

# Study Techniques for NBME Subject Exams – Students from Class of 2017

1. I focused on only 3-4 out of 7 of the subject exams for the first round. I got solid scores on those exams, and then I only had to really study for 3-4 out of 7 the second round. Some people just blow off the first round, but I think that even 2 weeks of studying can help knock out a few exams.

I used practice questions almost exclusively. I read the answer explanations thoroughly, and that kind of replaced any book studying that I might have done. I also listened to **OnlineMedEd** in the car because I have a 20-30 minute drive to the hospital.

My last piece of advice is just general test advice. When reading the questions, I try to imagine what answer the test writers are aiming for. What is the answer they want me to give.

2. Specifically for the exams though, I think reading early and often is important. Having one main book to study from and then one book for each subject is important. It is important NOT to get bogged down by the MANY resources there are - the other students and I stressed this heavily in the Pillar 2 panel last week. Pick resources from the attached **powerpoint** and stick to them! Once you get into the hang of reading and as the exams approach (like maybe 4-6 weeks out) is when I would start doing **NBME exams**. Work hard on them and expect them to take some time. It's doable to do 1-2 per weekend (\$20 per exam, 50q each, expect it to take ~2 hours if taken with classmates) in the weeks leading up to the exam. These questions are gold, but of course keep reading and taking notes. In my experience it is most beneficial to take the exams in groups of 2-3 not only to share the cost but also (and mainly) to really walk through the questions with each other because the correct answers are not provided upon completion of these exams. I personally do not like to study in groups, however I did so for these and it was very helpful. If taking it alone just expect it to take maybe a little longer and you will be looking up explanations to questions you got wrong and "guessing" on the correct answer. It's just time consuming.
3. To begin, there are two separate strategies that exist for preparing for these exams. Because we take the exams twice, some choose to devote all of their studying energy to a few select subjects for the first round, hopefully do well on those subjects in round one, then study for the remaining subjects for round two. Others work to study broadly for all of the subjects and strive for a comprehensive knowledge of each. I chose to study broadly for all of the subject exams and would recommend this strategy. With strategy #1, I think a person puts too much pressure on himself/herself to perform well on the subjects that were focused on. If for some reason they do not go well, then they are left with twice as much work preparing for round two. In addition, there is a considerable overlap of material between each of the subjects (Neuro and Psych, Internal medicine & family medicine, etc.), which I feel is a big reason to choose to prepare for all of the exams as best you can. After all, the LIC is set up so that we gain a comprehensive knowledge of each discipline and learn to apply information learned

in one discipline to others in order to be well-rounded clinicians. When preparing for all of the subject exams, many people will be able to at least pass all of the exams in round one, which takes a lot of pressure off for round two.

In terms of specific studying tips, I would recommend the following resources:

1. **Step-Up to Medicine** for all things Medicine
  2. First Aid Step 2 will provide the basics for each specialty (WARNING: this book will not sufficiently cover all of the details found in subject exams)
  3. **APGO uWISE v.3** on the APGO.org website is a free 542 question bank that is a must for the OB/GYN shelf.
  4. **Dr. Pestana's Surgery Notes** is an easy, quick read and a must for the Surgery shelf.
  5. LAST BUT NOT LEAST: **U-WORLD, U-WORLD, U-WORLD** . This is your most valuable studying resource. The more questions you do, the more prepared you will be. It's that simple.
4. Studying for all of the exams at once can be overwhelming, so it was important for me to figure out what resources I wanted to study and then divide the work evenly in the months prior to the exams. I needed a schedule or else I wouldn't have been able to stay focused.

These are the other resources I used:

**Surgery** - Dr. Pestana's Surgery Notes and Case Files.

**Psych** - First Aid for Psychiatry.

**Peds** - Peds section in First Aid for USMLE Step 2.

**Neuro** - Blue Prints.

**OB** - Case Files and OB section of First Aid for Step 2.

**IM and Family** - I just did UWORLD questions and hoped that by preparing for everything else I would know enough to pass

**Additional:** As with Step 1 and Step 2, nothing beats uworld questions. I found it useful to separate the questions into the various specialties; that way I was able to practice doing a set of just surgery or just OB questions. Also, the

website: <http://som.uthscsa.edu/StudentAffairs/thirdyear.asp> has GREAT review

powerpoints and videos for the various shelf exams. I found it incredibly helpful and used them to study during the week of exams since I was too exhausted to read at night after testing.

I know some people divided the exams and just focused on 1/2 of them each time. Personally though, taking one of the exams without really studying or trying seemed like a missed opportunity to me. So for the first round of testing I tried to study for all of them as best I could. Fortunately I passed them all and was able to then focus on the exams that I scored the lowest the next time around.

5. I prepared for the shelf exams by a combination of reading and practice UWORLD questions. I would do focused reading on one topic (surgery, IM, OB/GYN etc.) for approximately 3 weeks to a month on each subject. I used all the blueprints books for each of the specialties with the exception of Pestana's surgery notes for general surgery and step-up-to-medicine for internal medicine.

Every other night I would do approximately 30 UWORLD questions on the topic that I was covering and review them the following day. For the first round of shelves I focused my studies on surgery, psych, and neuro. The final round I focused on the topics that I needed to improve on. They have really great practice shelf exams on the USMLE NBME website that are subject specific. They really help to gauge your knowledge and potential score.