

# The University of Queensland/Ochsner Clinical School

## USMLE Step 1 Study Plan for MD: 2021

### Introduction

To be licensed in the United States, physicians must pass the United States Medical Licensing Exam (USMLE) series. The exam is divided into three parts: The Step 1 exam, the Step 2 clinical knowledge exam, and the Step 3 exam. The Step 1 Exam is a multiple-choice exam that you are required to take before beginning Phase 2. The Step 1 exam results will probably be reported as pass or fail beginning in January 2022, though a final decision had not been made at the time this guide was published. The Step 2 Clinical Knowledge Exam is a clinically focused multiple-choice exam. The Step 2 Exam should be taken no later than April of a medical student's fourth year of school. The Step 3 exam must be taken before the end of the internship year.

The USMLE website is an important reference that students should review regularly ([www.usmle.org](http://www.usmle.org)). Another very important resource is Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates website ([www.ecfm.org](http://www.ecfm.org)) which will direct you appropriately as a University of Queensland student.

The University of Queensland (UQ)-Ochsner Clinical School revises this study plan annually with the input of prior students who were successful on the Step 1 examination. Because the Step 1 Exam is usually the most difficult of the steps, preparation should begin from the first day you begin your studies at UQ. **It is impossible to do well on the Step 1 Exam if you wait to begin your preparations one or two months before the test.**

Every year, successful students emphasize the relevance of the UQ curriculum to Step 1 study. Year after year, our data clearly shows that students who perform well on the UQ clinical science courses perform well on step 1. While the UQ courses do not completely cover all the material required for step 1, good performance on these clinical science courses is associated with good performance on step 1. Align your Step 1 study plan with your UQ curriculum during the first two years. Classroom work will help solidify and clarify topics that you are reviewing in the USMLE resources.

### Study Resources

There are an overwhelming number of resources available for step 1 study. Focus on 3-4 resources, rather than using too many. The resources listed in the table below have been recommended by students in years past. If a resource is listed as essential, you must completely master this resource. Textbooks can be very expensive and may not be readily available in Australia; you may wish to purchase these in the US. The Book Depository ([www.bookdepository.com](http://www.bookdepository.com)) is a good site to obtain references and texts while in Australia, and many good texts are available electronically through the UQ library ([http://guides.library.uq.edu.au/medicine/clinical\\_science](http://guides.library.uq.edu.au/medicine/clinical_science)).

UQ will provide First Aid for USMLE Step 1 and a 2-year subscription to Boards and Beyond (<https://www.boardsbeyond.com/>). A six-month subscription to the USMLEWorld QBank will be provided to you beginning in Semester 2 of your second year as part of the USMLE Step 1 preparation course (see below).

#### *Roadmap to Step 1 Seminars*

The Roadmap to Step 1 seminar series was introduced into Years 1 and 2 of the MD program in 2018. There are one to two seminars per semester which are jointly presented by Faculty and upper-year student peers. The purpose of these seminars is to bring together students across the cohort who are studying for Step 1, to provide

study advice and tips to help achieve success in both medical school and Step 1 and to allow regular opportunity for students to hear from their peers who have successfully completed Step 1. The seminars also provide check-points throughout Years 1 and 2 to reflect on individual progress, identify areas where study habits and techniques may need to be adapted, and discuss avenues available for further support. There will be opportunity for students to ask any questions at the seminars.

#### *UQ to First Aid Study Links*

The 'UQ to First Aid Study Links' spreadsheets for semesters 1-4 are also available on the Year 1 and 2 Blackboard community sites. This mapping of the Clinical Science curriculum is intended to help guide study for Step 1 alongside the UQ curriculum. By knowing the topics that UQ will address in certain weeks and what will come up in future semesters, study for Step 1 can be planned around it to reduce the feeling of 'studying two different curricula'.

#### *Preparation for US Medical Licensing Examination (USMLE) Step 1 (MEDI7282)*

Offered for the first time in 2019, this 2-unit dedicated preparation course provides students with protected time and structure to support intense study leading up to the Step 1 exam at the end of Year 2. Co- designed by successful Step 1 exam takers, this course predominantly consists of tutorials led by near-peers who have passed the exam, with a focus on "high yield" topics and approaches to assessment. The course is compulsory for all UQ-Ochsner students, and attaining a passing score on the [National Board of Medical Examiners \(NBME\) Comprehensive Basic Science Exam \(CBSE\)](#) is required to pass the course and progress to Phase 2.

#### *Recommended resources:*

##### **Text resources:**

**First Aid for USMLE Step 1 (essential).** This is the **key text** that most effectively covers all areas tested. Many students use this to take notes and consolidate information into one place.

Rapid Review Pathology was described as transformational. This text helps formulate understanding of pathology and interconnected physiology

Costanza's Physiology was recommended to lay down foundations in physiology for you to build upon Rapid Review Biochemistry, Lippincott's Biochemistry, or Principles of Medical Biochemistry (the last book is available online through UQ Library) to help with biochemistry review

##### **Question bank resources:**

**USMLEWorld (6-month subscription) and USMLEWorld self-assessments (essential).** Most useful for the last six months of study. USMLEWorld assessments often over-estimate step 1 score.

AMBOSS emerged in 2020 as the second-best question bank with challenging questions.

USMLE Rx Qbank – A good Qbank to start; tests more general concepts

Kaplan USMLE Step 1 QBank

Pastest USMLE Step 1 QBank <https://www.pastest.com/usmle-step-1/exam/>

MedBullet USMLE Step 1 QBank (Free, 1000 question QBank, Optional) <https://step1.medbullets.com/>

##### **Video Lectures:**

**Boards and Beyond (essential).** Use this to supplement topics in the UQ curriculum

Pathoma – considered essential by most students.

Sketchy Micro, Pharm and Pathology – also considered essential by most students

USMLE Rx – short and concise, but can be expensive.

**Flashcards allow repetition:**

ANKI notecard spaced-repetition software. Do your reviews every day. There is an excellent YouTube channel to help guide you through the setup process. [www.youtube.com/channel/UCLeZR5LtbJ8Klmeux\\_6TTJw](http://www.youtube.com/channel/UCLeZR5LtbJ8Klmeux_6TTJw)  
Brosencephalon

Several pre-made decks are available on Reddit, including Lightyear, which is highly recommended and follows Boards and Beyond, and Zanki  
Osmosis

**Secondary resources (you may need to copy and paste the URLs into a browser):**

Firecracker <http://firecracker.lww.com/students.html>

UQ Anatomy Notes

Goljan Audio – entertaining lecturer

<http://JGMalcolm.com/tactical-test-taking-skills> provides a fascinating approach to test-taking

Cram Fighter (<https://cramfighter.com/>) helps you create a schedule to ensure you cover all resources you want to review.

**Available in the UQ library online resources:**

Guyton and Hall Textbook of Medical Physiology (13<sup>th</sup> ed)

Robbins Basic Pathology (10<sup>th</sup> ed)

Clinical Anatomy by Systems

Neuroanatomy: An Illustrated Colour Text (6<sup>th</sup> ed)

The Developing Human (11<sup>th</sup> ed)

Medical Pharmacology at a Glance (8<sup>th</sup> ed)

Review of Medical Microbiology and Immunology (15<sup>th</sup> ed)

A Primer of Clinical Psychiatry (2<sup>nd</sup> ed)

## Timeline for Study

### Year 1

During Year 1 at UQ, your study plan should coordinate USMLE study with the topic you are studying that week using the UQ to First Aid Study Links described above. Prepare prior to CBL sessions! Actively participate in all your case-based learning tutorials. Watch Boards and Beyond videos correlating to information in the UQ curriculum to reinforce the information. These follow UQ material but go into USMLE depth. Sketchy pharmacology and Pathoma videos can also help with preparation.

Join a tutoring group to aid with your case-based learning (CBL) and preparation for the Step 1 exam. Tutors can guide you along the path to step 1, answer questions, and offer suggestions.

### Summer

While summer is a great time to enjoy your observership and to do some traveling, make sure you continue to study. Most students recommend review of biochemistry and microbiology and starting a question bank, like USMLERx during this time.

### Year 2

During Year 2, you will steadily intensify your study preparations. Your review of USMLE topics should again be coordinated on a weekly basis with those topics covered in your Year 2 Clinical Science curriculum. Coordinate your UQ study with First Aid for USMLE Step 1, Boards and Beyond, and USMLEWorld QBank. When working with question banks, read the explanations for both correct and incorrect answers. Add notes to First Aid. Use Anki

cards every day to reinforce information you've learned. If you've done well during your first year, consider volunteering as a tutor for first years – this helps solidify your knowledge.

The Step 1 exam is about eight hours long and requires prolonged mental and physical concentration. For this reason, you should train for this endurance event by sitting for at least one eight-hour simulated exam from the USMLEWorld question bank. Consider making a list of “stupid mistakes” which you have found that you consistently make and bring this with you to the exam site to review up until the start of the exam.

### **Scheduling the USMLE Step 1 Exam**

The [Program Rules for the Doctor of Medicine \(Ochsner\)](#) state that students enrolled in the UQ Ochsner MD program must attempt the USMLE Step 1 examination before commencing Phase 2 of the program. Successful completion of the Step 1 exam is required to participate in research at OCS, to do an external rotation during your fourth year, to serve as an officer in OMSA, and to enter the Match in your fourth year.

As Step 1 is not offered during the first two weeks of January, this means taking the exam prior to December 31st before your third year so that you can be settled in New Orleans for the week of mandatory orientation events that take place prior to the start of Block 1.

You should plan your schedule so that you can sit for the exam in the US, because scheduling the exam in Australia can be difficult. Actively plan and manage the time between arriving in the US and sitting for the exam. You will require at least 4 weeks of dedicated study time. Do not plan anything other than Step 1 study during December of Year 2. Family and friends must understand and not interfere. Ensure that your environment for study is: 1) without a lot of distractions; 2) conducive to studying; and 3) near your Prometric testing center.

The Faculty suggests you register for the December – February Step 1 eligibility period. This eligibility period will not be confirmed until mid-September. You must have completed all your Phase 1 requirements by the start date of your examination eligibility period. If you select an eligibility period that begins before you have completed Year 2 coursework, the Faculty will not approve your application, and you will suffer significant delays in your application.

### **ECFMG Certification**

All details about the ECFMG certification process are available in the [ECFMG 2021 information booklet](#). Read the booklet before starting the certification process. The first step of ECFMG certification is registering for a USMLE/ECFMG Identification Number, which can be done using ECFMG's Interactive Web Applications (IWA). Register with ECFMG at the beginning of Semester 2 of year 2.

### **March-July of Year 2**

No later than March of your second year, you should begin a question bank, like USMLERx. Some students recommend starting as early as January because the question banks are very large. When doing the question banks, you should be sure that you understand the rationale for all the correct and incorrect answers. Take your time reviewing questions.

The [USMLEWorld QBank is your best question bank resource](#), as it has many questions that are similar and, in some cases, identical to those on the real Step 1 exam. You should begin using the USMLEWorld Qbank no later than early August. There are approximately 3400 questions in this question bank. Aim to complete at least 40 questions per day, every day on tutor mode, reviewing every question in detail. If time management is an issue for you, do the questions on timed mode instead of tutor mode.

- ANKI, Firecracker and USMLE Flashfacts are very helpful as a flashcard resource.
- USMLERx and AMBOSS are great question banks to review as a backup to USMLEWorld.
- Kaplan QBank is optional, but it has good physiology, law and ethics questions, and it will truly test your knowledge/concepts on these subjects.
- The Pastest and Medbullet QBank are free and well-written Qbanks.
- By the end of semester 3, know First Aid cover to cover.

**A consistent question-intensive study plan results in better performance than study plans based on reading texts or viewing videos.** You should review questions related to the topics covered in class and review the First Aid for USMLE Step 1 textbook at least weekly. When reviewing questions, take your time reading all the answers and take notes, particularly on questions you miss. **Plan to review the USMLEWorld question bank twice, concentrating on questions you missed the second time.**

## July-November of Year 2

As part of the new USMLE Preparation course, you will be **REQUIRED** to sit THREE NBME CBSE/CBSSA exams. While passing the first two of these exams is not required to pass the course overall, you should **aim to achieve a passing score in the first practice exam.** Passing the third (final) CBSE is required to pass the course and progress to Phase 2.

You should use the results of each of these NBME exams as a guide for topics for future study.

One week prior to your scheduled step 1 exam you should utilize the free 120 USMLE tutorial test questions offered by USMLE (<http://www.usmle.org/practice-materials>).

You will be spending October and the beginning of November studying for your final UQ exams, which typically occur in the second week of November. During this time, you will have little time to study for USMLE. **Do not defer and try not to fail the end-of-semester exams**, as this will severely limit the remaining time available to study for the Step 1 Exam.

## November

You should have completed the USMLEWorld question bank before the start of the final exam period. Intensify your preparation following final exams in November by completing a second review of the USMLEWorld question bank, being sure of the rationale for answers to the questions. Consider accessing one of the other question banks for fresh questions if necessary. You should be spending about eight hours a day studying. In the last two weeks of study, you should be answering about 150-200 questions per day as you ready yourself for the testing conditions on exam day.

Once your NBME practice exam scores are  $\geq 200$  (USMLE Step1 equivalent), you should be confident that you will achieve a passing score. If your practice exam scores do not reach this level, reach out to your Society Head for advice BEFORE taking Step 1. Do not take the exam until you are ready to achieve a passing score.

**One week prior** to the exam, consider taking a shorter practice exam at the Prometric testing center where you intend to take the exam. Drive to the center so that you have no surprises on the day of the exam. The exam questions will be the same as the free 120 USMLE tutorial test questions. This Prometric practice exam will familiarize you with the site, the testing conditions, and the identification requirements at the site. This preparation will help remove surprises about the testing conditions during the real exam so that you can focus your full attention on the exam and not be distracted by other events.

## General advice

Successful students from prior classes have emphasized the importance of being honest with yourself regarding strengths and weaknesses. Work very hard on your weaknesses. Start studying early and understand that repetition is essential.

Reflect on why you're struggling. Are you having trouble with recall questions? Make or purchase flash cards. Are you having trouble with problem-solving? Re-read First Aid or watch Pathoma, DIT or Kaplan to figure out why.

If you cannot figure out why you are struggling, talk to your peers or faculty - they are always here to help. This is where the small group tutors are most valuable. Consider working question banks in groups to talk out successful critical thinking patterns that you can emulate.

Beware internet forums like the student-doctor network and USMLE forum. While there might be an answer there, information is often inaccurate. Moreover, conversations there might increase your anxiety and impair your performance.

It is extremely important to incorporate exercise and good nutrition into your lifestyle during your study preparations. Relax the day prior to the exam. Don't cram and get yourself stressed just prior to the exam. Get plenty of rest two to three days prior to the exam. Have a plan for nutrition and fluids during the exam. Think positively and be confident in yourself! You have put in the hard work and now it is time to show off!

Please contact Dr. G Dodd Denton ([gddenton@ochsner.org](mailto:gddenton@ochsner.org)) or your society head ([med.ocsStudentAdmin@enquire.uq.edu.au](mailto:med.ocsStudentAdmin@enquire.uq.edu.au)) should you need advice or have any questions. This study plan will be updated as new information becomes available.

## Timeline Summary 2021

| Year 1 Students 2021                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |  |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinate your Clinical Science study with First Aid (using the study links provided) and Boards and Beyond videos</li> <li>• Assess your progress with scattered questions from USMLE Rx</li> </ul> |  |

| Year 2 Students 2021 |                                                                                                                                                                            |                  |
|----------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|
| Month                | Action                                                                                                                                                                     | Approximate Cost |
| Semester 1           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider purchasing USMLE Rx and start reviewing</li> <li>• Continue coordinating UQ curriculum with Boards and Beyond</li> </ul> | \$160            |
| Beginning Semester 2 | ☒ USMLE Preparation course begins                                                                                                                                          | Usual UQ fees    |
|                      | ☒ UWorld Subscriptions are distributed as part of USMLE Prep course; also purchase the UWorld self-assessments                                                             | Nil              |
|                      | ☒ Attempt to pass the required NBME CBSSA                                                                                                                                  | Nil              |
| Before September     | ☒ Register with ECFMG through IWA (allow a minimum of 5 business days to process your request)                                                                             | \$135            |
|                      | ☒ Generate your Form 186 and submit via NotaryCam                                                                                                                          |                  |
|                      | ☒ Take the required mid-semester CBSSA                                                                                                                                     |                  |

|                         |                                                                                                                                                         |       |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| <b>Mid - September</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Register for USMLE via IWA</li> </ul>                                                                            | \$940 |
| <b>Early -- October</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Faculty of Medicine will receive a request from ECFMG to verify your eligibility to sit the exam.</li> </ul> | Nil   |
| <b>October</b>          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reach out to your Society Head about progress</li> </ul>                                                         | Nil   |
| <b>November</b>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Third NBME CBSE administered as final exam for prep course.</li> </ul>                                           | Nil   |
| <b>December</b>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sit the USMLE Step 1 before starting Phase 2</li> </ul>                                                          | Nil   |

### **The Final Push**

|                          |                                                                                                   |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 8 weeks before exam date | Take a practice NBME exam                                                                         |
| 6 weeks before exam date | Take a practice NBME exam                                                                         |
| 4 weeks before exam date | Take a practice NBME exam                                                                         |
| 3 weeks before exam date | Take an 8-hour simulated exam                                                                     |
| 2 weeks before exam date | Take a practice NBME exam                                                                         |
| 1 week before exam date  | Take the UWorld self-assessments                                                                  |
| 5 days before exam date  | Take the 120 question USMLE tutorial<br>Consider going to your Prometric site for a practice exam |

**We gratefully acknowledge the input of prior UQ/OCS students in crafting and revising this document, including the following students in the class of 2022:**

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