

## Do NOT underestimate the USMLE Step 3

All of us have heard the saying, “Step 1, one month. Step 2 CK, 2 weeks. Step 3, number 2 pencil.” In our experience, that couldn’t be further from the truth. Every year we see talented doctors with strong USMLE scores falter on Step 3. Why? Because they didn’t take the exam seriously. Almost no one expects to have difficulty on Step 3 – and you shouldn’t! – but don’t take it for granted.

## But does USMLE Step 3 even matter?

Yes! If you plan to pursue competitive fellowships after residency, your Step 3 score will definitely be considered, especially if it is significantly lower than your Step 1 and 2 CK scores. For foreign graduates who are applying for residency, a good Step 3 score will send a powerful message to the selection committee: You will be able to obtain a medical license when you’re done training in the United States, even before you’ve started.

## Best Resources for the Multiple-Choice Question (MCQ) portion of Step 3

- Step-Up to Medicine (NOT Step-Up to USMLE Step 3) – The cornerstone of preparation for the MCQ portion. If you know it inside out, you’re *almost* guaranteed to pass since most of the USMLE Step 3 covers non-pregnant/non-psychiatric adult disease.
- Crush Step 3 – The ideal supplement to Step-Up, which includes Pediatrics, Psychiatry and Ob/Gyn (very hi-yield).
- USMLE World Qbank for Step 3 – Answer all the questions in a timed fashion and review carefully.
- The Rule of 3s – Read the two books *and* review/answer the Qbank questions 3 times over.
- Official questions/cases/tests are available at [usmle.org](http://usmle.org) and [nbme.org](http://nbme.org).

## How to Study for the Clinical Case Simulations (CCS) Portion of Step 3

- **Become familiar with the software.** Review the published cases (on the USMLE website) at least 3 times to acclimate to the software and to learn *expected* management of common diagnoses (e.g., DKA, pneumothorax, eclampsia, etc.).
- **Master the USMLE World CCS cases.** You will become even more familiar with the software and with 50 more common diagnoses. Again, follow the rule of 3s, and read the explanations *in detail*, even if your patient improved!

## How to Balance Residency and Preparation for Step 3: The Toughest Part

- **Start early.** Do not wait until 2-3 weeks before the exam to make a plan. Ideally, you should plan for Step 3 the year before. That way, you can ask for an elective, an “easier rotation,” or if needed, vacation, right around the time you plan to take Step 3. At the very least, we’d recommend a 1-3 week period (depending on your prior experience with the Steps) of complete dedication to Step 3 to ensure a passing score.
- **Use your down time effectively.** You can do your first read-through of Step-Up and Crush overnight in between admissions, on your commute home, at the gym, etc. And get a mobile app for flashcards and USMLE World to use on the floor.
- **Create a firm detailed schedule.** For example, schedule to read Step-Up to Medicine GI from 6-8pm, do a GI question block from 8 - 9 pm and review it from 9 - 10 pm. Write this schedule for your study period up front and stick to it! (Roughly half the time should be spent reading and the other half doing questions.)
- **Make the most of days off and elective/easier rotations.** Use these days strategically (scheduling some just before your exam for final review) and prepare to spend most of them studying. Remember to take a day off here and there to avoid burnout.

Preparing for Step 3 appropriately is no easy task. That said, numerous medical students, interns and residents have done it. You can do it too! Remember that once you pass the USMLE Step 3, you’re done with the Steps forever. You will also become a better, well-rounded doctor by thoroughly preparing for this very clinically relevant exam. Let that give you the energy you need to get it done.



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