

# USMLE STEP 2 CK BEFORE STEP 1 – EXPERIENCE

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## INTRODUCTION

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Graduation Date: March 21, 2020

Preparation Time: 13 months (15/3/20 – 7/4/21)

Exam Date: April 8, 2021

Step 2 CK Score: **265**

## ASSESSMENTS AND UWORLD STATS

UWorld 1<sup>st</sup> pass: **81%**

UWorld 2<sup>nd</sup> pass: **94.5%**

UWSA1: **272** ( 1 month before exam)

NBME 6: **273** (3 weeks before exam)

NBME 7: **259** (2 weeks before exam)

NBME 8: **279** (10 days before exam)

UWSA 2: **269** ( 5 days before exam)

Free 120: **88%** (a day before exam)

## RESOURCES USED

1. UWorld
2. UWorld Notes
3. First Aid for Step 1
4. Online MedEd Videos
5. Kaplan Lecture Notes ( all except Psychiatry)
6. Kaplan Video Lectures ( only OBGYN and Surgery)
7. UWorld Biostats Review
8. 100 Cases By Conrad Fischer
9. Offline UW 1 and 3 for Ethics and Patient Safety
10. Amboss 5 day free trial for Ethics, Patient Safety and Biostatistics
11. All CMS forms
12. Sketchy Micro
13. Heart Sounds – Michael Barrett audio files

## A BRIEF BACKGROUND

I had originally planned to start studying for USMLE from 3<sup>rd</sup> year. But it was due to sheer laziness that I ended up wasting my 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year without studying anything for the exam.

Now in final year, I had to make a choice; whether to forsake my final year studies in med school and prepare for Step 1, or focus on the final year curriculum, which would be similar to Step 2 CK and try to prepare for CK along with the ward rotations and daily classes. I chose the latter.

The best decision I made during this was using the **UWorld notes**. I found them on the internet and actually had no idea that it was the best available resource for

CK. Had a look at that 1900 paged file and found the content so good that I decided I would get them printed and study them from time to time.

So while preparing for my final professionals, I did Medicine and OBGYN from Kaplan and gave a read to the UW notes for these 2 subjects. It would come in handy later when I finally started UW after my prof.

My final professional ended on February 12, 2020, and continuing the shameless streak of wasting time for a 4<sup>th</sup> year in a row, I decided it would be a good idea to rest for a whole month. NOT RECOMMENDED.

## TIMELINE

### PHASE 1 ( March 2020- September 2020)

Started preparation on March 15, 2020, a day after the whole country went into lockdown. Bought a 6 month subscription of UWorld , when I really should have bought the 1 year one. Had to renew my subscription a further 4 times, so my advice is, buy a 1 year subscription, and save yourselves some serious money.

Decided to do **Medicine** first.

This was my strategy for tackling any system that I would start:

- **First Aid:** I would read the system (eg, Respiratory) from FA, especially its physiology and pharmacology. Also used to revise that system from Pathoma, but wasn't really necessary.
- **BNB Videos:** Didn't use them an awful lot, but for anything that I wouldn't understand, I'd go to BNB.
- **Online MedEd Videos:** Highly recommended. Dr Dustyn is a gem, and watching these will help you clear up a lot of concepts about the all important NEXT BEST STEP IN MANAGEMENT.

- **UW Notes:** Gave them a read before doing the UW blocks. Many people advised me against doing it, saying that it gives you 'spoilers'. Were they right? Maybe. Did it increase my first pass percentage? Obviously. Did it hurt me in the long run? NO.
- **UWorld:** The ABSOLUTE GOLD STANDARD for CK. Did the first pass in system wise, tutor mode. Tried to do a block daily, but could barely do 30 questions a day. And this was due to the biggest mistake I made during my preparation. UWorld was adding a lot of new questions during this time ( they added around 800 questions during the time I was preparing for my exam), and so they obviously weren't in the UW notes. My OCPD kicked in, and I decided that I would write all these new questions BY HAND, and make my own notes for this new stuff. And making notes is one thing, but I started noting down all the stuff that was given in the explanations. Extremely dumb. Worst decision ever. Cost me around 2-3 months. Make your own notes if you want, but make them concise and to the point.
- **Educational Objectives:** One of my better decisions was preparing separate registers just to note down educational objectives. Would later turn out to be HUGE help in the final phases of preparation.

## OBSTETRICS & GYNECOLOGY

Another subject on which I had a strong grasp from my final prof preparation. Dr. Sakala's Kaplan Video lectures are really good. I did them in final year, and I would highly recommend them. Revised Kaplan once, watched OME videos, read UW notes, and then did UW questions.

Did the same mistake of making handwritten notes and noting down all of the material that was mentioned in the explanation. Cost me yet more time.

## PSYCHIATRY

The best resource for Psychiatry is UWorld and UW Notes. Add in stuff from FA about the drugs (which are very high yield) and you'll be golden.

Only portion in my actual exam, and also in assessments where I scored in the higher category. So yes, UWorld is all you need.

## SURGERY

Now I was diving into the unknown portion of the syllabus. This syllabus was quite different from the course that is followed in our med schools, and UW notes didn't cover it properly at all.

Started with Kaplan video lectures. Then read it's lecture notes. I'd recommend doing these, especially the Trauma portion, which is super high yield.

Also did the OME videos, but don't think they're super important.

Moved to UWorld. Did this portion in random mode.

I realized that writing notes was now impossible, so I bought a printer, took screenshots (sorry UW), and compiled all these printed notes. Life was suddenly easier and simpler. Still can't believe it took me this long to make such a simple decision.

## PEDIATRICS

Used the following resources:

- Kaplan lecture notes. Hideous. But found no other source, so somehow had to finish these.

- OME videos: Okayish. Can be done.
- UW notes: Main source.
- UW: Random, tutor mode.

## BIOSTATISTICS:

- Kaplan lectures.
- First Aid
- UW subject review.
- UWorld: They're adding lots of new questions, especially drug ads and abstracts. So, it'll cover most of what you see on exam.
- Amboss 5 day trial. Did it 3 weeks before my exam. Around 120 questions. Recommended.

Keep revising the formulas, and understand the definitions very well.

## ETHICS AND PATIENT SAFETY

Loads of questions about this bad boy in the exam these days.

- First Aid
- Kaplan lectures and lecture notes
- 100 cases by Conrad
- UW 1 and 3 offline
- UW 2 online
- Amboss 5 day trial. Around 90 questions.

Like stats, UW is adding lots of new questions and concepts. While exam questions will be extremely vague, I think UW can orient you to think in a way that you will eventually be able to pick the right answers. So do as many questions as you can, from wherever you can find them.

*First pass of UW and doing all this stuff mentioned above took me around 6 months. It can be and should be done in much less time.*

## **PHASE 2 (Mid September 2020 – Mid December 2020)**

After the first pass, I had the 1900 pages of UWorld notes on which I had also annotated loads of stuff from online UW, as well as more than 1000 pages of handwritten and printed notes.

Original plan was to revise all of this in 1 month, but I realized on the first day of revision, that it would take me at least 2 months.

Began revision of notes, as well as FA stuff which I thought was important, like pharmacology portion of each system.

Went back to Lahore to complete all the ECFMG documentation. I had been stuck at home and hadn't met my friends for 6 months. So took some time off, and these 15 days would go without me doing anything at all. The break was needed, and helped me recharge myself.

Completed revision by the end of November. Read the educational objectives which took me about a further 10 days.

## **PHASE 3 (MID DECEMBER 2020- FEBRUARY 2021)**

I was nervous before starting the 2<sup>nd</sup> pass of UW, since I thought that using the UW notes might have grossly overestimated my 1<sup>st</sup> pass percentage, and I might be 'found out' in this random, timed 2<sup>nd</sup> pass.

Fearful, I started the 2<sup>nd</sup> pass, planning on doing at least 2 blocks daily, and was relieved that I was easily scoring above 90% in every block.

During this pass, I once again read all the explanations, including the wrong choices, so it was essentially a 3<sup>rd</sup> time read of UW for me.

One wise thing that I did during this pass was that I made sticky notes about some volatile and important stuff, and pasted them on my walls. There were about 200 of them, and I would later go on to revise them before every assessment.

Also, took pictures of important topics from every system, made folders of them in my phone, and like the sticky notes, would try to revise them before assessments.

When there were about 1500 questions left, I decided to do 8 blocks daily to build some stamina for the real exam.

While I was doing all this, my application which I had submitted back in November was still being processed. It wouldn't get approved until late February, and the anxiety about the application and booking exam date took its toll on me, and I ended up wasting even more days.

Anyways, I finished the 2<sup>nd</sup> pass by the end of February. Next, I did my wrongs and also revised the new questions that UW had recently added in the previous couple of months. Booked the exam date, and decided it was time to take assessments.

## PHASE 4 (March 2021)

Quickly gave another read to the educational objectives, sticky notes, and pictures of the important topics that I mentioned previously.

Gave **UWSA 1** on March 8, exactly 1 month before my exam, and scored a **272**. I couldn't believe it, since I found the assessment quite tough, but it did give me a huge confidence boost. I hadn't wasted this last year after all by the looks of it.

Took **NBME 6** on March 17, and found it hilariously easy. Scored a **273**. Thought NBMEs were going to be a walk in the park, but I was wrong.

After these 2 assessments, I started doing the **CMS forms**. Did all the available forms, though if you're short on time, just do forms 5 and 6 of every subject.

Took **NBME 7** on March 23, and I was almost in tears by the end of it. Scored a respectable **259** though, and read that it supposedly has a harsher curve, and under predicts, so was relieved.

Next, I started using **Amboss'** 5 day trial for Ethics and Biostatistics. Learnt some new concepts that I hadn't seen in UW, so I would highly recommend that everyone do this.

Did the same ritual of sticky notes and pictures, and took **NBME 8** on March 28, which was also quite difficult. Ended up scoring **279**, and by now I knew that all of these weren't just flukes.

Took the big one i.e. **UWSA 2** on April 3 and scored a **269**.

In the last week, I tried to revise the educational objectives, and do 10 UW blocks in a day. Could only do about half of the educational objectives, and did about

1200 questions over 3 days. Also listened to heart sounds, did some ECGs, CXR, CT imagings etc.

Gave **Free 120** on the day before exam and scored **88%**.

Went to my cousin's house, because it was near the prometric center, chilled with the kids over there, and went to sleep at around 10:30 PM without much difficulty.

## **EXAM DAY**

Woke up to the news that my team Chelsea had won the CL QFs 2-0, so I knew it was going to be a good day lol. Had a light breakfast, reached prometric center at 8. Went through all the checking procedures and was sitting in front of the computer by 8:25. Thought that exam would start at 9, as was written on the permit, but they said that we'll be starting at 8:30 and that was the first time I felt a bit anxious.

Anyways, the exam started and it went.

It was how I expected it to be. Vague and frustrating. You'd know what they're asking for in the question, but then they'd give you answer choices which just won't fit. Or 2 choices, both of which could be right.

I'd say that the ratio of whether I was confident about an answer or not in a block, was about 25:15 or even 20:20 in some blocks.

Time management was never an issue Alhamdulillah, and in each block I had about 8-10 minutes left to review the marked questions.

Now people say that you shouldn't change your first pick. While I agree, I did change a lot of my answer choices. Whether it had a positive impact on my score or not, is something I don't know. But in UW, more often than not, I'd change

answer choices and end up picking the right one. So, have a look at your UWorld stats to see if you're a good second guesser or not.

One of the abstracts was unbelievably long and vague, and it was frustrating, reading it over and over again, just to find, nothing. Make sure you've got enough time at the end of the blocks containing abstracts or drug ads to deal with these monsters.

I'd say, embrace the vagueness of the exam, make guesses without panicking, and take it one question at a time.

Never think about the previous blocks, or previous questions.

## **BREAKS**

After 2 blocks: 10 minutes

After 2 blocks: 10 minutes

After 1 block: 10 minutes

After 1 block: 20 minutes

After 1 block: 10 minutes

Came out of the exam center in a state of euphoria, knowing that it was finally over. Had no clue whether I'd score a 220 or a 260. But I was satisfied, knowing I had given it my all, and left the rest to ALLAH.

## **SCORE REPORT**

Received it 13 days after my exam, exactly on 5 PM local time, and 8 AM EST.

## **END NOTE**

My experience is far from perfect. I ended up taking much more time than I initially expected or had planned. But it got me a good score in the end and because of that, I'll look back at this journey with fondness.

Finally, a message to people out there planning to take CK before Step 1. DO NOT ask other people whether it should be done or not. Ask yourself whether your basics are strong enough to tackle this task. If you believe in yourself, DO IT. And once you've started preparing, avoid people and posts that might bring doubt in your mind about the validity of your decision. I cannot count the number of times I'd see posts about people asking whether this is a good plan and someone telling them that it's not, and I would spend the next 2-3 days worrying about whether I made the right decision.

**BELIEVE IN YOURSELF. PUT IN THE WORK. STOP WORRYING ABOUT THE OUTCOME. AND ENJOY THE PROCESS.**

You'll learn a lot while taking this exam, and at the end, THAT is what matters the most.

Thank you for taking the time to read my experience. Hope someone out there finds this experience useful.

If you have any questions, feel free to reach out to me.

