USMLE® STEP 1 IN 18 STEPS

Personal recommendations from an IMG to IMGs preparing for USMLE® Step 1

By Pooyan Khalighinejad M.D.
@pooyankhn

Contents

Introduction

USMLE Step 1 is a very complicated and long journey; therefore it's expected to make mistakes, and I was not an exception. I'm an IMG[1] and have taken my exam in January 2018. Now that it's over, I have a clear vision of the path because I have already crossed it. The reason I wanted to write this "guide" was to share my experience, especially mistakes, and to help you write a study plan.

I have seen that people who are preparing for Step 1 tend to ask the ones who have passed the exam about what they have done, rather than what they recommend. I mean it's good to know what people usually do and what becomes of it, but the more important thing is to know what they would have done more or might have avoided. Therefore, this "guide" is mostly about my recommendations rather than a summary of my own experience (which you can find on the last page).

Have a study plan

The most important part of preparing for a big exam like USMLE step 1 is to know what you are going to do and have plans for it. When you know the path, you can prepare more efficiently for the final goal.

You should have two study plans:

- A *long-term plan* that gives you an "at a glance" preview of your journey. I have drafted one in this guide and have tried to explain it in details.
- A *short-term plan* that is your daily schedule, providing details of what you want to do during each step. I suggest writing the short-term plan for each step on the first day of the same step.

Just note that planning is not as easy as it looks; it's a skill and just like any other skills it needs practice. So if you fail to accomplish your goals in the first few days or even weeks, don't get disappointed cause it is definitely going to happen now and then. But as you proceed, you learn how to personalize your study plan and thus increase your efficacy.

Adjust your sleep pattern

From the very first week, you should start changing your sleep pattern to maximize the efficacy of your day and increase the studying hours. You need to change it gradually so that waking up early (in case your exam is going to be at an early hour like 7:30 AM) would be your routine and sleeping early won't be something new to you. Be sure that for the last two weeks (last two steps) you wake up at the exact time you are going to wake up on the day of your exam.

Also, don't push yourself towards burnout; always get at least 7 hours of sleep each night. If you are extra exhausted on an especial day, it's ok to get an hour or so more of sleep.

---

[1] International Medical Graduate

Boost Morale

Step 1 is a marathon; you'll have a lot of ups and downs along the way. By making a study plan and defining goals, you will have fewer problems; but eventually, you are going to feel burnt out. So what should you do? Here are my suggestions:

- Have a hobby, don't go dedicated all along the way! Dedication is just for the last few steps not from the very beginning. Go to the gym, watch a TV show, read a book, or whatever you enjoy the most. Keep a hobby!
- Socialize, go out and have fun! Don't lock yourself in. Have one night out per week. Getting fresh air and changing the environment is a necessity!
- Be in touch with people who are preparing for Step 1. It'll help you know where you are standing; you can use their experiences, and also you can get help for solving some problems
- Get motivational apps like "Motivate" and mindfulness apps like "HelloMind." Stay focused and stay motivated; don't forget that always "there is an app for that."

And finally, just one quick and important note: Avoid piracy, respect the copyright laws and buy original.

Step	Duration	Studying Hours	Goals
1	4 weeks	6 h/d	Pathology - Pathoma Physiology - BRS
2	8 weeks	7 h/d	UWORLD Qbank – Pathology, Pathophysiology & Physiology questions Biochemistry – Kaplan Lecture Notes + Videos Genetics (selected chapters) – Kaplan Lecture Notes Anatomy - Kaplan Lecture Notes + Videos Pharmacology (selected chapters) – Kaplan Lecture Notes Immunology (selected chapters) – Kaplan Lecture notes
3	2 weeks	8 h/d	UWORLD Qbank – Remaining subjects
4	9 weeks	8.5 h/d	First Aid – 1st round DIT videos UWORLD – 2nd round
5	2 weeks	9 h/d	Review Pathoma Review BRS Physiology EXTRA: Review Kaplan lecture notes Finish UWORLD 2nd round
6	2 days	9 h/d	NBME 16
7	4 weeks	10 h/d	First Aid 2nd round Conrad Fischer's 100 Ethics Cases
8	2 days	10 h/d	NBME 17
9	18 days	10.5 h/d	UWORLD 3rd round UWORLD incorrects and marked
10	2 days	10.5 h/d	NBME 18
11	21 days	11 h/d	First Aid 3rd round UWORLD Stats package
12	2 days	11 h/d	NBME 19
13	15 days	11 h/d	First Aid 4th round
14	3 days	11 h/d	UWORLD Self-Assessment 1
15	15 days	11.5 h/d	Kaplan Qbank (or USMLE Rx)
16	10 days	12 h/d	First Aid 5th round
17	4 days	12 h/d	UWORLD Self-Assessment 2 Free 120 Questions
18	10 days	12 h/d	One last review of all your notes First Aid 6th round

1ˢᵗ Step

Duration:	4 weeks
Studying Hours:	6 hours per day
Goals:	• Pathology – Pathoma +Videos • Physiology - BRS

I decided to put Pathology and Physiology in the first step for many reasons: they are super important, very high-yield and fundamental for other subjects. Three subjects of Pathology, Pathophysiology, and Physiology make half of the questions in the UWorld, which clearly is an indication of how important they are.

For pathology, I did Goljan Rapid Review, but I seriously regret it. Most IMGs go for Pathoma, and now I believe it's the right choice. Although I think Pathoma is a decent book, Goljan was super great; find it in contrast to what I just said? Nope, "a better book" is not enough. Just note that Goljan is at least four times bigger than Pathoma, hence reviewing it would be really difficult and time and energy consuming. Also, when you are reading Pathoma, you can assume that most of what you see are high-yield. However, Goljan has lots of low-yield stuff mixed with high-yields. Therefore it's impossible to differentiate high-yield from low-yields unless you have done FA [2] and UW[3] before. One more point for Pathoma is that it comes with videos which although don't cover new stuff but will help you absorb and understand what you have read in the book.

For physiology, I did BRS[4], most say it's the best, but I didn't like it. Again you must ask why you recommend it then. Because I have not done any other physiology books and based on what I have heard from friends, BRS is still the best; not great but the best option at the moment.

Let me emphasize that with Pathoma, BRS and Kaplan Lecture notes; you don't have to "memorize" all the tiny details, you are just building a base. The overwhelming majority of the questions in the exam are covered by UW and FA; however to be able to answer the complex questions, one must have mastered that subject. So consider these books as preparation for FA: you should *understand* the subjects now, and when you start going over FA and UW, it would be the time to *memorize* all the tiny details.

---

[2] First Aid
[3] USMLE World (UWorld)
[4] Board Review Series

2ⁿᵈ Step

Duration:	8 weeks
Studying Hours:	7 hours per day
Goals:	• UWORLD Qbank – Pathology, Pathophysiology & Physiology questions • Biochemistry – Kaplan Lecture Notes + Videos • Genetics (selected chapters) – Kaplan Lecture Notes • Anatomy - Kaplan Lecture Notes + Videos • Pharmacology (only pharmacodynamics and pharmacokinetics chapters) – Kaplan Lecture Notes • Immunology (selected chapters)– Kaplan Lecture notes

Start with one of the lecture notes; if you want to watch the videos as well, it's better to do so *before* reading those chapters. It will increase both efficacy and speed. I strongly recommend watching videos for neuroanatomy and biochemistry; but the rest are not that important and can be skipped, decide based on your background.

Some say that doing Kaplan Lecture Notes (or even Pathoma) is a waste of time and you should jump right to FA and UW. I don't find that true unless you are a med student in the US or if you are an IMG who just wants to get a 230+ score. As mentioned before, you are not supposed to memorize all the details in these books but just learn the concept.

Moreover, as a secondary objective in this step you should go over Pathology, Pathophysiology and Physiology questions of UW; create blocks of unused questions in untimed tutor mode for all three subjects (not separately, but mixed) and right at the beginning of each block, mark all the questions (this will come handy for the 2ⁿᵈ round). I think it's best to purchase a one-year subscription of UW instead of a subscription of 6 months which will definitely need renewal. Some say that you should start UW after you have gone through FA but I think it's completely wrong; the questions in step 1 are not what most of us are used to, so it's better to get yourself familiar to them as soon as possible. This way you can increase the efficacy of your first run of FA too.

Just a few notes in regards to each subject:

- **Biochemistry**: Pay attention to what Dr. Turco (Kaplan instructor) says is high-yield and what is low-yield, definitely true
- **Genetics**: First four chapters are recommended while chapters 5 & 6 (recombination frequency and genetics diagnosis) are not really necessary and you can skip them
- **Pharmacology**: The only chapters that you need to go through are the first two chapters that cover Pharmacodynamics and Pharmacokinetics. Although, they are fairly covered in FA and DIT too. So if you can borrow the book from a friend, do so; otherwise, you can skip it and avoid buying the whole book for just the two chapters.
- **Immunology**: If you have a 260+ goal, go through the whole book. If not, you can just read high-yield chapters which are 1, 10, 11, 12 and 13 (The immune system, Immunizations, Primary immunodeficiencies, HSR & Autoimmunity and Transplantation)

3rd Step

Duration:	2 weeks
Studying Hours:	8 hours per day
Goals:	• UWORLD Qbank – Remaining subjects

Now that you have gone through almost half of the UW, it's time to finish up the rest. Since the 1st round of UW is all about learning rather than testing yourself, I suggest proceeding on a subject basis, e.g., anatomy & embryo, then pharma, then micro, etc. For some of the subjects like Microbiology and Pharmacology you have not studied anything yet, but I still suggest going over those questions purely on a hunch. Read the explanations (which is the primary goal right now) and don't get stuck on testing yourself, you will get to that point later.

Just like the 2nd step, create blocks of unused questions in untimed tutor mode and mark all the questions right at the beginning of the block. Try to gradually increase the number of questions in each block as you proceed.

Don't rush yourself; it's too soon to create blocks in timed mode, you'll have plenty of time to work on the timing strategies; just familiarize yourself with the styles of the questions and learn what is being asked.

4th Step

Duration:	9 weeks
Studying Hours:	8.5 hours per day
Goals:	• First Aid – 1st round
	• DIT videos
	• UWORLD – 2nd round

The first three steps were just preparations for this step. In the first three steps you just had to *learn* everything, now it's time to *memorize* too.

You might have already heard that FA is the bible for Step 1: you should know it word for word, literally! Even pictures & diagrams are important; you have to know them in and out.

Although you have prepared yourself for the FA by the first three steps, there are still some new concepts in it. So my recommendation is to get help from DIT[5]. Most of the stuff in DIT is already covered in FA, and you should not expect new concepts from it which is not the point of watching them. DIT will help you understand FA better and teaches it from a different angle. Some say it's a waste of time, but I believe it will increase the pace and efficacy for the upcoming runs of FA.

---

[5] Doctors In Training

I suggest to watch 2-4 videos in a row and mark the discussed pages on FA as DIT instructors tend to jump from page to page, then read the marked stuff from FA, and finally move on to the next 2-4 videos.

Since the first run on FA is really hard and takes a lot of energy, I suggest taking a few questions once in a while during your fourth step. Not only will it help you to stay connected to the questions, but also it would be somehow fun to do something different every now and then.

Start the 2nd round of UW too, again as a secondary objective. Do a few questions each day from random (random subjects and random systems) marked questions in timed mode.

Schedule the exam

If you have not scheduled the exam, by the end of this step you can do it with high precision of when you will be ready. Schedule now and commit yourself to that date.

5th Step

Duration:	2 weeks
Studying Hours:	9 hours per day
Goals:	• Review Pathoma • Review BRS Physiology • Finish UWORLD 2nd round • EXTRA: Review Kaplan lecture notes

Start reviewing Pathoma and BRS Physiology and don't be picky, pick up the pace. Keep in mind that the primary objective here is to know the general concepts not to memorize all the tiny details. While going over Pathoma and BRS, finish the remaining questions on your 2nd round of UW too (random, marked and timed) in blocks of 40.

If you have time and especially if you are aiming for a 260+ score, I suggest doing a rapid review of Kaplan Lecture Notes too.

Let me make something clear; I'm not saying that reviewing or even the first run of Kaplan lecture notes are necessary for getting a 260+ score for IMGs. But it's crystal clear that doing so increases your chance for that goal.

6ᵗʰ Step

Duration:	2 days
Studying Hours:	9 hours per day
Goals:	• NBME 16

Now it's time to test yourself. There are two good sets of self-assessment tests for USMLE Step 1: UWSAs by UWorld and CBSSAs [6](commonly known as NBMEs) by National Board of Medical Examiners.

I had a different approach to NBMEs and UWSAs from many of my friends. They believed these exams are meant to predict your score, and if you need to re-schedule based on how far you are from your goal, they can help you find it out. But I believe these exams are for you to find your flaws so that you can improve yourself. Why would you care about the prediction of your score? You should aim for the BEST score you can get, so just try to improve yourself as far as you can get; don't just wait for yourself to reach the goal you had in your mind from the very first few days of studying.

NBMEs are nothing like the real exam: there are four blocks (instead of 7), each has 50 (instead of 40) questions and is 1.25 (instead of 1) hours long, the questions are way too straight-forward, and the question stem rarely exceeds two lines. Nevertheless, you should take the NBMEs because the concepts that are tested in them are really close to the exam and sometimes the images are used in the real exam too. Meaning that if NBME likes going after a specific drug and ask about it in more than a question, it is highly likely to see a question from that drug (although completely different from the question in NBME) in the real exam.

UWSA is more similar to the real deal, that's why I suggest to take them after you are done with NBMEs. UWSAs have four blocks of 40 questions.

Now, what should you do in this step? There are three goals: **Take the quiz**, **Analyze it**, and **Learn everything**.

Take the quiz

Not just like that! Don't sit in your pajamas and answer the questions while taking a sip of your coffee. SIMULATE THE EXAM, for real! Imagine this is your real exam:

- Eat the breakfast you want to eat on the day of the exam
- Wear the clothes you are going to wear on the day of the exam (including shoes if you are not going with sandals)
- Wake up at the same time that you are going to wake on the day of the exam
- Start the quiz at the same time of the real exam
- Use soft earplugs (the same type you are going to use in exam) even if there is not much noise; get yourself used to them
- One thing that disturbs people on the exam is the typing sounds from the keyboards of the nearby stations. Search youtube for "typing sounds" and download a video, play it while you are taking the exam as if there are people typing nearby

---

[6] Comprehensive Basic Science Self-Assessment

- Schedule the breaks just like the exam; if you want to take a break after each block then it should not exceed 8 minutes (considering sign-out and sign-in procedures which take time)
- Eat dried fruits and nuts in the breaks; I also suggest drinking half of a Redbull on each break
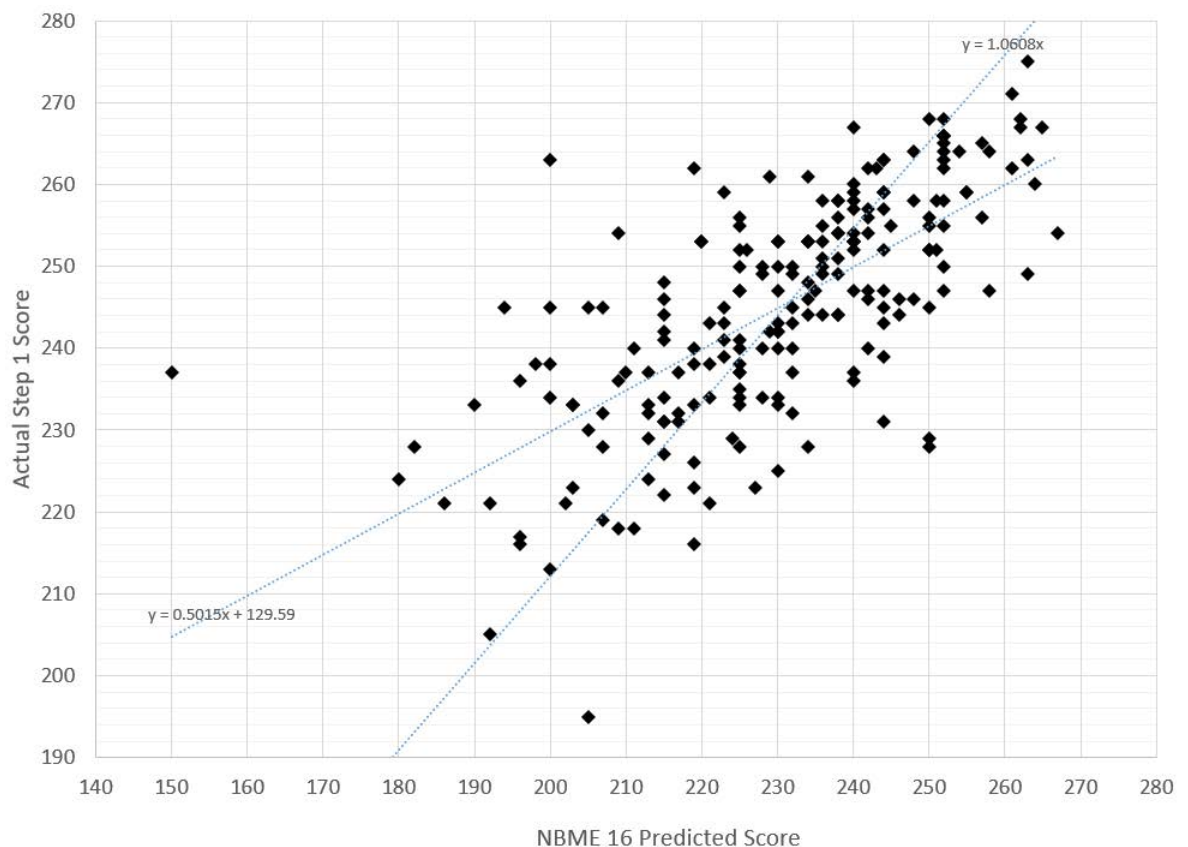   - See "Exam Day" on page 18 for more tips

Analyze it

This is the most important part: You should find out what your flaws are and what needs improvement. There are different reasons for getting a test wrong; analyze your exam find out what went wrong. For instance, I used to get a lot of questions wrong just because I had not read the stem of the questions properly, or were too quick to choose an option and didn't go through all of the options so have missed the "better" choice. But with analysis of self-assessment exams, I figured it out and with a lot of practice got it under control.

Learn everything

You should review and *learn* from not only the questions that you have answered wrong but also from the ones that you have answered correctly. As mentioned before, although the questions of NBMEs are nothing like the real exam, the main concepts of the questions are similar to the exam.

The following is an analysis done by a Reddit user which can help you understand how predictive the score is:

7ᵗʰ Step

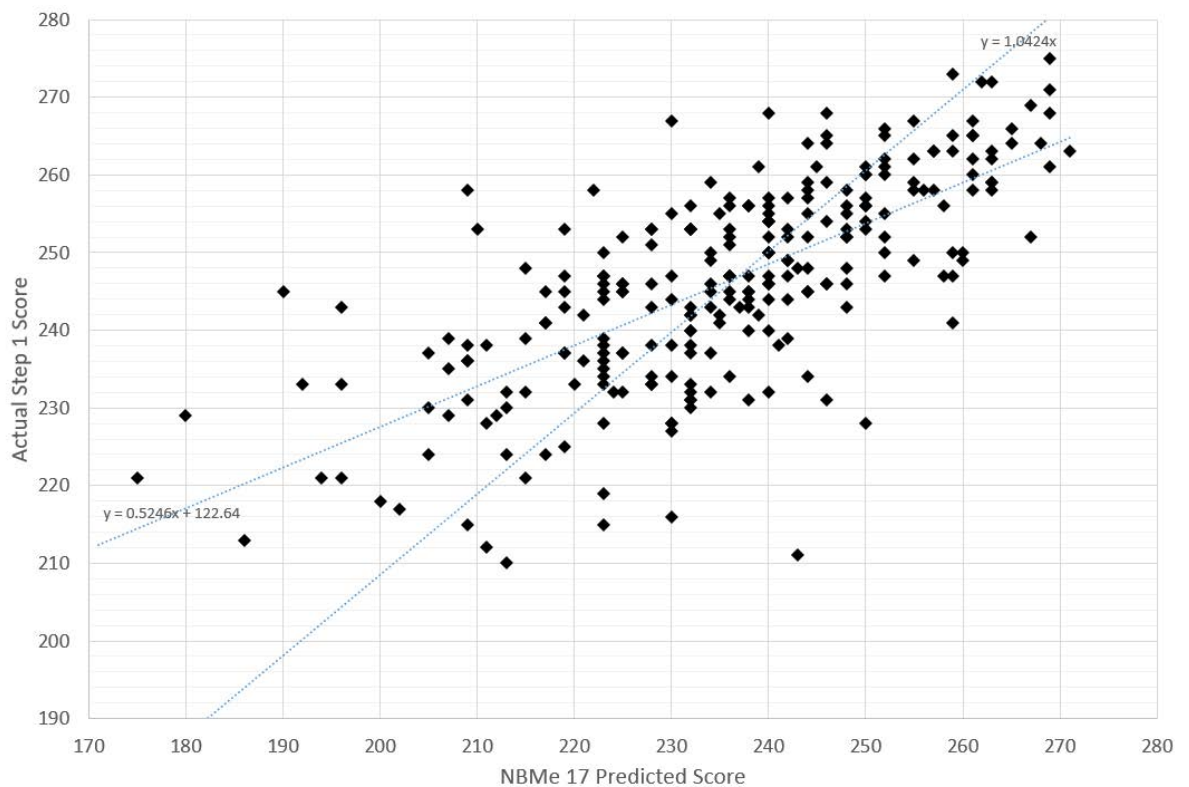|	
Duration:	4 weeks
Studying Hours:	10 hours per day
Goals:	• First Aid 2nd round
	• Conrad Fischer's 100 Ethics Cases

Now it's time to go for the second run on FA. There's not much to say except for the fact that you will find some stuff in FA that looks completely new to you; don't panic! Since the first run took a long time, it's completely normal to forget many (if not most) of the concepts.

I have put the Conrad Fischer's 100 Ethics book in the 7ᵗʰ step and not in the earlier ones because it would be more efficacious to go through it now that you have done UW two times. Besides, it would be fun to do something besides FA in this whole one month! There is no need to read the whole book, just read the cases at the end of the book which is in Q&A form. If you do a few cases each night, you'll be done with it by the end of this step.

8ᵗʰ Step

Duration:	2 days
Studying Hours:	10 hours per day
Goals:	• NBME 17

Refer to the 6ᵗʰ step. Score correlation analysis:

9th Step

Duration:	18 days
Studying Hours:	10.5 hours per day
Goals:	• UWORLD 3rd round • UWORLD incorrects and marked

This is the last step that involves UW. First, reset your account, then create blocks of 40 questions of random subjects and random systems in timed mode.

Go over the explanations of the questions that you have got wrong and the ones that took a lot of time. Mark the questions that you have answered correctly by chance or with a lot of suspicions. Use this method for timing:

- **Days 1-4:** 4 blocks per day – Blocks 1 & 2 back to back, 15minutes of break, Blocks 3 & 4 back to back

- **Days 5-8:** 5 blocks per day – Blocks 1 & 2 back to back, 15minutes of rest break Blocks 3&4 back to back, 15 minutes of break, Block 5

- **Days 9-12**: 7 blocks per day – Simulate the exam; start the first block at the starting time of your exam and have a stopwatch to look for the break times not to exceed 55minutes in total

- For time-management in each block, see "Time Management" on page 18.

When you are done with the third round, you should go over the marked and incorrect questions. Again, with blocks of 40 questions in timed mode and seven blocks per day.
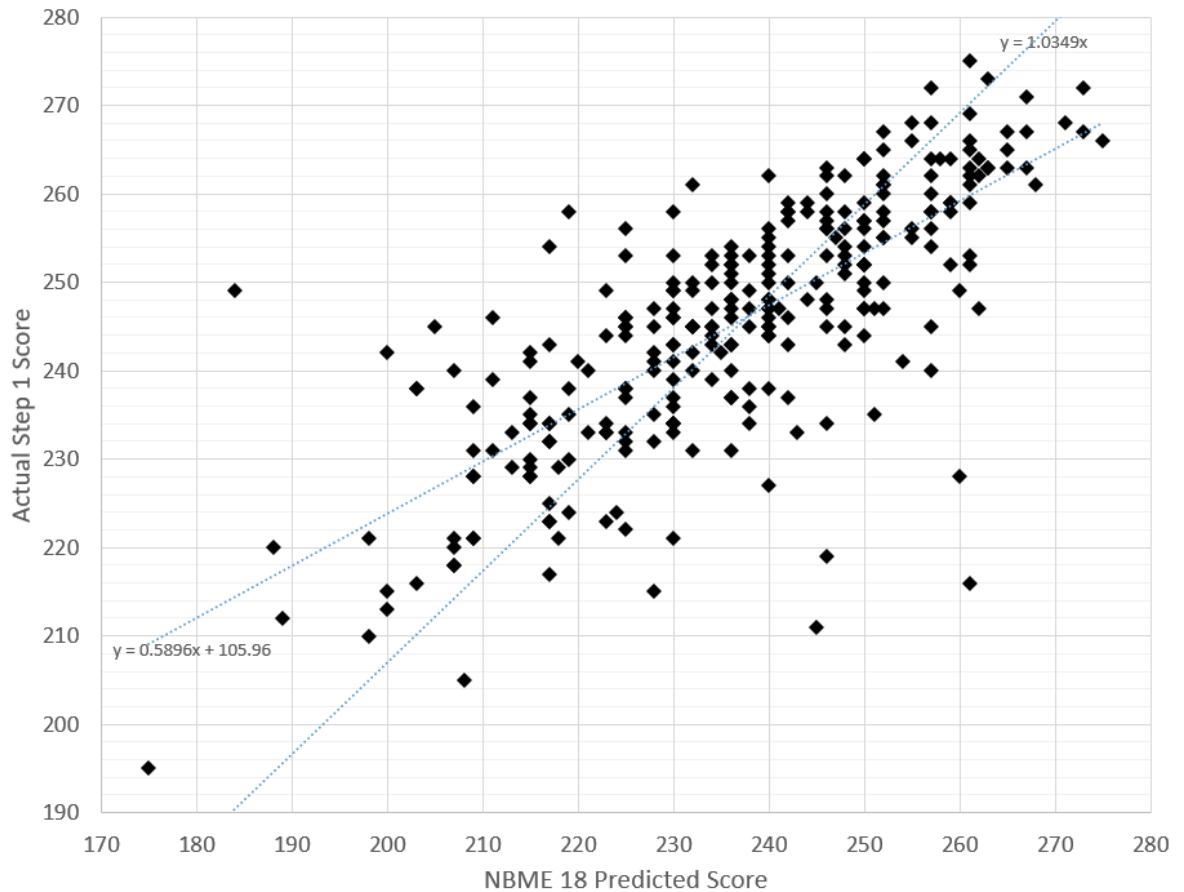
Just if you are curious, this is a rough estimation of how UW percentage correlates to USMLE score (use your percentage in the 3rd round although it may overestimate how you are doing right now) →

UW Q Bank	USMLE
49%	197
50%	199
51%	200
52%	201
53%	203
54%	206
55%	208
56%	211
57%	213
58%	216
59%	222
60%	225
60%	228
61%	230
62%	232
63%	234
63%	236
64%	238
65%	240
65%	241
66%	242
67%	243
67%	244
68%	245
68%	247
69%	249
70%	250
71%	252
72%	253
73%	255
74%	256
75%	257
76%	258
77%	259
78%	260
79%	261
80%	262
81%	263
82%	264
83%	265

10th Step

Duration:	2 days
Studying Hours:	10.5 hours per day
Goals:	• NBME 18

Refer to the 6th step. Score correlation analysis:

11th Step

Duration:	21 days
Studying Hours:	11 hours per day
Goals:	• FA round 3 • UW stats package

Pick up the pace; you should go over each page in 15 minutes or so in order to reach the goal of this step.
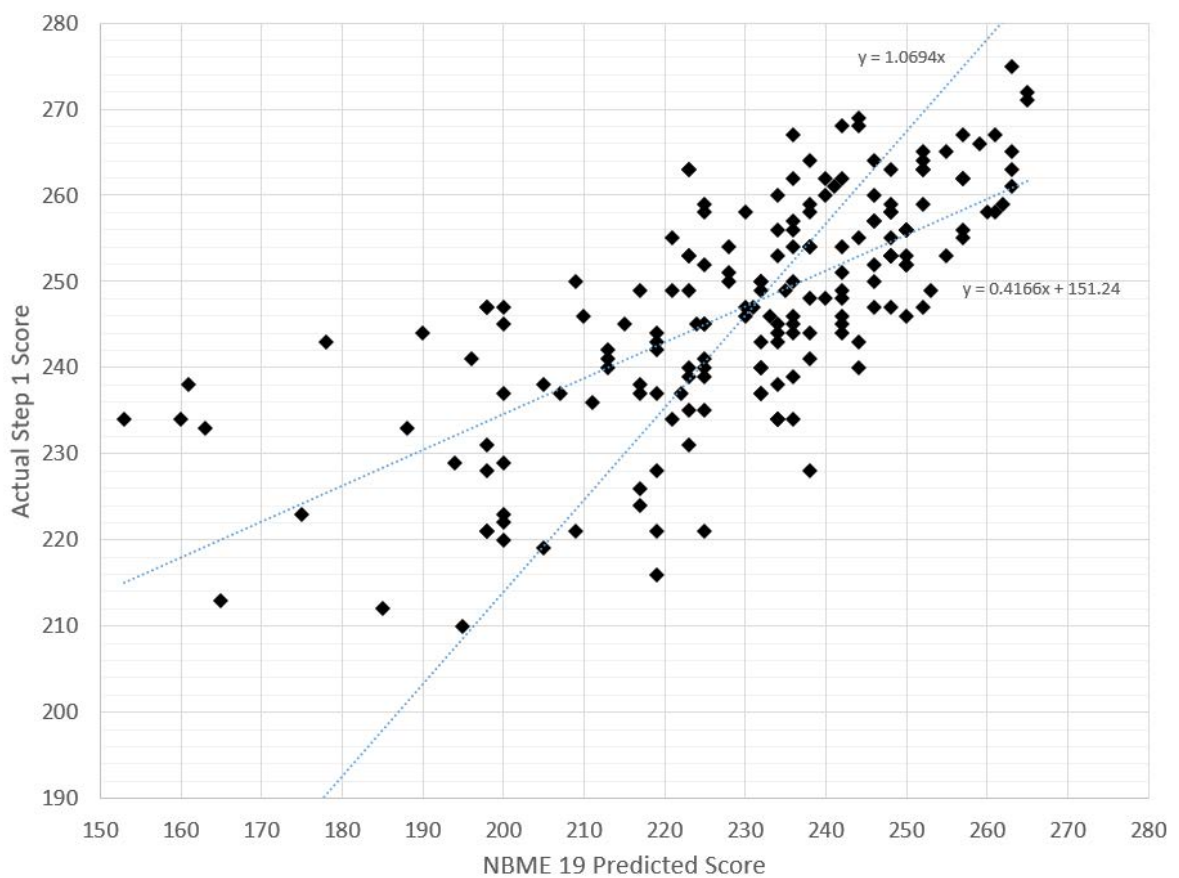
USMLE World has a small package of Q&A on statistics called Biostatistics Review. Go over it on either the first or the last day of this step; you can finish it in 7-8 hours.

12ᵗʰ Step

Duration:	2 days
Studying Hours:	11 hours per day
Goals:	• NBME 19

Refer to the 6ᵗʰ step.

Side note: If by the time you have reached this step, NBME #20 is released, squeeze it here and add two more days to your schedule.

13ᵗʰ Step

Duration:	15 days
Studying Hours:	11 hours per day
Goals:	• FA 4ᵗʰ round

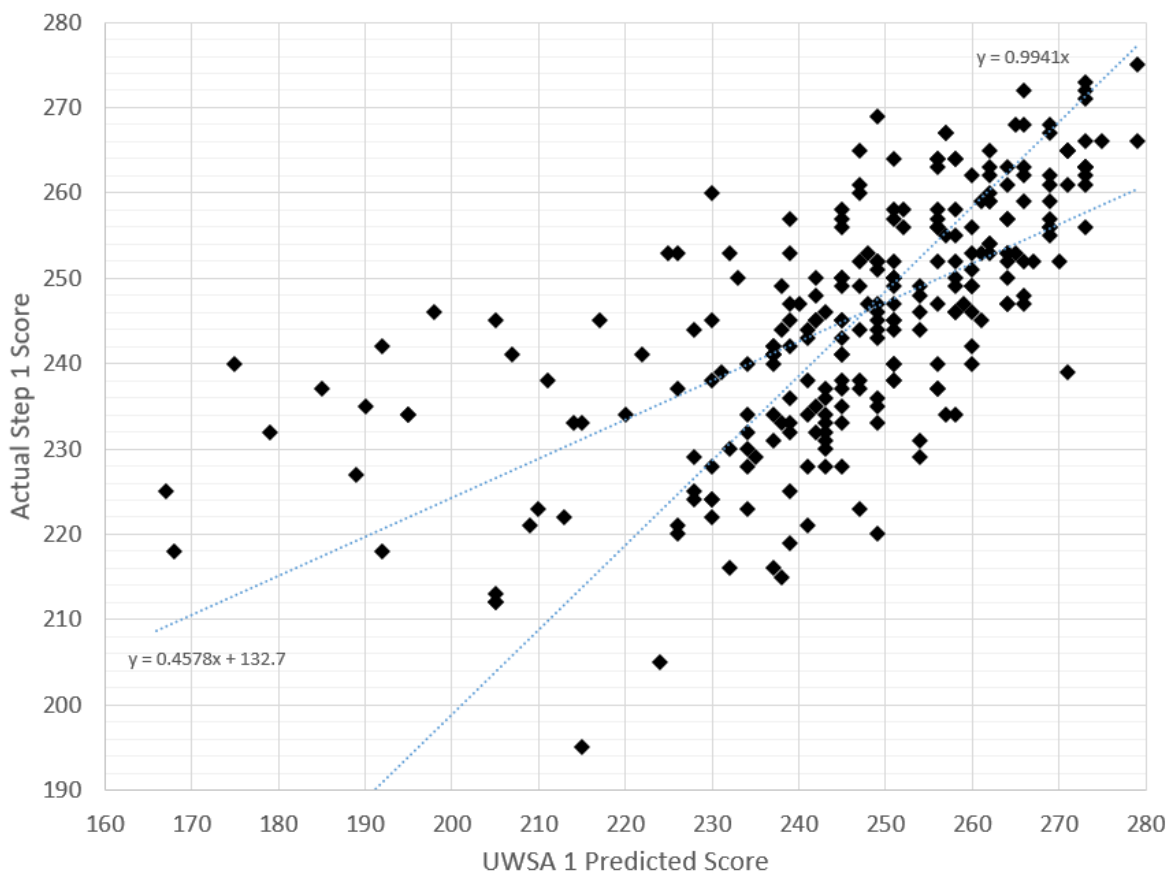Again not much to say, just go over FA again, and this time you should do about 4-5 pages per hour.

14ᵗʰ Step

Duration:	3 days
Studying Hours:	11 hours per day
Goals:	• UWSA 1

UWSAs are nothing like NBMEs; everything looks like the UW Qbank, and it's pretty close to the real deal. Many say that UWSAs are less predictive than NBMEs, but who cares! The important thing is that the questions look like the real exam, blocks are 40q and one-hour long, and finally, the interface is just like the exam.

Despite NBMEs, UWSAs have explanations, and you won't have to go through much trouble to find the answers to the questions.

Score prediction analysis:

15th Step

Duration:	15 days
Studying Hours:	11.5 hours per day
Goals:	• Kaplan Qbank (or USMLE Rx)

Now it's time to go over a second qbank; I recommend <u>Kaplan</u> and <u>USMLE Rx.</u> Just so you know, despite UWorld, Rx and Kaplan occasionally give away promo codes, so Google a bit for them before getting a subscription.

You can get seven days of free-trial from USMLE Rx, try it out and if you liked it renew the subscription. Personally, I really liked Kaplan. I registered for the free trial of Rx and did a few blocks but didn't like it at all. Instead, I found Kaplan Qbank to be actually great despite all the bad comments about it. Although 10% of the questions (4-5 questions in each block) are worthless, the rest is good. Moreover, don't go near the simulation forms; absolutely garbage!

There are many other question banks out there, but I don't think that any of them can compete with Kaplan or Rx.

16th Step

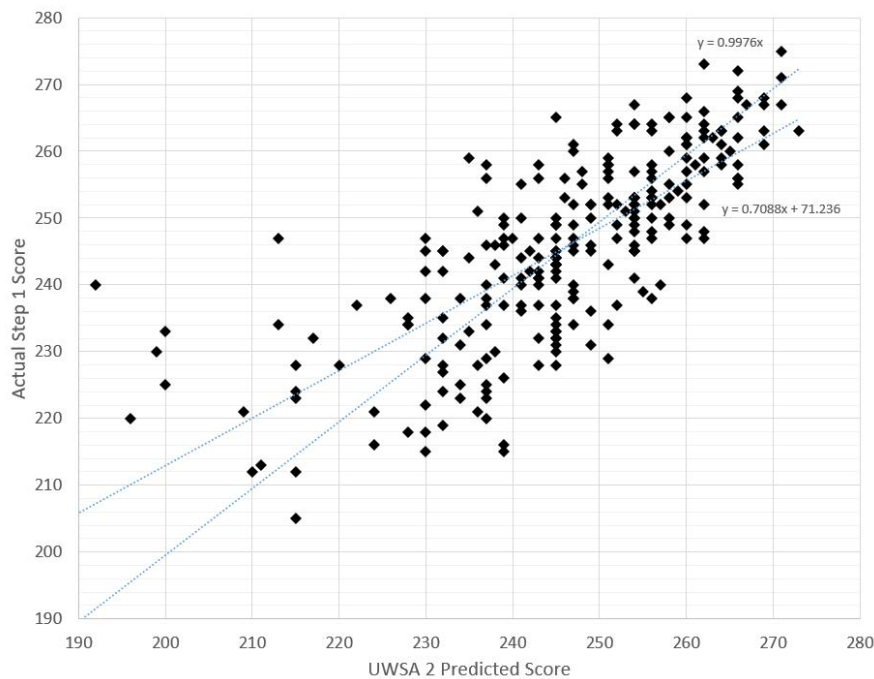| Duration:	10 days
Studying Hours:	12 hours per day
Goals:	• FA 5th round

This is the last time that you will go through every single word of FA, so make it count. You have to go through 6 pages each hour.

You might feel low during this step as despite the previous steps that had new stuff or even when you were going over FA for the third or fourth times; you were adding something new to your knowledge. However, in this step, you might feel that you are not adding anything to your knowledge or even losing some; but this is not true. Don't doubt yourself and stick to the plan! Push forward!
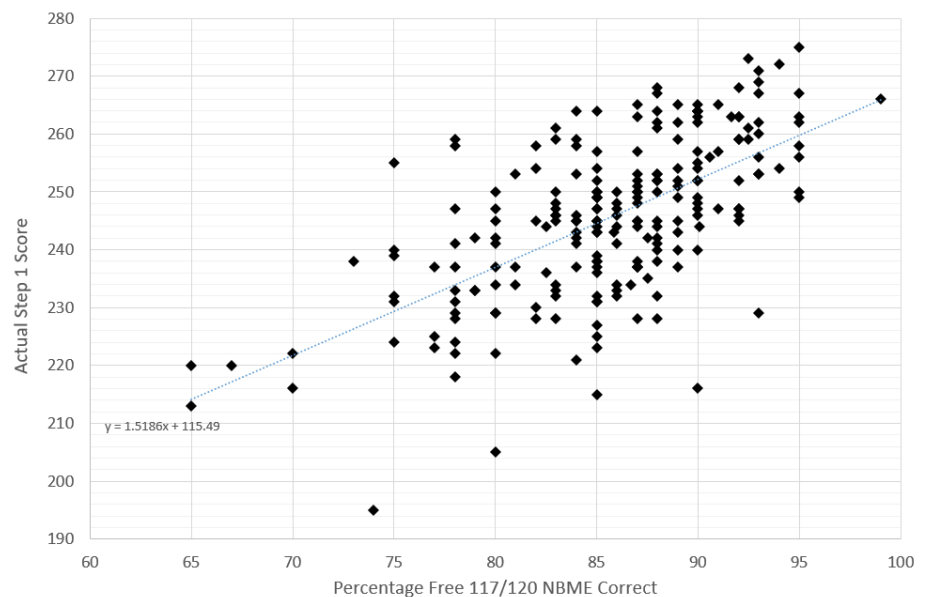
17ᵗʰ Step

Duration:	4 days
Studying Hours:	12 hours per day
Goals:	• UWSA 2 • Free 120 q

Refer to the 14ᵗʰ step in regards to tips on UWSA. Score Prediction Analysis for UWSA2:

On the last day of this step, go over <u>FREE 120Q</u> which are sample questions provided by the NBME. Do all the questions and even the tutorial (which is the same tutorial you are going to see in the real exam). Pay attention to all the details especially the auscultation questions. The real exam looks just like this.

Score Prediction Analysis for Free 120q →

18ᵗʰ Step

Duration:	10 days
Studying Hours:	12 hours per day
Goals:	• One last review of all your notes • First Aid 6th round

Finally, the last step! This is going to be the hardest step; last days are always the hardest. Be sure to keep your confidence and morale high. Don't doubt yourself; you have built the perfect pyramid from the very base, now you are just making sure that every brick is on its place.

You should go through everything one more time, but really quick. Go over FA in about seven days and go over all your notes in 3 (or do 8 & 2 days). DO NOT remove FA from the last two weeks; don't underestimate the importance of recent memory.

The day before exam

Although recent memory plays a significant role in getting a high score, there is a fine line that if you pass it, it can cause more harm than good. Meaning that if you try to cram a lot of information the day before the exam, you will get nervous and therefore lose your concentration. You might get troubles in sleeping too.

So my advice is to study only half of the day, till launch or an hour or so after that. Try to get some (not strenuous) physical activity in the afternoon and before dinner (the perfect one: swimming). You should eat your dinner 2.5-3 hours before the time you intend to go to bed. No exercise after dinner, not even a walk; turn your phone and laptop off and don't check your messages, emails, etc. Don't even watch TV. Any of the activities I just mentioned may include something unexpected like surprising/sad news that might cause trouble sleeping. Just try to relax, but don't lie on the bed unless you are going to go to sleep.

Check everything after the dinner: ID (e.g., passport), exam permit, directions to the Prometric, clothes you want to wear, earplugs, stuff you are going to eat and drink and some painkillers in case you get headaches.

I strongly suggest that you go to the Prometric center the day before (my suggestion is after lunch) and get yourself familiar with the environment. Ask to see the closets, check the restrooms, and look around.

Exam day

Just remind yourself constantly that you have prepared yourself for this day and you are at your best right now. Eat a healthy breakfast full of proteins and complex carbohydrates; avoid hams/bacon. If you are a coffee addict, take a sip of coffee, not much.

I have tried a lot of energy drinks, and my only favorite is Redbull, it really increases my energy, stamina, and concentration. If you want to have Redbull (or other energy drinks) on the day of the exam, you should find the right dosage for yourself. For instance, I drank a Redbull before going in for the first block and drank half of a can on each of my breaks (4 breaks in total). It's important to get the right dosage as you don't want to get overdosed on caffeine!

On the breaks, eat dried fruits and nuts as they have complex carbs and can increase your blood glucose for a longer time compared to chocolate while causing less thirst. For lunch, prepare a really simple and small club sandwich preferably with chicken breasts and some vegetables like lettuce and tomatoes.

Breaks

For breaks, I have two suggestions:

- One strategy is to take a break between each block (6 breaks of about 9 minutes each) that are commonly used
- The other is to take four breaks of 14 minutes, meaning that you should do blocks 1&2 together, take a break and then go over blocks 3&4, take another break and after that, you've got two breaks after each block.

I used the latter one, and it worked for me. Note that each time you want to take a break, you should sign out and then sign in again when you get back (which includes fingerprints, signature, etc.). This process takes about 2 minutes for each break. So if you are going for six breaks, you have about 7 minutes on each break, meaning that you have to *hurry* and can't actually rest your mind.

Time management

It's really important to manage your time on each question and each block. Despite UW, NBMEs, UWSA and Kaplan Qbank, the real deal has really long questions which obviously needs a lot of time. I have heard from a lot of people how they have missed some questions, I didn't have that problem myself on the exam, although I had a lot of timing problems before.

I read the following on Reddit and found it interesting and accurate:

" One thing very difficult to grasp and that I've wanted to know prior to my exam was: What is the STYLE of questions compared to the practice tests. Here is personal interpretation from my exam:

Type 1. Straightforward knowledge-based question. Seen in typical NBMEs, and a good deal of questions on the Step.

What's the state capital of California?
a) Kathmandu
b) New York City
c) Sacramento
d) San Francisco <-- The only other "PLAUSIBLE" answer
e) Beijing

For these questions, if you read that paragraph on FA or heard Sittar's beautiful voice on Pathoma, you'll get it. Pretty straightforward.

Type 2. The verbose stem but straightforward type. Good deal of questions UWorld, some on the real Step 1.

State capitals are really nice. Some are big, some are small. The patient comes from some the state capital, and he really likes them. He also likes dogs and cats, but not skunks. Why not skunks? Because they smell. Here's a map of Nevada:
By the way, what's the capital of California?
Same answer choices.

For these questions, it's simply a matter of skipping to the end (if you're confident) or skimming it (if you're a fast reader) and ignoring irrelevant BS. The trouble is not getting bogged down. I distinctly remember a handful of questions on my test that had the key facts in the middle of the literary novel.

Type 3a The straightforward question with HARD answer choices. Some Uworld, a large minority Step questions.

What's the state capital of California? "OOO I KNOW THIS"
a) a large commune sitting at the base of the Himayalas. <-- "OH **** can't be Himalayas"
b) New York City <-- easy elimination
c) a population center which has a subpar NBA team windward of the Sierra Nevadas. "WTF...this..maybe?"
d) a metropolitan area closely associated with the MUNI transportation system. <-- you gotta know MUNI is SF and NOT Sacramento
e) a city in a province <--Classic vague answer choice.

As you can see, the QUESTION itself isn't hard. But the answers PARAPHRASED with additional facts that you must know to answer that question. You might know that the Sacramento Kings are a bad NBA team which would help. You may have never heard the word "windward", but you can sort of guess what that means. This is when good ELIMINATION and INTUITION come in.

Type 3b. Straightforward ANSWERS but vague QUESTIONS. A large minority of Step.

There's areas that may determine the legislative future of its surrounding area. That large region around the Pacific that's part of the US, what's that legislative-area?
a) California. "What? no?"
b) Oahu. "Well, it is *around* the Pacific...but legislative?"
c) Sacramento
d) the White House. "It IS politically-related...but it's not an AREA?"
e) Dolphins <--easy elimination

I would say 3a/3b are why people come out of tests so unsure. Notice how it's awkwardly phrased with non-specific words. It's not terribly long, or terribly anal in its wording, yet it's hard. I suspect there's only so many ways you can test one fact, so they gotta soup it like this.

Type 4. "WTF?!" Only seen in real Step 1.

Who's that one construction worker who worked on that capital building of the capital of California? <-- super specific
or...
Where do you get sandwiches around the capitol building? <-- easy if you KNOW the answer but WHY WOULD YOU?

I would argue there's NO DELIBERATE WAY to study for these questions, other than having incidentally heard it OR having closely listened to professors during your first two years. It helps to have good long term memory too.

On MY TEST (YMMV), I would say the approximate break down would be:

40% Type 1 questions.
15% Type 2 questions.
40% Type 3a/3b questions.
5% Type 4 WTF.

These are obviously arbitrary classifications (just as in a lot of medicine). There's overlap and some questions can be a combination. But I hope you get the idea.

So in summary, MOST Step questions (Type 1/2/3a/b) can be answered with UFAP studying, but a good amount require ADDITIONAL processing of the question or the answers. And obviously some questions are next to impossible (type 4) but I wouldn't worry about those. "

One more thing about the types of questions that is related to time management is that there are two auscultation questions in each exam, and it is totally different from what you have seen in UW. You can find what it looks like in the Free 120Qs. Just wanted to mention that since auscultation in the real deal requires placing the stethoscope on different locations and listen to each location separately, it is REALLY time-consuming.

I practiced a lot on time management while going over Kaplan Qbank and came up with a strategy. I suggest you try it yourself and customize it based on your skills. The following are the steps for this strategy on each block:

1. Obviously, start with question number 1 and move through to the question number 40. On each question, read the very last sentence of the stem first and take a quick look at the choices. Now you know what the question is really about and you can start reading the question stem from the beginning and concentrate (&highlight) the important stuff. This way not only you don't waste on the type 2 questions from the quotation above, but also you pay more attention to the related stuff and reading the question stem takes less time.

2. Now I'm going to categorize the questions one more way, and will tell you what to do with them:
    a. Questions that you are pretty confident about the answer → answer and move on
    b. Questions that are 100% new and you have no clue about the answer → choose the most plausible one and move on
    c. Questions that are somehow vague and you are not confident about the answer, but you think that you probably have got the right one → answer and mark the question, move on to the next question
    d. Questions that have very long stems have strange graphs, auscultation questions and the ones that by any means show that are time-consuming → don't even read the stem, skip and go to the next question

    e.   Questions that you know the answer but have a feeling that you might be missing the point or can remember something that you believe you can recall by a few more seconds of thinking → answer and write the question number on the board that has been provided to you by the Prometric center.

3.   At this stage you have gone over all of the questions and have either answered them without marking or writing the question number (types a and b), have answered and marked (type c), have answered and written the question number down (type e) or have not answered yet (type d). So now it is time to answer type d questions, go over them one by one.

4.   If you still have time (that most probably is true), the priority is now with type e questions, review them.

5.   If you still have time (less likely) now, it's time to answer type c questions.

    The total amount of type c questions is probably around 10, and the total amount of type e questions might be around 3.

My Personal Experience

- **Goal**: 260+
- **Score**: 265
    - The score report looks like the following, along with detailed performance report based on subjects and systems

265	This score is determined by your overall performance on Step 1. For administrations between Jan 1, 2016 and Dec 31, 2016, the mean and standard deviation for first-time examinees from U.S. and Canadian medical schools were approximately 228 and 21, respectively, with most scores falling between 140 and 260. A score of 194 is set by USMLE to pass Step 1. The standard error of measurement (SEM)‡ for this scale is six points.

- **Studying time**: About 14 months
    - Months 1-2: *35 hours per week*
    - Months 3-5: *43.5 hours per week*
    - Months 6-8: *61 hours per week*
    - Months 9-11: *67.5 hours per week*
    - Months 12-14: *75.5 hours per week*
- **Resources**:
    - Goljan Rapid Review of pathology: one run
    - BRS Physiology: one run
    - Kaplan Anatomy (except neuroanatomy): one run
    - High-yield Neuroanatomy: one run
    - Kaplan Biochem & Genetics: one run
    - Immunology (w/o micro): one run
    - FA: 6 runs
    - DIT videos: one run
    - UW: 3 runs
    - Kaplan Qbank: one run
- **Self-assessments & Qbanks**

Test	Time to exam	Score	Correlates to
UWSA1	18 w	249	249
UWSA2	14 w	247	247
NBME16	11 w	590	246
NBME15	8 w	640	257
NBME17	7 w	600	248
NBME18	7 w	660	261
NBME19	6 w	510	230
Kaplan 1st pass	5-6w	84.0%	265
Kaplan Form 1	5w	87.5%	272
UW 1st pass	>6m	55.7%	
UW 2nd pass	>3m	90.5%	
UW 3rd pass	~2m	94%	