

The Official Step 1 Student-to-Student Guide for Class of 2014

compiled by class of 2012 and 2013

How to sign up for the test

Start at the NBME website <https://apps.nbme.org/ciw2/prod/jsp/login.jsp> and create an account. Follow the steps and then you will have to print out an application that will need to be verified by the Registrar (Belfer, 2nd floor). The verified application will then be mailed in to NBME and who will take about 4 weeks to process your application and then they will give you a user id for their website. Then you can sign up for a 3 month window to take the test.

General Test Information

The test is 7 blocks, each block has 46 questions which totals 322 questions. **The questions stems are longer than most tests you have taken**, but the question banks give a fair representative of their length (maybe a tad shorter than the actual exam). Scores above 188 are passing and the average score is between 220-225 with a standard deviation of 20-25. There is no criteria for a 'good' score or a 'bad' score and everyone you ask will give you a different opinion. Set your goal as something realistic and partially considering what type of specialty you are thinking you would like to go into.

How long you get to study

This year, the last exam of second year (Hematology) is on April 26th and third year clerkships will likely began on June 11th. This gives you a little over 6 weeks total. Most people take Step 1 one week before the beginning of clerkships, plus or minus a couple days. So, about 5 weeks of study time for the test. Last year, Einstein students had 8 weeks to study due to Spring Break/Passover being grouped into the dedicated study period. **Freaking out because you only have 6 weeks? Don't!** The 2010 cycle (Class of 2012) had 6 weeks to study and over 2/3s of the students believed they had sufficient time to prepare for Step 1. Additionally, last year the students had lots of lectures/exams crammed into a short period at the end of the school year. Although it may not seem like enough time to study, after 5 weeks of studying full-time you will most likely be mentally, physically and emotionally ready to take the board.

When to start studying

Although you may not specifically be studying for Step 1 until later in the year, you've really been studying for this test since you entered medical school. **Studying hard for your courses gives you a baseline that is invaluable as you start your Step 1 studying.**

The typical suggestion for time to study for Step 1 is between 3-6 months. However, these are just suggestions as some people study more and others less. Studying during classes is difficult and is best done a little bit at a time focusing either on one source (ie reading through First Aid slowly), looking over a review book on the current course or a weak subject (ie reading a BRS/High Yield/Rapid Review/etc book on a specific topic - Behavioral Science, Biochemistry, etc.), or doing 20 questions from a question bank at night when you have the chance. There is no single way to do this, but depends on the way you best learn. **If you decide to start studying during the school year, make sure you keep up with your classes. Study hard for the final set of exams**

because the last thing you want to do is take a make-up exam in the middle of your board study time. Knowing the material well for your classes ensures it becomes one of your strengths when reviewing material in May.

The average Einstein student studied about 3 months before the boards. The 2012 student poll actually showed a bimodal distribution, with most students either starting to study in January or May. This is probably an indication of what your goal is for Step 1. If you are trying to achieve 240+ and match into an uber-competitive speciality, starting to study in January is probably the right move. If you hoping for solid score but not trying to match into Harvard Derm, studying 2-3 months before the exam is sufficient.

How to study

This question has no best answer and is different for every person. The two most popular and productive ways to study are: reading review books and doing questions. Neither way is better than the other and most people study with a combination of both. However, a *question-heavy* or *review-book-heavy* study schedule should be used depending on which method of studying suits you best. For example, a question-heavy schedule would use 2 question banks and the basic First Aid, Goljan and BRS Physiology combination. A Review-book study schedule would utilize USMLE World and several different topic-specific review books in addition to First Aid, Goljan and BRS Physiology.

The Basics

Most students agree the basic necessities of studying include First Aid for the USMLE Step 1, Rapid Review Pathology (Goljan) and USMLE World Question Bank. First Aid is universally agreed as an essential tool for your studying. New editions come out every year with tweaks after getting feedback from students. Newest editions are not necessary, but occasionally Amazon.com has a discounted price on the new edition soon after its release. Most students swear by Rapid Review Pathology (Goljan), while others dislike its list format and nit-picky details. My suggestion is to give Rapid Review a try, maybe by reading one of the sections along with one of the second year course (ie. Reading the Pulmonary Section before the Pulmonary exam as a review). USMLE World Question Bank is considered the best question bank available and offers USMLE-like questions (although typically more difficult than you will see on the real exam) with excellent explanations.

Many students use also Goljan Audio Lectures (ask your friendly neighborhood upper-classman for a copy). Regardless of whether you like his book or not, the Goljan Audio Lectures are a different way of learning and worth trying. These lectures were illegally recorded during one of Goljan's lecture series with the Kaplan review course around 2000 and he does an excellent job of explaining concepts while entertaining (as much as this material can be). Some students use his lectures on the go or as more of a break from intense studying and some students use his lectures in conjunction with his slides (find an even friendlier upper classman because these are a little harder to come across) as a serious study tool. Give them a try as an adjunct during one of your second year classes and make your own decision.

First Aid, USMLE World, Rapid Review Pathology (Goljan) and Goljan Audio were the most used and best reviewed resources in the Class of 2012 survey.

Other Resources

Many different review books are out there and it is hard to know which is the best. For your convenience, the Class of 2012 listed their opinions in a survey that you might find helpful. The top books in each category were BRS Physiology, High-Yield Neuroanatomy, High-Yield Behavioral Science (although BRS Behavioral Science was highly rated as well), Rapid Review: Biochemistry, High-Yield Cell and Molecular Biology, Clinical Microbiology Made Ridiculously Simple, Microcards, Lange Pharm Flash Cards and BRS Pharm Flash Cards. For the full listing, please check out the Class of 2012 Step 1 Survey.

Annotating

Many people annotate into their book of choice, whether it is First Aid, Goljan or other. Annotations can be from subject review books (ie BRS or High Yield series) or from questions banks (ie writing the answer to a question you missed in that section of First Aid). This can be useful in many ways. It will help you remember the fact better by taking the time to actually write it in the book. It will also be there when you review that section or half-remember the fact but you aren't quite sure. Some people annotate a lot, some a little, and some not at all. It all depends on your personal preference, but personally I recommend this technique.

How to Schedule your month

Never before have you had a month to do nothing but study everyday and you probably never will again. The key to utilizing this month to your advantage is planning out a schedule and sticking to it. Einstein employs a Boards studying advisor who comes and gives a lecture on the topic, so I'll just supplement his ideas a bit.

Spilt up the categories as the advisor says and assign them 'stones' of worth based on how important the topic is and how well you know the topic. Each stone represents a 3-hour block of studying. For example, Cardiovascular and Neurology and rather large topics and deserve more review time than Behavioral Science and Biostatics. Additionally, if you really rocked Renal and just didn't get Biochemistry, maybe you spend a little more time on Biochemistry and a little less on Renal.

So the first step is to figure out how many stones do you have. If you study 9 hours a day for 6 days a week for 4 weeks, you'll have 72 stones (Each stone = 3 hours of studying, 3 stones per day, 18 stones per week). You have to personalize how many stones you think you will have based on when you take your test, how many days off you want and how many hours you want to work per day. I would recommend leaving yourself a couple of extra days at the end of your study schedule as 'catch-up days' in case you fall behind on a certain topic or feel you just need to spend a little more time understanding a certain section.

Next, assign each of the topics an appropriate amount of 'stones'. The bigger topics such as Microbiology, Biochemistry, Neurology, and Cardiovascular probably demand a little more time, but definitely personalize your schedule to your strengths and weaknesses. Then, you will have to assign time within each topic to different resources. How you prioritize your resources will be up to you, but be sure to have a balance of review books and questions for each topic so you get a couple different ways of approaching the material and get a little variety to keep yourself sane.

Finally, you will put your proposed stone distribution on a calendar. Some people prefer having each day devoted to a single topic and others would rather spilt the day up

into different topics. Whatever you decide, try to have a nice mix of hard topics and easy/enjoyable topics in each week. It will prevent you from putting off your least favorite sections until the end and then not having enough time to go over them. Here's an example of what a week could look like.

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Morning	CV 1	CV 4	Biochem1	Biochem 4	Immuno2	Renal2	OFF
Lunch							
Afternoon	CV 2	Resp 1	Biochem2	Biochem 5	Immuno3	Renal3	
Dinner							
Night	CV 3	Resp 2	Biochem3	Immuno 1	Renal 1	OFF	

Or

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Morning	CV 1	Questions	Questions	Questions	Questions	Questions	OFF
Lunch							
Afternoon	CV 2	CV 3	Biochem 1	Biochem 3	Immuno 1	Immuno 2	
Dinner							
Night	Resp 1	Resp 2	Biochem 2	Biochem 4	Renal 1	Renal 2	

Plan your schedule any way you think is best for you. If you need more days off, take them. If you need less, don't take them. Just make sure that you are not doing any studying (at least no heavy studying) before your test day and don't set an impossible schedule that you can never fulfill or one that will make you burnt out by the time the test comes around.

In your scheduling, some people devote a morning or evening session of studying to a block (46) of questions. Some people choose to do random questions while others will do questions on the topic they are currently studying. Either way is fine, just do questions. It gives you a little break from just reading and allows you to think in the same way you will have to on the exam.

Some people like to set aside the last several days for a quick review of the topic with your favorite review book (whether it is First Aid, Goljan Pathology or other). This appeals to some people, but not to others. You have to cram your review of the topics pretty tight if you choose this, so make sure it works with your schedule.

Practice Tests

Another very important topic is practice tests. People have different opinions on how many you should take, but I recommend you take at least a couple to build up your stamina for this marathon of an exam. You can even take back-to-back practice tests (they are only 4 blocks of 50 questions each, meaning they are really only half-exams) to get a better feel of what a full test day is like. The school sponsors one NBME exam either in early May or early June to give you a taste of what the exam is like. NBME exams can be found at their website https://nsas.nbme.org/nsasweb/servlet/mesa_main These exams are composed of 'retired' questions from prior Step 1 exams, so they are as close to the real questions as you will get. USMLE World and Kaplan Qbank also offer

practice exams, which are basically a collection of their questions presented in timed blocks of 48 questions. Some people like to take exams once a week to give them an idea of their progress, while others only took one practice exam to get the feel of it. Choose how many you would like to do, but I suggest at least a couple to get the feel of grueling nature of the exam and to try a NBME exam to get a better idea of the difficulty of the majority of test questions (easier than most questions banks). Regardless of how many you choose to do, definitely go over all the questions (at least the ones you missed) so you can learn from it. You can track your studying with your practice exam scores but don't get discouraged or overconfident. The practice exams are better used as a tool for studying and acclimating to the testing conditions than an indicator of what your score will be.

If you would like to see a very detailed study schedule, go to this link for the 'Taus method' <http://forums.studentdoctor.net/showpost.php?p=6192274&postcount=12> This guy laid out a very specific study plan on StudentDoctor.net that incorporates First Aid, Goljan and other review sources. Unfortunately, it requires about 6 months of pure studying with no classes, so it is not really practical for us. Also, his 2-week review requires some serious speed reading, so I wouldn't use his study plan verbatim. However, he does do a very good job organizing the resources and integrating them together which can be a good reference when figuring out how you want to study different topics. A 'modified Taus' plan to your schedule and preferences can be a very effective and efficient study plan.

The Day Before the Exam

Try to study as little as possible and if you just can't avoid studying something, make sure it is very light and easy studying (no new information). Get your food lined up for the exam day (you will be there 8 hours). Pack a lunch, plenty of snacks and liquids to keep you going. You will have an hour of break time that you can use at your discretion (see below for more information) and you will be able to go to your locker and eat at each break. Bring caffeinated/energy drinks if you need that burst to pick you up when you are dragging (you should know when you need the caffeine the most from your practice tests). Try to sleep early. Sleeping before the exam is difficult for everyone, but do your best to relax and get as much sleep as you can.

The Day of the Exam

Get there early. You will get a locker to place all your belongings in. If you have a choice, try to sit away from the door so people are not walking by you all the time. Most people in the room will not be taking Step 1, so they will most likely be on a different timing schedule than you. Expect that there may be some noise around, and bring your own ear plugs or ask for them (they provide them, along with ear muffs for sound dampening). Be sure to test your headphones during the tutorial so see if they are working. Don't read the rest of the tutorial (you should have done this already with the practice NBME exams) because it will cut into your break time. Make sure to use your break time to your advantage and take breaks when you need them. You get 60 minutes of break time total that you can use anyway you want. If you finish a block early, the extra time will be added to your break time. You will have enough time either for a 10-minute break between each block or you can take a longer break for lunch and then

shorter breaks between blocks. Don't get too fixated on any one question. There are 'experimental' questions that the NBME has in each exam that are being used for research purposes and will not factor into your actual score. It is impossible to know if a question is experimental or not, so take each question seriously and put down your best answer and move on no matter how odd the question is.

We hope this summary was helpful. Further survey information on student resources and study schedule planning can be found at our website:

<http://blog.myalbert.einstein.yu.edu/step1s2s>

We will be holding periodic meetings throughout the year and updating our webpage with useful tips about Step 1! Be sure to check in periodically throughout the year and attend all of our meetings!

If you have any questions about anything here or anything else Step 1 related, email us at EinsteinStep1@gmail.com. Good luck!

-Step 1 Group (Eric Jordan, Jacob Johnson, Burgundy Tyrrel, Chris Taglia).

The Office of Academic Support and Counseling would like to thank the "Step1s2s" team for their compilation of this student-to student guide.