

LEAD Step 2 Q&A for the Class of 2026 | December 2024

Study Resources

1. What are the best resources for Step 2 preparation?
 - a. I used UWorld as my primary question bank. Some people preferred Amboss, but I would say the majority of my friends used UWorld. I liked the Amboss articles and questions for ethics and statistics (here's a [reddit link](#)), which I reviewed the last week before my test. I also liked doing the [Amboss 200 high-yield questions](#) for Step 2 the last week or two before my test. I would recommend doing the practice NBME full-length exams listed below. I also liked listening to Divine Intervention, but not all my friends did the same. I think he breaks down things very well and I went through all his shelf reviews and some other podcasts (He made a [post on reddit](#) with recommendations), just keep in mind he does sometimes have some minor inaccuracies in his podcast. Someone also made Anki decks for each podcast if you prefer that method.
2. Should I use UWorld as my primary study tool?
 - a. I used UWorld as my primary study tool for questions. I reset my UWorld question bank immediately after clerkships ended and before I started dedicated. No worries if you did not complete the entire first pass (I only got through 70%). I would recommend resetting it. Some of my friends used Amboss or liked Amboss more, so it really comes down to whatever is your preference.
3. How many practice tests should I take, and which ones are the most accurate?
 - a. I would recommend taking all the NBME exams if you can. For me I took it in this following order, NBME 9, U World 1, NBME 13, NBME 12, NBME 14, NBME 10, UWorld 2, NBME 11, Old Free 120, New Free 120, Newest Free 120. I am not saying that you must do it in this order, this is just what I did; the LEAD team can also provide guidance regarding the test order. I also redid the NBME subject shelf exams the week before. I did not finish the entire second pass of UWorld, but some of my friends did, so it really comes down to how you study.
4. What are some effective strategies for using Anki decks for Step 2?
 - a. For me, as I went through UWorld, I created Anki Image Occlusion cards using tables or figures on UWorld and/or First Aid only for topics I got wrong or was struggling with. I personally am not a person who is able to keep up with doing 500+ Anki cards a day, so doing this was a little more manageable for me.
5. Are Step 1 resources still helpful for Step 2 preparation?
 - a. I used First Aid for Step 1 almost daily during Step 2 dedicated. I think it helps remind you of the basics that can help your clinical reasoning for some of these questions. Also, I found their mnemonics pretty helpful. I also reviewed my Sketchy Micro and Pharm at the beginning of dedicated. I referred to Amboss articles for topics I struggled with.

Study Timeline

6. When should I start studying for Step 2?
 - a. You've been studying for Step 2 all of third year! It's much better than Step 1 in that regard. But in terms of focused exam studying, I personally just waited until dedicated to study for Step 2. I just wanted to focus on clerkships and shelf exams during my rotations, which also served me well for the exam. I have friends who kept Anki cards unsuspended all year to keep up with the material, but that isn't necessarily required to do well — just personal preference!
7. How long should I dedicate to full-time Step 2 preparation?
 - a. There are lots of opinions on this, but it isn't one size fits all. The ideal amount of dedicated time is enough so that you have taken every practice test you want to and studied every topic to your satisfaction without burning yourself out. For me, this was around 4.5 weeks. I have friends who took up to 8 weeks and others who tested within 3 weeks. This largely depends on how much you kept up with content during clerkship year, how long after finishing clerkships you start dedicated, how much time per day you are able to commit during dedicated, etc. I strongly recommend not scheduling any rotations during any part of dedicated though — every friend who did this regretted it.
 - b. I personally did not keep up with any content during clerkships, and I took 7 weeks for dedicated. I did so because I kind of eased into dedicated the first couple weeks and wanted to make sure I was scoring where I wanted to be before I sat for the test. A lot of my friends took around 5-6 weeks, some took less and others took more. Definitely not one size fits all! Don't be afraid to meet with the advising department if you want to push back your test, they're here to help! Go with what makes you most comfortable!

Exam Content

8. What are the high-yield topics I should focus on for Step 2?
 - a. See this [link](#) for the official breakdown of topics. Notice that internal medicine makes up over half the exam questions, whereas neurology and biostats are less emphasized. Use this to tailor your studying based on your weak points.
9. How is Step 2 different from Step 1 in terms of question style and focus?
 - a. Step 2 emphasizes management and “best next step” questions almost entirely, whereas Step 1 has a mix of diagnosis, best treatments, drug mechanisms, etc. Your studying for Step 2 should focus on identifying the pathology, but more so how you would treat that disease process in a clinical setting. Divine Intervention is great for this.

Test-Taking Strategy

10. How do I improve my time management on the exam?
 - a. A very effective strategy for me was allowing myself one minute per question in my initial run-through. If I didn't know the answer ~50 seconds in/immediately, I would flag it and move on. This leaves you about 20 minutes remaining at the end of each block to go back to your flagged questions (ideally, you would have flagged less than half the section or < 20 questions). I didn't allocate too much time to re-checking questions I didn't flag since I trusted my initial instinct (see Q12).
11. What is the best way to approach long, vignette-style questions?
 - a. Read the identifier line and then skip to the end to read the question and the answer choices. Get an idea of what they will be asking you before you read the bulk of the question stem so you know which details to pay more attention to. For example, the fact that he had a tetanus booster last year may not be useful if he's presenting with swollen legs and the question asks for which medication is the likely cause. And use the highlight/underlying tool!
 - b. On long question stems, I read the last 2 sentences first, so it helped cue me into what to pay attention to. I would keep track of time and make sure I stick to 90 seconds per question. That means after 10 questions, I should have 45 min left, and after 20 questions there should be 30 minutes left, and so on.
12. How do I avoid overthinking or changing correct answers?
 - a. Go with your gut! Your first instinct is usually correct. Even if it isn't, you will likely make more mistakes by changing answers than if you left your first picks alone.

Scheduling and Logistics

13. When should I schedule my Step 2 exam during fourth year?
 - a. I scheduled starting my dedicated after my clerkships ended. I would definitely recommend taking a few days completely off, just so you can fully reset after clerkships.
14. What are the key deadlines for residency applications in relation to Step 2 scores?
 - a. Admin will go over the major deadlines for crafting personal statements and LOR and stuff later on. The main thing is just that away rotation applications usually open around late January-March, depending on the institution, so I would keep an eye out on VSLO. You may need a letter of recommendation for some away rotations, so look up if your institution requires one and plan accordingly so you're not asking attendings last minute.
15. Should I aim to take Step 2 before or after audition rotations?
 - a. I definitely recommend taking step 2 before audition rotations. This way you can really focus on doing well on audition rotations.

Motivation and Mindset

16. How do I stay motivated during long study periods?
 - a. I set a schedule of how I wanted to split up my time and then had a hard cutoff at a certain time in the evening so I could workout, eat, and watch TV. It is hard at times to stay motivated, but creating a daily schedule and weekly schedule helps you stay on track and motivated. Don't be afraid to adjust your schedule as you go through dedicated and figure out what works for you.
17. What should I do if I feel burned out while preparing for Step 2?
 - a. Step 2 studying is most definitely a marathon and not a sprint. If you are feeling burnt out, definitely take an extra half day or full day off and don't be too hard on yourself if you don't get through all the stuff you wanted to do for the day. Sometimes I would change up where I study, whether it is a new café, park, library, or studying with friends. A lot of people may feel some symptoms of burnout during dedicated, so you're not alone, make sure to talk with friends and family!
18. How do I handle test anxiety?
 - a. I would try to simulate every practice full length test day as if it was the real deal, especially in the last month leading up to it. Make sure you are getting up at the same time you would need on test day. When you take the test, make sure there are no distractions and plan out your breaks as you would on the real day. The week of the test, I got up at the same time I would need to get up on test day to get myself ready. This gets you really used to the test day routine and eases your nerves. Then on test day, really trust all your preparation and keep in mind that you are the most prepared that you have ever been. It's natural to be a little nervous!

Special Considerations

19. How should my preparation change if I am applying into a very competitive specialty?
 - a. I just had a goal score in mind that would make me a competitive applicant for a competitive specialty (talk to your specialty advisor on what score is recommended). I just wanted to make sure I was hitting that score or getting close on my final few practice tests. Sometimes that may mean taking a little longer for dedicated, but not always necessary.

More Questions?

- If you have any additional questions you want answered or more clarification on, fill out this form: https://usc.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_9StO3YmQYR4sRsq

- If you would be interested in receiving a Step 2 mentor, fill out this form:
https://usc.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_bCfOfLEV878bfD0