

March 24, 2020

Dear Class of 2022,

As you know the Prometric Test Centers have temporarily closed their testing sites as per measures taken to protect the health of all persons to reduce the spread of COVID-19. As of now, those centers are projecting a re-opening date effective April 16. We are aware that some of you have had your STEP ONE test date rescheduled. Others of you are questioning whether to move your date in anticipation that they might not reopen as planned on April 16. Additionally, many of you have been contacting us for guidance as it pertains to your STEP ONE study plans.

For those who have to delay Step 1 until after Prometric Centers reopen, we know that the particulars of your situation are unique, however, we would like to offer a bit of advice. Our advice is based on our work with multiple students who need to maintain vigor as they study for a period of 6 weeks to even 9 months. We recognize it is challenging, but we routinely help our students prepare. Below are some general ideas that can help you begin to re-imagine how to study...for even longer than you already have.

We have composed some general advice for you as you might be extending your Step study a while longer than you anticipated. This set of guidelines is intended to address general evidenced- based study practices.

1. Think like a physician! Be methodical in your approach by using a diagnostic prescriptive plan based on your own performance data from U-World and NBME practice tests. Your goal is to be at about 65% accuracy in your overall U World questions as well as individual organ systems and subjects. Take NBME practice tests spaced 10-14 days apart. Taking tests too close together will likely not be enough time spaced apart to ascertain if learning and study plans are effective.

- 2.. Continue your study schedule as planned.

Consider determining an “endpoint” for this current phase of studying. It might be the next date on which you have a practice exam scheduled...or it might be the literal day you thought you’d be taking Step 1 (with or without a practice exam and whether you have many unused practice exams left). For some, the “endpoint” involves a previously scheduled practice test or a practice test on your old Step 1 date. For others, it might be a cumulative review and reassessment of where your strengths and weaknesses now lie.

3. After that “endpoint” for this study phase, consider taking a break of 2-4 days, depending on your level of fatigue from the last several months.

4. Some of you will want to take a break sooner. But a “clean break” (now or following some “endpoint” in a few days) is often a good way to precede a multi-day brief retreat from the Step 1 study grind. During unusually long study timeframes, this endpoint and subsequent relaxation often motivates a more energized return.

5. Following that break, plan based on a new tentative test date based on the timeframe you now have (to the best of your knowledge). Then, spend half a day developing a daily study schedule that is likely reduced in time from what you have been doing...so that you can maintain it until that test date. Most people’s schedules should include 2 days each week of some form of cumulative review and at least 1 day off each week (or 2 half days).

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6. Question based study is still the way to focus your work and make it active in a prolonged study plan, but the additional time in front of you means that your pace through the questions likely need not be so rapid. If you are not finished with UWorld, develop a schedule to accomplish that. If you have or will complete UWorld before the end of March, then develop a schedule that is based either on a) missed UWorld questions or b) questions from another bank. No schedule should obsess about finishing every single missed UWorld question or every single question from an additional bank. We want you to keep learning from questions and keep in the habit of the careful reading required by questions. We are gathering information at this time from AMBOSS who may be offering a Q bank free to you. More information will be forthcoming. Please note however that data suggest U-World is still the best for review as the questions seem to best align with STEP.

7. On the ~4 days each week when you do missed or new questions, begin every day with review of Anki , other flashcards ,topics/notes from yesterday's questions. End each day with a quick survey of the notes from all items missed that day and an Anki sprint about 20 minutes. Remember, your best return is on cards that you have made yourself that are unique to YOUR LEARNING. The rule of thumb is 20 cards in a minute to build not only accuracy of knowledge but fluency!

8. Make your days shorter than they have been up to this point in time. The time will vary for all of you but consider a day that is 40-70% as long as your prior days (8-10 hour days become 3-7 hour days).
8."Adopt or renew a low stakes hobby that takes some limited amount of time and that you can use to recharge energy and enrich your life. Your mind will need new sources of metaphor, excitement, and enjoyment when you extend Step study for this long a period of time: a new craft or skill, a new exercise program, an intellectual interest outside medicine, a group of novels or non-fiction writings, etc. We're not suggesting something "effortful," but something that offers relief and perspective. In fact, if it sounds like adding "work," you're reading too much into this advice. We want you to have fun doing something that is not Step study...not for long periods, but something you can enjoy anticipating during your studying. "Perhaps you'll binge watch a favorite series or learn to play a new game.

9." Engage with others socially (online of course)...perhaps especially with one another. If you found a compatriot among you to quiz one another via video conferencing, that would be great. Varying and socializing your study routines (even via remote means) is a critical way to energize for many people".

Please remember although the cause of STEP delay is unprecedented, having to study for Step 1 over 3-6 months is not. We are skilled in helping you maintain energy and assure that you do not "lose" what you have learned.

Your studying effort thus far has been valiant--amazing in the face of uncertainties of all sorts. We congratulate and admire your perseverance. This dedication we see in every meeting with each of you is what will make you outstanding physicians. Taking care of yourself will also make you an outstanding physician.

Should you need additional guidance to convert these guidelines to an individualized plan, please reach out to Dr. Naquin , Learning Specialist at gnaquin@tulane.edu or for wellness tips, Dr. Karen Weissbecker at kremer@tulane.edu.

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