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Stepping Into the Ring with Step 1

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Disclosures & Funding

I am currently a fourth-year medical student and have no conflicts of interest, financial or otherwise.

The advice in this presentation is a combination of many resources and insights. This worked for me, but adjustments may be needed to fit your Step 1 goals and learning style, and there are certainly other strategies that may work as well or even better for you!

In February 2020, the National Board of Medical Examiners announced the USMLE Step 1 exam would transition to a pass/fail scoring format rather than the three-digit score, with this change occurring no earlier than January 2022. Details including changes to the minimum passing score or specific implementation, particularly given the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the timeline, were not available as of July 2020.



USMLE Step 1

”Measure understanding of important basic science concepts and ability to apply it to medicine”

National Mean and Minimum Passing USMLE Step 1 Scores, by Year

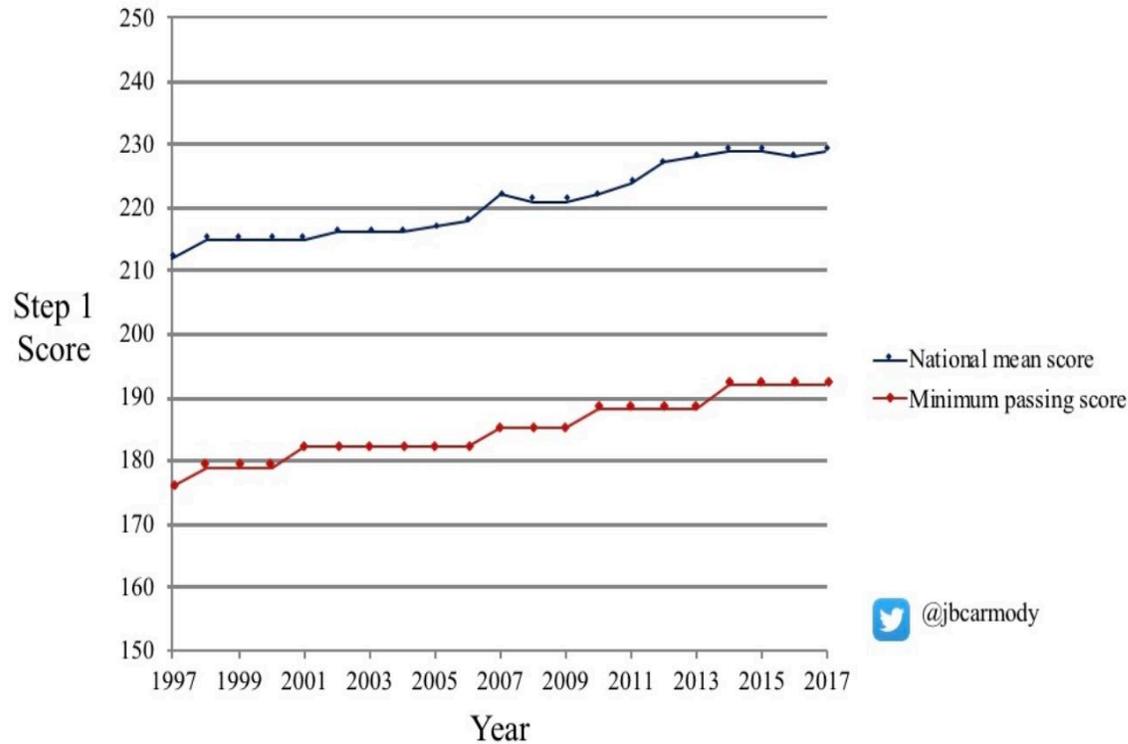
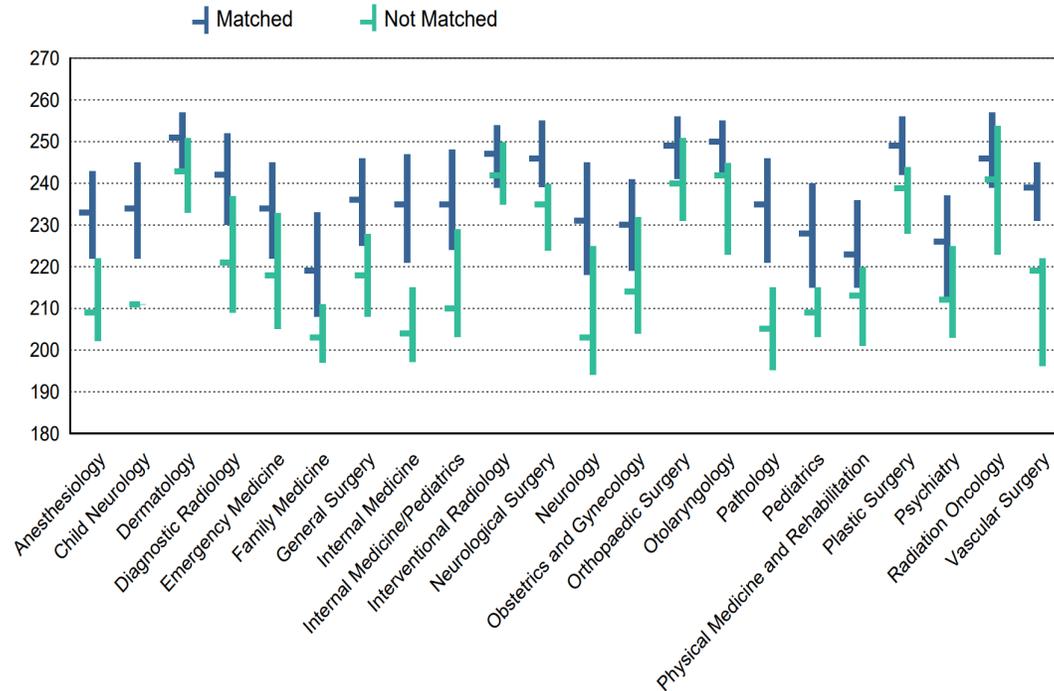


Chart 6 USMLE Step 1 Scores of U.S. Allopathic Seniors by Preferred Specialty and Match Status



2018 NRMP Data¹

Minimum passing score: 194

Average score to match: 233 (SD 17.5)

Source: NRMP Data Warehouse



USMLE Step 1

Figure 1

All Specialties
Percentage of Programs Citing Each Factor And Mean Importance Rating¹ for Each Factor in Selecting Applicants to Interview
(N=1,233)

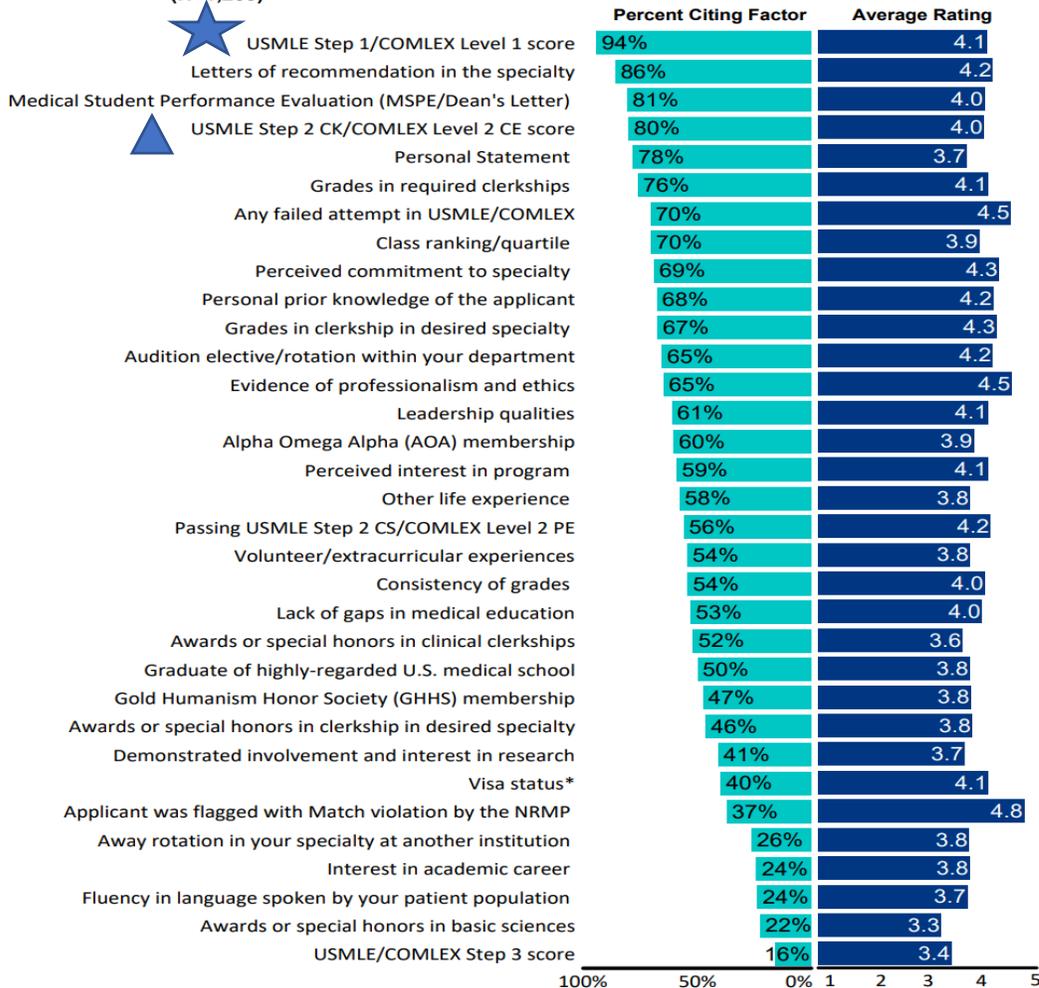
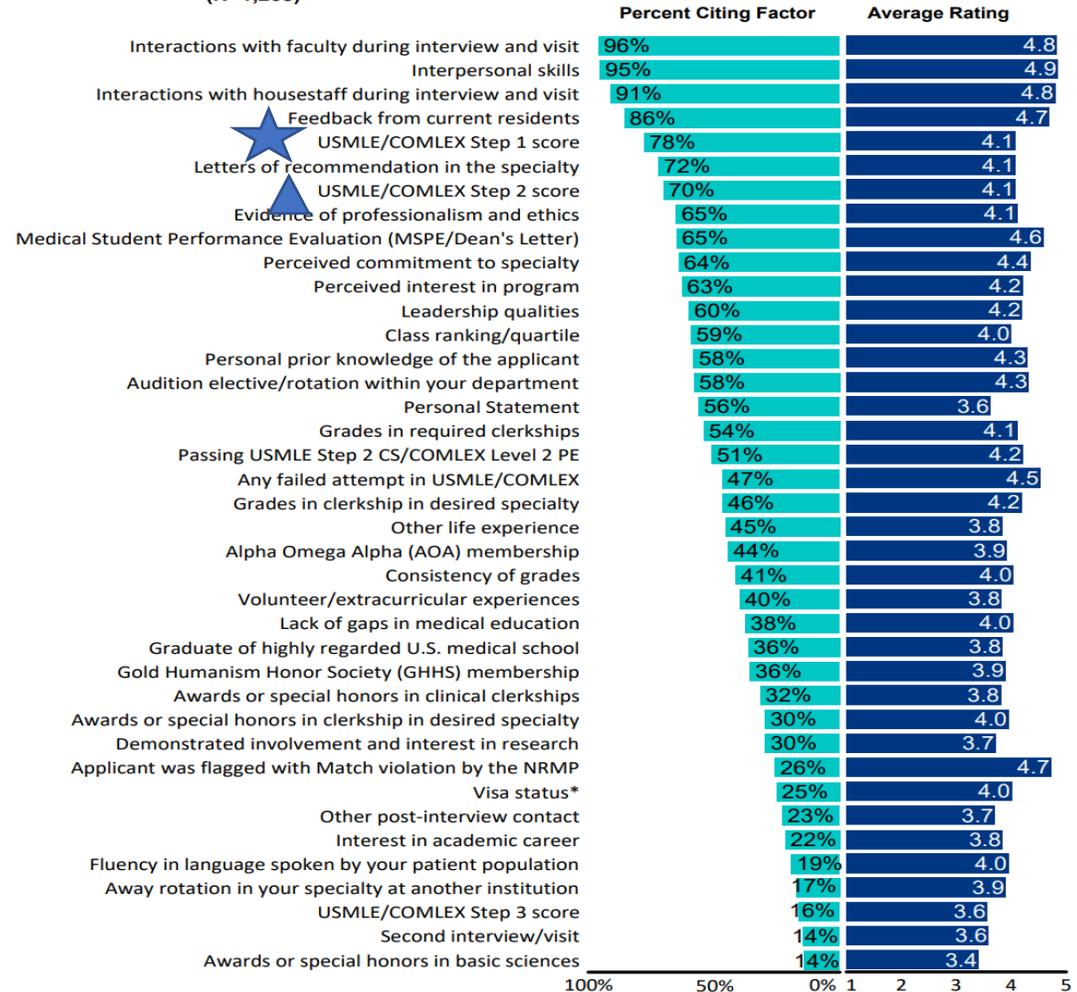


Figure 2

All Specialties
Percentage of Programs Citing Each Factor And Mean Importance Rating¹ for Each Factor in Ranking Applicants
(N=1,208)



2018 NRMP Program Director Survey² Response Rate 29.3%



Critical Components of Match

Summary from University of Michigan Website³

Class A Criteria: Step 1, Step 2, clerkship grades

Step 1 Passing-215: Low
215-230: OK to good
230-245: Good
245-255: Very good
250+: Excellent

Class B Criteria: Interview

Class C Criteria: Research, extracurriculars, leadership, personal statement, LORs, MSPE



Resources

Core resources: “UFAP” Uworld, First Aid, Pathoma

Additional dedicated study period resources: Dr. Goljan audio lectures

Optional longitudinal resources/Q banks: Anki, Kaplan, Amboss, Firecracker, Boards and Beyond [...] Sketchy, Picmonic, Osmosis. **Do NOT try to use all of these! Less is more. Which you choose, if any, is dependent on whether your school provides any of these and your learning style.**



Study Guide

Amalgam from: "DermGuy" youtube videos (no longer posted), Reddit, advisors, peers.

Think of this as a job with 8-10 hours of pure work most days.

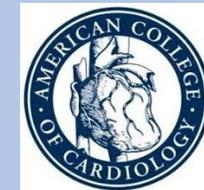
Study by organ system, with day 1 being reading through First Aid chapter, distilling your own "master notes" into a notebook, and listening to relevant Goljan lectures. Days 2 and 3 are going through Uworld on that topic. I preferred doing sets of 40 questions, untimed, on tutor mode.

Pros: focus learning and mastering one system at a time, periodically revisit your "master notes" and never look at First Aid again*.

Cons: this is dedicated study, so any way you slice it if you're doing it right, it is going to be tiring.

Reddit Search: "Step 1 Score Calculator" & "Step 1 Score Correlation"

	# of Q's (with all subject boxes checked)
UWorld Q Bank c. 2018 Systems	
Allergy & Immunology	39
Biostatistics and Epidemiology	58
Cardiovascular	314
Dermatology	66
ENT	15
Endocrine, Diabetes & Metabolism	187
Female Reproductive System & Breast	65
Gastrointestinal & Nutrition	228
General Principles	75
Hematology & Oncology	224
Infectious Diseases	173
Male Reproductive System	24
Miscellaneous (Multisystem)	31
Nervous System	299
Ophthalmology	12
Poisoning & Environmental Exposure	7
Pregnancy, Childbirth & Puerperium	28
Psychiatric/Behavioral & Substance Abuse	132
Pulmonary & Critical Care	189
Renal, Urinary Systems & Electrolytes	148
Rheumatology/Orthopedics & Sports	126
Social Sciences (Ethics/Legal/Professional)	45
Total	2485



Study Guide

Every day: eat nutritious food, sleep well, take breaks, stay connected with friends/family, exercise and go outside.

Day	Subject		
	1 Cardio Day 1	19 NBME Form 15 and review answers	41 NBME 120 & review it
	2 Cardio Day 2	20 Micro/Immun, Day 1	42 NBME 16 & Review
	3 Cardio Day 3	21 Micro/Immun, Day 2	43 Pharm chapter -> master notes
	4 Pulm Day 1	22 Micro/Immun, Day 3	44 UWSA #1 & review it
	5 Pulm Day 2	23 MSK & Derm Day 1	Review old NBMEs (Forms 19 & 15) *our school made us take these earlier in our
	6 Pulm Day 3	24 MSK & Derm Day 2	45 curriculum*
	1/2 Day off, 1/2 day GI Day	25 MSK half day off	Can do NBME 17, I planned to but felt I was
	7 1	Catch up (Derm, MSK, Micro notes, misc) -	46 running out of steam so took the day off
	8 GI Day 2	26 free time if you're caught up	Read through 1/2 of master notes, take your
	9 GI Day 3	Catch up (Derm, MSK, Micro notes, misc) -	time to digest it. Mine was ~90 notebook
	10 Renal Day 1	27 free time if you're caught up	47 pages.
	11 Renal Day 2	28 Hem/Onc Day 1	Finish reading through master notes & go
	12 Renal Day 3	29 Hem/Onc Day 2	through First Aid's "Rapid Review" section.
	Stats, Public Health, Psychiatry	30 Hem/Onc Day 3	This should make you feel very confident, as
	13 Day 1	31 Read master notes. NBME Form 18.	it is the core information tested on Step 1
	Stats, Public Health, Psychiatry	32 Review NBME Form 18 answers -> short day	and from my experience ~85% of the
	14 Day 2	33 NS Day 1	questions on my test was this content. Pack
	Stats, Public Health, Psychiatry	34 NS Day 2	your snacks and drinks, have omega 3s with
	15 Day 3	35 NS Day 3	48 dinner, try to get good sleep.
	16 Biochem Day 1	36 Endo/Repro Day 1	Step 1 Exam!!! Wake @ 5:30, have coffee and
	17 Biochem Day 2	37 Endo/Repro Day 2	49 re-read First Aid's "Rapid Review" section
	Catch up on everything - free	38 Endo/Repro Day 3	
	18 time if you're caught up	39 UWorld 2 & Review answers	
		Finish master notes...this is a free day if you	
		40 stay on top of everything	



Study Guide for DO Students

Zach Manna of ACC Med Student Leadership Group did a 100 day study plan for dual-prep for Step 1 and COMLEX Level 1 beginning January 2nd incorporating Uworld, annotating in First Aid & Pathoma (not "master notes"), Boards & Beyond, Sketchy micro & path videos, Goljan audio. Given taking COMLEX Level 1 shortly after USMLE Step 1, he added 35 Combank questions (untimed, tutor mode, covering any previous topics up to that point) per day at the ~1/3rd point of this study period. Zach took Step 1 two days before COMLEX Level 1, but said that it seems typical to take Level 1 anywhere between two and seven days after.

Zach's Days per block (14 break days were scattered in this period, with 3 of the break days just before Step 1):
GI (11), Immuno/Path/Pharm (7), Heme-Onc (12), MSK/Derm (7), Endo (7), Repro (10), Psych (6), Pulm (6), Neuro (10), Renal (7), Cardio (9), Anatomy+Embryology (5), Biochem (8).

I know this is not an exhaustive description of Zach's study guide and will defer to him and/or other DO members to share more details on their experience in dual preparing for USMLE Step 1 & COMLEX Level 1!



Test Day

- If you see a Q with a huge stem, quickly look at the last line for their question and glance at the choices to give you context. Otherwise you may have to re-read the whole question.
- Highlight salient parts of the questions as you go. Questions can become a blur, so highlighting can help you focus, identify key features, and save time when reviewing marked questions.
- Mark questions as needed and try to finish each block with ~5 minutes to revisit
- Take 5-10 minute breaks between each block
- Do not dwell on questions you're unsure about or on questions that bother you after a block is over, just continue and do your best. Focus on how much you DO know, which will be a ton!



Final Thoughts

Everyone is different, so don't force yourself to do this plan exactly.

Anki is a love/hate thing and a lot of extra work. Had I done it, maybe I could have scored 5-10 points higher on Step 1 but would have felt overworked and unhappy. I personally would choose to use energy on Q banks than on flashcards since they are more reflective of the test.

If you do Kaplan x1, Uworld x2, NBME practice tests, the free 120, and the questions in your curriculum, you will have done ~10,000 questions. The test is 280 questions.

Step 1 is 2.8% of all the questions you have already done. Let that sink in.

You are ready and you will do great!

There is more to your pre-clerkship medical school experience than Step 1, so explore what interests you and get involved in research, leadership, activities & community outreach. A stellar Step 1 score with no personalization or interesting experiences is not holistically impressive, so set realistic goals and have fun discovering your path!

Feel free to email me with questions or comments: AJM@email.arizona.edu



References

- 1) National Resident Matching Program. “Charting Outcomes in the Match: U.S. Allopathic Seniors 2nd edition”. 2018.
- 2) National Resident Matching Program. “Results of the 2018 NRMP Program Director Survey” 2018.
- 3) Critical Components in the Match. University of Michigan.
<https://medstudents.medicine.umich.edu/student-support/match/critical-components-match>

