(CIS\)](#)

- Questioning skills
- Information-sharing skills
- Professional manner and rapport

[Spoken English Proficiency \(SEP\)](#)

- Clarity of spoken English communication within the context of the doctor-patient encounter

Step 2 CS uses standardized patients, i.e., people trained to portray real patients in the examination. You are expected to **establish rapport with the patients, take pertinent history from them, perform FOCUSED physical examinations (most important thing to remember is FOCUSED PHYSICAL EXAM as you'll NEVER have enough time to do a detailed exam in any patient), answer patient questions, and provide counseling when appropriate.** After each patient interaction, you will record pertinent history and physical examination findings, list diagnostic impressions, and outline plans for further evaluation, if necessary. The cases cover common and important situations that a physician is likely to encounter in common medical practice in clinics, doctors' offices, emergency departments, and hospital settings in the United States.

TEST LENGTH AND FORMAT

Step 2 CS has twelve patient cases. You will have FIFTEEN MINUTES FOR EACH PATIENT ENCOUNTER AND TEN MINUTES TO WRITE EACH PATIENT NOTE. If you do not use the entire fifteen minutes for the patient encounter, the remaining time will be added to the time you have to record the patient note. The testing session is approximately eight hours. Step 2 CS cases must be taken in the order presented. After you exit the case or session, or when time expires, you can no longer review test items or cases, change answers, or collect additional information.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

To be eligible for Step 2 CS, 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)
- 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.

HOW TO PREPARE FOR STEP 2 CS

The best material used for Step 2 CS includes

- [First Aid for Step 2 CS \(THE BEST Prep Material for CS\)](#)
- [CSE Videos for Step 2 CS \(EXCELLENT videos – explained below\)](#)
- [UWORLD for Step 2 CS \(Optional\)](#)
- [Iqbalian Notes for Step 2 CS \(Needed to build basics\)](#)
- [Dr. Majid's notes for Step 2 CS \(Optional - Also help with basics\)](#)

The total time required to prepare Step 2 CS is approximately 30-45 days (30 days is max in my view). If you study 6-8 hours a day for this exam, you'll feel more than ready within a month. It took me 30 days to prepare for this exam and I felt very comfortable during the entire exam. The most important thing in this exam's preparation is to **PREPARE IT WITH A PARTNER**. You need to practice cases with a partner as much as you can. If you do that on a regular basis, you'll feel very comfortable during the actual exam. The best prep book is FIRST AID. Some people also recommend UWORLD, but I personally don't think that it's a good idea to do both books for two reasons (Firstly, both books are written in a different style and tend to divert THE FOCUS from each other, so **doing FIRST AID ONLY will keep you more focused**. And secondly, doing both of them will take additional time).

However, before you start practicing cases of First Aid with your partner, I recommend that BOTH of you go through the Iqbalian notes to build strong basics for this exam. The **MNEMONICS** given in these notes that should be memorized (PAM HUGS FOSS, OFP LIQRAA etc). These mnemonics are given in First Aid as well as Iqbalian and Dr. Majid's notes. Some students don't feel very comfortable with memorizing mnemonics, BUT FOR THIS EXAM, YOU HAVE TO MEMORIZE THEM (no exceptions).

CSE Videos – After First Aid, this is the very best source to be used for the Step 2 CS exam. These are around 20 video cases in which a simulated medical student takes history and performs appropriate physical examination on a simulated patient. Everything in these videos is CS oriented. These videos teach you how to manage time during the exam. The best thing about these videos is **THE PHYSICAL**

EXAMINATIONS. You have to learn to do a FOCUSED physical exam in every case, otherwise you'll end up short of time at the end of the case (resulting in loss of points in addition to the lack of opportunity to counsel the patient, which itself is the most important component in a patient encounter). I will give these videos to Dr. Majid, so that you won't have to buy them online. They will be available to all of you very soon.

EXAM PREPARATION

The following pattern should be followed for successful completion of CS exam preparation within 30 days (or 30-45 days).

- **Day 1 – 3:** Go through the Iqbalian Notes (or Dr. Majid's Notes, whichever you prefer) at least 4 times during these 3 days. The idea is to get a basic structure of the entire exam. The MNEMONICS given in these notes should be memorized. You don't have to memorize every single one of them, but the more mnemonics you memorize, the more time efficient you'll become during the actual exam. It's also a good idea to memorize (not word by word though) the counseling instructions that you need to give to the simulated patient (smoking cessation, alcohol cessation, safe sex practices etc). If someone tells you to memorize every single line word by word, they're basically misguiding you. Never forget, you are doctors, NOT primary school children.
- **Day 4 – 14:** The First Aid and CSE Videos preparation starts at this point. Every day, go through 4 cases (the more, the better) with your partner. There are a total of about 40 cases in First Aid and a lot of cases are repeated in the book (so the actual number is less than 40). First, both students should read the case from the book. Next, turn on the TIMER on your cell phone and start practicing. The practice should start from the very beginning (knocking on the door with a smile). Take detailed history as you would during the actual exam, perform a focused physical exam (it's a good idea to follow the physical exam given in First Aid). You DON'T need to perform an abdominal exam in every single case, unless it's relevant to the case (suspected appendicitis, cholecystitis, hepatitis etc). If you do that in a case where it isn't needed, the simulated patient might even fail you because of the discomfort associated with it (imagine 15 people pressing on your belly again and again, and for no reason). It is however a good idea to do chest auscultation in every case (as in the CSE videos). Watch CSE videos with your preparation whenever you get free time, they are worth it. Learn how to do a good and focused physical exam from these videos.
- **Day 15:** Give yourself a break. RELAX for a day. You are almost done.
- **Day 16 – 25:** Start the second round of First Aid. This time, you don't need to watch every single CSE video with it. Just watch the cases that you find difficult or time consuming, to get a better grip on them. To help yourself utilize this time period in the most appropriate manner, you need

to PRACTISE, PRACTISE & THEN PRACTISE SOME MORE. The history questions and the physical examination steps should become a reflex for you during this time period. You should still be practicing with the timer ON. During this time period, you should also apply for the CS exam and choose an appropriate date.

- **Day 26:** Again, take a day off. Go out and have fun with friends. You need to relax before facing the upcoming exam. Taking a break at this point will definitely be helpful. Exhaustion during this exam's preparation can ruin your performance during the actual exam.
- **Day 27 – 35 (or 45):** During this time period, you need to do the following
 - ✓ PRACTISE the difficult and tricky cases with your partner as much as you can.
 - ✓ Do a CASE SIMULATION in front of a senior (WHO HAS ALREADY PASSED CS) and ask him about your performance and weaknesses. Work on your weaknesses and make sure you get rid of them before entering the exam.
 - ✓ I also recommend that you make SHORT NOTES of difficult cases as well as the cases that are extremely common (headache, abdominal pain etc). It's a good idea to go through your short notes during the last few days before the exam.

HOW TO APPLY FOR STEP 2 CS

1. Go to www.ecfm.org
2. Click on "Online Services >>> IWA"
3. If you already don't have an ECFMG account, make a new ID and Password (otherwise skip to the next step).
4. Apply for the exam you want to take using your 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 them 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 \$1440.**
10. Choose your TESTING CENTER wisely.

PERSONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- ✓ Step 2 CS preparation should not exceed 45 days. G
- ✓ Students should go through FIRST AID ONLY. Combining UWORLD with First Aid is a bad idea. It tends to divert the focus. First Aid is more than sufficient, if done properly.
- ✓ The ideal time to give Step 2 CS is while the person is still a medical student. A good plan is to apply for clinical electives during 4th year of medical college. The student should prepare for CS during these clinical electives and should give this exam after being done with the clinical electives. This helps save a lot of time as well as money.
- ✓ **TIME MANAGEMENT** is the biggest factor. The more efficient you are in time management, the better you'll perform on this exam.
- ✓ **COUNSELLING AT THE END OF EVERY CASE** is extremely important. You have to keep this in mind. You can afford to skip the steps of a physical exam, but you should NEVER skip counseling. It carries a lot of points on this exam.
- ✓ **SMILE**, it's free (unless of course, the patient is in acute pain/distress). Your behavior with the patient should reflect "A Friendly yet Passionate Doctor". No matter how good you perform on this exam, if your behavior is rude with the patient, you'll fail for sure.
- ✓ **Be confident**. Without confidence, you WILL NOT pass this exam.
- ✓ Make sure you choose your **TESTING CENTER** wisely. **THEY ARE NOT THE SAME**. When I gave CS, Philadelphia testing center had the highest fail rate for IMGs. It's always a good idea to ask the seniors and recent test takers about this issue.
- ✓ The exam result is reported as a PASS or FAIL. However, they do send you a graphical presentation of your performance in all of the 3 CS components. Don't forget, you'll have to pass all 3 of them in order to pass the exam. I have attached a sample performance graph at the end of this document.

RECOMMENDED WEBSITES

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

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

<http://www.usmle-forums.com/> (THE BEST source of information for USMLEs)

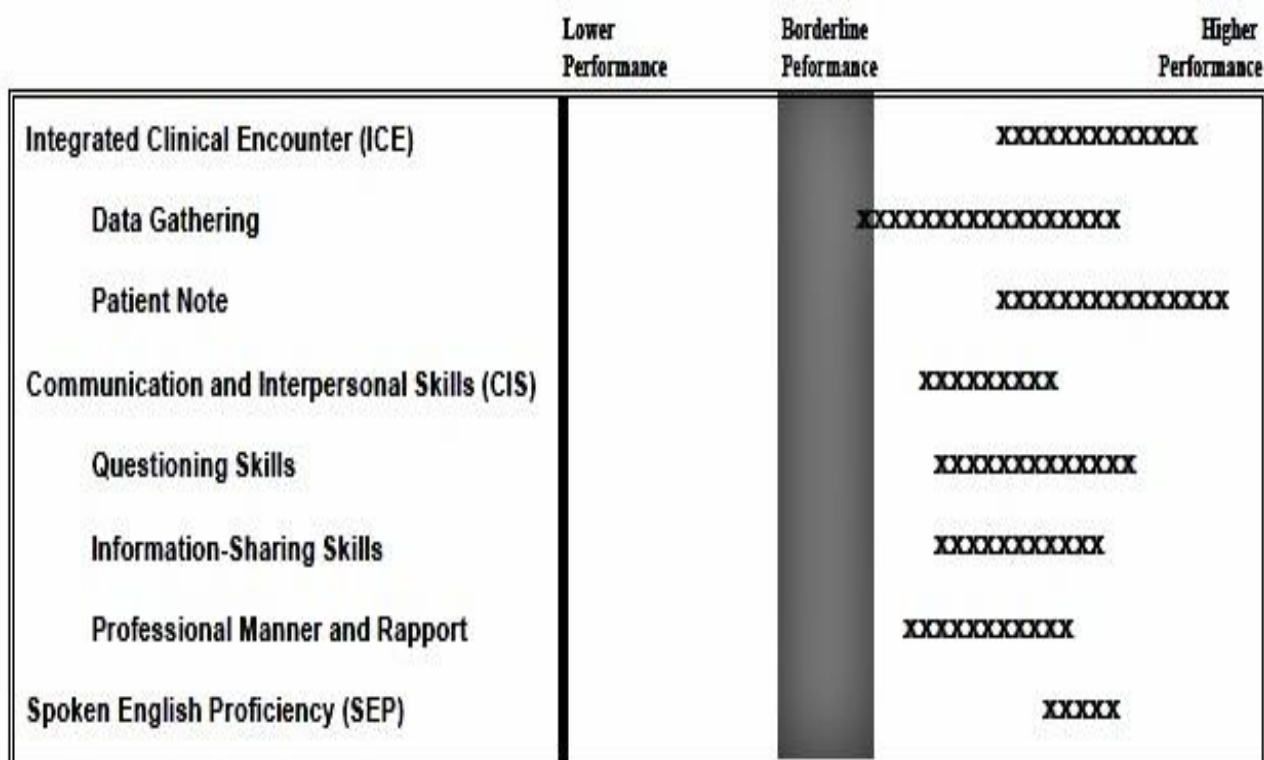
<http://prep4usmle.com/>

<http://nbmeanswerkeys.blogspot.com/> (a relatively good site for offline NBME questions & answers)

(Best of luck . . . Shahzaib Nabi)

SAMPLE RESULT

USMLE STEP 2 CS PERFORMANCE PROFILE



The above Performance Profile is provided to aid in self-assessment. The shaded area defines a borderline level of performance for each subcomponent (ICE, CIS, SEP); borderline performance is comparable to a HIGH FAIL/LOW PASS on the subcomponent.

For the ICE subcomponent, additional information is provided for Data Gathering and for the Patient Note. Data Gathering represents performance on history-taking and physical examination tasks. Patient Note represents performance on completion of the post-encounter summaries. For the CIS subcomponent, additional information is provided for Questioning Skills, Information-Sharing Skills, and Professional Manner and Rapport.

Performance bands indicate areas of relative strength and weakness. Some bands are wider than others. The width of a performance band reflects the precision of measurement: narrower bands indicate greater precision. The band width for a given content area is the same for all examinees. An asterisk indicates that your performance band extends beyond the displayed portion of the scale. Small differences in the location of bands should not be over interpreted. If two bands overlap, performance in the associated areas should be interpreted as similar.