



EMORY  
UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF  
MEDICINE

**A STUDY GUIDE TO STEP 2 CK**

**For the Class of 2024**

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## INTRODUCTION

As you begin to study in earnest for the **USMLE Step 2 Clinical Knowledge (CK) Exam**, choosing the appropriate study materials is important to your success. However, **it is easy to overwhelm yourself by using too many resources**. This brief guide is meant to provide an outline, suggested strategies and answers to frequent questions about studying for Step 2 CK.

Keep in mind, you cannot choose the "wrong way" to study - **no one approach to studying is right for everyone**. This guide contains trust resources and approaches that give you space to decide the best approach for you.

Preparing for Step 2 CK is a matter of reviewing sample study schedules online, practicing Step 2 CK-style questions, taking practice exams, talking to near-peer M4 mentors, your small group advisors, deans, and faculty. While you should seek out advice from others, you know yourself better than anyone. Devise a study plan that works best for you.

## PREPARING FOR STEP 2 CK

Although for completeness' sake, multiple references are listed below, **be sure to limit your number of resources to 2-3**; additional resources quickly become overwhelming and can contribute to anxiety and lack of focus.

### EXAM STRUCTURE

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Step 2 CK is a one-day examination divided into eight 60-minute blocks and administered in one 9-hour testing session. The number of questions per block never exceeds forty. Exam items will not exceed 318.

*Step 2 CK assesses an examinee's ability to apply medical knowledge, skills, and understanding of clinical science essential for the provision of patient care under supervision and includes emphasis on health promotion and disease prevention. Step 2 CK ensures that due attention is devoted to principles of clinical sciences and basic patient-centered skills that provide the foundation for the safe and competent practice of medicine under supervision (USMLE, 2022).*

Table 1: Step 2 CK System Specifications\*

| System  | Range, % |
|---|----------|
| General Principles of Foundational Science**  | 2-4      |
| Immune System   | 3-5      |
| Blood & Lymphoreticular System  | 4-6      |
| Behavioral Health   | 6-8      |
| Nervous System & Special Senses   | 6-8      |
| Musculoskeletal System/Skin & Subcutaneous Tissue   | 6-10     |
| Cardiovascular System   | 8-10     |
| Respiratory System  | 7-9      |
| Gastrointestinal System   | 7-9      |
| Renal & Urinary System & Male Reproductive  | 4-6      |
| Pregnancy, Childbirth & the Puerperium  | 4-6      |
| Female Reproductive System & Breast   | 4-6      |
| Endocrine System  | 4-6      |
| Multisystem Processes & Disorders   | 4-6      |
| Biostatistics & Epidemiology/Population Health/Interpretation of Medical Literature             | 3-5      |
| Social Sciences: Legal/Ethical Issues & Professionalism/Systems-based Practice & Patient Safety | 10-15    |

\* Percentages are subject to change at any time.

\*\* The Step 2 CK General Principles category includes normal and abnormal processes that are not limited to specific organ systems.

## CONTENT REVIEW

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When approaching Step 2 CK studying, identify your areas of greatest strength and weakness. For some clerkships, you may need to review intensive content; for others, merely using Qbank review will help you recall and reinforce. For those areas that require content review, the following section offers popular resources.

**2023 pricing is provided in green.**

This guide is not an endorsement of one product over another; nor should one believe that the higher the price, the higher the quality. These are merely popular resources that have helped students to see success, and we are providing them to guide you in your choices.

### **First Aid for the USMLE 2 CK**

**Approximately \$25 to rent; \$50 to buy**

The book is separated into three sections:  
 Section 1: Guide to Efficient Exam Preparation  
 Section 2: Database of High-Yield Facts  
 Section 3: Top-Rated Review Resources

Students often read relevant sections of *First Aid* throughout the first three years (especially second year). Many make notes directly into *First Aid*, while others choose to hole-punch the pages and put them in a binder, combining class notes and high yield information gleaned from *UWorld* questions into one source. **As valuable as it is, it is not recommended as a stand-alone reference.**

### **Access Medicine - <http://pid.emory.edu/chkns>**

**Free subscription through Emory Health Science Library**

Access Medicine is not only a resource to over fifty medical texts, but it also contains study tools with review questions, flashcards, and play Showdown! Create an account to access the study tools which are located under *Study Tools* tab. Emory has subscriptions for AccessSurgery, AccessEmergencyMedicine, and AccessPhysiotherapy.

### **Anki Flashcards - <https://apps.ankiweb.net/>**

**Android version free; Mac version \$25**

Some students use flashcards extensively, and others never use them. For those who benefit from flashcards (e.g., a quick review of material prior to bedtime or first thing in the morning) this is a popular option.

### **AMBOSS - <https://www.amboss.com/us>**

**\$10.75/month billed yearly; \$14.99/month billed monthly.**

Includes content review using unlimited library access, Anki add-on and smart study tools, as well as interactive medical imaging with overlays. Includes “phrasionary, table quizzes, charts, radiological images with overlays, videos, SmartZoom samples and other images that illustrate key points on different topics” all on a digital platform.”

**Kaplan - <https://www.kaptest.com/usmle>**

**Prep Course on Demand \$1199; Live Online \$3999; New York In-Center \$7499**

Options videos, quizzes, “warm-up and post-test questions,” 2 simulated exams and accompanying lecture notes. See Qbanks below for additional Kaplan Step 2 CK offerings.

**Sketchymedical - <https://sketchymedical.com/>**

**\$299.99 for 6 months; \$399.99 for 12 months; \$599.99 for 24 months**

A visual mnemonic series for microbiology, pathology, and pharmacology. Sketches “help you create a memory palace by associating medical topics with memorable visual elements.”

**Pathoma - <http://www.pathoma.com/>**

**PathomaFree version is free and does not include the textbook or all videos. PathomaPro starts at \$84.95 and offers the textbook, and 3-, 12-, or 21-month subscriptions to videos for every chapter of the book.**

While Pathoma offers a Step 1 review, they do not offer a formal Step 2 CK review. This resource covers high-yield pathology information for all organ systems in shorter videos. For those who prefer, reading the *Pathoma* textbook may be faster than reviewing the videos. The textbook has many color images like those on Step 1 and 2. Often considered an essential resource.

**Boards and Beyond - <https://www.boardsbeyond.com/>**

**Subscriptions range from \$24.00 for one week to \$399.00 for 2 years.**

Step 2 CK resource includes 260 videos, PDF copies of the slides and Qbank of 1300 questions. Covers content review and Qbank with one subscription.

**Divine Intervention Podcast - <https://divineinterventionpodcasts.com/category/usmle-step-2-ck/>**

**Offered as a FREE Podcast**

Focuses on high yield concepts. This podcast allows you to choose specific topics to supplement learning deficits. Because it is a podcast, it can be listened to during commutes, while running errands, or even during exercise.

## QUESTION BANKS (QBanks)

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After gaining expertise in Step 1 for USMLE Board examinations, you are familiar with the value of question banks to improve the speed and effectiveness by which you can (1) identify distracters, (2) see what the question is truly asking, (3) work through the best possible answer, (4) choose it and (5) move on. It is both an art and a science. The following QBanks are popularly used for Step 2 CK.

### UWorld - [www.uworld.com](http://www.uworld.com)

**30-day (\$319), 90-day (\$439), 180-day (\$479) or 360-day (\$559) subscriptions**

- **Identify** ways to gain optimal benefit from this essential resource. UWorld Step 2 CK builds upon your Step 1-tested knowledge with a greater focus on clinical skills, patient-centered care, disease prevention, and clinical science.
- **Integrate** high yield topics gleaned from *UWorld* questions and reading answer explanations into your own list of high-yield topics for additional review (i.e., Anki cards, *First Aid* annotation, excel documents or other creative way you have identified).
- **Review** incorrect questions. Should you read the explanation for each answer option for every question? For the sake of efficiency, probably not. Rather, read the explanation for any answer option you get wrong, "guessed right" or considered as possibly correct.
- **Plan** to do a set amount of questions/day during dedicated study time. While it is true that there is an advantage to completing as many questions as possible, be sure not to rush through questions at the expense of learning from the questions.
- **Reflect** on your strengths and weaknesses - be sure to take the time to review what you have learned from them.

### AMBOSS - <https://www.amboss.com/us>

**Full Qbank access is in addition to the monthly membership; (\$149) for one month; (\$189) for three months; (\$229) for six months, (\$299) for twelve months.**

### Kaplan - <https://www.kaptest.com/usmle>

**QBank - 1 month (\$159); 3 month (\$199); 6 month (\$299); 12 month (\$399)**

### BoardVitals - <https://www.boardvitals.com/>

**Subscriptions are available for 1 (\$159), 3 (\$219), or 6 (\$359) months.**

Over 1400 USMLE Step 2 board review practice questions with explanations available. Create an account to access test banks to create customized practice tests and review advanced statistics.

### USMLE-Rx - <https://www.usmle-rx.com/>

**QMax (2300 questions) - 1 month (\$59); 3 months (\$99); 6 months (\$169); 12 months (\$199); 24 months (\$229)**

Question bank for Step 2 CK by the authors of *First Aid*.

## BUILDING YOUR EXAMINATION ENDURANCE

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Taking practice tests is the best way to improve your endurance for a 9-hour exam. Since joining your clinical rotations, you are less in the habit of sitting. As such, you will need to rebuild your endurance step-by-step. It is recommended to plan practice tests when it can be optimal for your own personal learning. Speak with your Associate Deans or small group advisors to decide how many and when practice tests make the most sense for you.

1. **Multiple Question Blocks.** Using QBank blocks one after the other with breaks simulating the testing environment. (Included in whatever QBank you choose)
2. **UWorld.** 4 blocks of forty question practice exam. (**Get 1 test with 90-day access; 2 tests with 180-day and 360-day options**)
3. **CCSSA.** NBME's Comprehensive Clinical Science Self-Assessment (CCSSA) (**\$60**): *Please note that Emory School of Medicine is providing one CCSSA in-person on February 27, 2023, to the Class of 2024.*
4. **Kaplan.** Kaplan offers 3-hour free diagnostic exam. (**Free**)
5. **USMLE Practice Examination. (\$75)**  
([https://apps.nbme.org/CBTPSRegistrationWeb/jsp/usmle\\_CBTPS\\_registration.jsp](https://apps.nbme.org/CBTPSRegistrationWeb/jsp/usmle_CBTPS_registration.jsp))

**Practice test quantity and timing.** Plan to take a couple of practice tests – some students take more. Completing the test at the standard pace allows you to practice getting through the exam in the time allotted. Taking a practice test at the midpoint period gives you a sense of where you are in terms of preparation, serving as a diagnostic tool to identify areas of strength and weakness, which may help you to adjust your schedule during the remainder of your study period. Reviewing material repeatedly through questions also helps to consolidate information and helps with retention. A low score may lead to undue anxiety while a high score may contribute to a false sense of security. Do not get fixated on your score! Practice exams help with endurance and time management skills.

**Step 2 CK is a test of endurance.** There are eight one-hour blocks of 40 (or fewer) questions; nine hours are allotted to complete the test. The total number of questions will not exceed 318. Forty-five minutes of break time is automatically allocated. In addition to the exam blocks, the test begins with a 15-minute computer tutorial. However, the tutorial is identical to the one online - <https://orientation.nbme.org/Launch/USMLE/STPF2>. It is best to skip it on test day and take those 15 minutes as additional break time. This allows you to begin with 1 hour of break time, which you may take between sections at any point during the day. Also, if you finish an exam block early, the remaining time is added to your break time.

Some complete a couple of sections at a time and then take a prolonged break, while others choose to take a five-minute break at the end of each section. Do not let the hours of testing wear you out. Do all those smart test-taking things (bring [and eat] snacks, use your break time, etc.). Give each question consideration, but if you are unsure, pick an answer and move on or skip the question and plan to return to it. A subsequent question may help to trigger the answer to a previous question that you skipped. Remember that there may be what you find to be easier questions at the end of the block – and you do not want to run out of time.

**Practice environment.** You may want to consider taking a practice test at the Prometric test site. Details are at <https://proscheduler.prometric.com/scheduling/testInformation>. Within your 90-day eligibility period, Prometric offers a practice session with a brief tutorial section and three 1-hour blocks of approximately forty multiple-choice test items each. Upon completion a printed percent correct score is provided. The opportunity to become familiar with the testing site may help decrease anxiety on the test day. Contact your local Prometric Testing Center for costs.

## STUDY SCHEDULES + FINDING BALANCE AMID THE STRESS

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- **Study schedules.** Following a study schedule will help you to stay on track. That said, you may not reach all the goals you set out to meet in the beginning. Be flexible, adapt throughout, do not beat yourself up and move on. Include several flex-days for “catch-up” or more time on a particular topic. Allow more time for review towards the end of dedicated study time – reviewing material helps with retention and more rapid recall during the exam itself. It is easy to get stressed if you get behind schedule and to ignore the importance of food, sleep, exercise, family, and friends. A daily routine helps to maintain sanity and decrease burnout.
  - Additional tips and **sample study schedules** are at <https://firstaidteam.com/schedules/>. (**Free**)
  - Many students also like **Cram Fighter** for daily Step 2 study schedule. 1 month (**\$29/month**); 3 months (**\$60**); 6 months (**\$95**); 12 months (**\$119**). (<https://blueprintprep.com/medical/med-school/study-schedule>). You enter all the resources you will use, the time you have before the test, and it gives you a daily schedule. If you do not finish something in one day, it rolls over and updates daily.
  - Your mentors and student success resources can support you in outlining your Step 2 schedule for dedicated and even throughout the curriculum.
  
- **Ordering topics.** Begin with your weaker topics and schedule, accordingly, allowing more time for these topics.
  
- **Balancing time on subjects.** Schedule more time to review those topics which tend to be more heavily emphasized on the exam.
  
- **Follow your energy flow.** Schedule the most challenging part of your study day when you are most alert – i.e., are you a morning or evening person and schedule accordingly.
  
- **Study environment.** Find a good place (or places) to study. What setting is least distracting and absent of anxiety-triggers? Home, library, school, coffee shop, etc. Going home for designated study time, not staying connected with classmates, but instead surrounding yourself with non-medical school friends/family may be best for some. Others, however, will equally benefit from being among other students.

- **Silence your cell phone.** Turning off all phone and computer notifications will aid in your ability to concentrate. Plan to check your phone and email at specified times as part of your study schedule.
- **Do not be an island.** Humans need connection and dedicated study time can be very isolating. Make sure that you are engaging with others in some way throughout the entire dedicated study time.
- **Study partners.** Many students benefit from a study partner. Plan, for example, to meet with a classmate to review a topic, ask one another questions, present a topic to one-another, etc. Find a white board and give “lectures” to one-another.
- **Time off from studying.** A study schedule *must* include study breaks - time off makes for more effective study. Take at least one full day off a week (one full day, two mornings, or two afternoons). Schedule a five-minute break at least every 45 minutes as this simulates the testing scenario. Go outside for breaks, when possible, to get fresh air and sunshine. During a break, remove yourself from any study materials and do your best to truly relax - no flash cards or podcasts on the treadmill. It is better to study 8 “good hours” than 12 “non-productive hours”; respect your limit and stop studying. Continue to do all the things that keep us healthy—exercise, meditation, hydration, nourishing food, and sunshine.
- **Sleep.** Get on a sleep schedule that will model the wake time on test day. Practice like you play.
- **Comparing self to others.** There will always be someone studying more than you (and less than you). While you should listen to the advice of others, you know yourself best and the way you are most productive studying. Do not be stressed by how other people are studying - be confident and do what works best for you. Extending your study time in an unreasonable fashion is counterproductive.
- **Step 2 CK Scheduling Permit.** You must bring the scheduling permit you receive in an email from the NBME to the Prometric testing site on the day of the exam. (Be sure to open the link and print the actual scheduling permit). You will be expected to present this permit along with an unexpired, government-issued photo identification with your signature (e.g., current driver’s license). Your name on the photo ID must exactly match the name appearing on the scheduling permit.
- **Additional study time. Avoid the urge to push back the test date.** There comes a point in time where additional study is counterproductive. Although the thought of an additional week of study time may be tempting, be confident in your ability and in the effectiveness of your study schedule. Changing the test date can negatively impact your confidence and contribute to anxiety. You will never feel totally prepared; most students “peak” at 5-6 weeks.

- **Reach out to your Emory School of Medicine Resources.** You are not alone in this journey—it takes a village—and we are here to support you! Please feel free to reach out to Dr. Christen Hairston, Associate Dean of Student Success at [christen.hairston@emory.edu](mailto:christen.hairston@emory.edu) if you have any questions.

### **CREDITS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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