

WHAT IS STEP 2 CK??

USMLE Step 2 CK is an exam in which the knowledge of clinical sciences is tested. Every medical student (US graduates as well as international graduates like us) are required to give this exam if they plan on working as a physician/surgeon in USA. The subjects included in step 2 CK are

- [Internal Medicine](#)
- [General Surgery](#)
- [Gynecology & Obstetrics](#)
- [Pediatrics](#)
- [Psychiatry](#)
- [Epidemiology & Biostatistics](#)

The Step 2 Clinical Knowledge (Step 2 CK) exam consists of multiple-choice questions that reflect the broad representation of academics, clinical practice, and licensing communities across the United States and Canada. The clinical science material of the Step 2 CK is organized along two dimensions:

- Normal conditions and diseases (normal growth and development, basic concepts, and general principles)
- Physician tasks (preventive medicine and health maintenance, understanding mechanisms of disease, establishing a diagnosis, and patient management).

Most Step 2 CK test items describe clinical situations and require that you provide one or more of the following:

- A diagnosis.
- A prognosis.
- An indication of underlying mechanisms of disease.
- The next step in medical care, including preventive measures.

TEST LENGTH AND FORMAT

Step 2 CK has approximately 352 multiple-choice test items. It is divided into EIGHT SIXTY MINUTE BLOCKS and administered in one NINE HOUR TESTING SESSION. For Step 2 CK, during the defined time to complete the items in each block, you may answer the items in any order, review your responses, and change answers. After you exit the block or when time expires, you can no longer review test items or change answers. The remaining 1 HOUR IS THE BREAK TIME and you can divide it however you like. But once you are inside a block doing questions, you are NOT allowed to take a break until the block is over. If, however, you do take a break during the block time due to an unavoidable emergency, it will be recorded as ABNORMAL BEHAVIOR by the testing center (and the block time will continue on during that break, so you'll actually be losing precious time). **The QUESTION STEMS in this exam are VERY LENGTHY.** I advise you to keep this thing in mind, as you will have to build up a good reading speed when you prepare for this exam. There won't be any short questions in Step 2 CK exam. So, be ready for that.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

To be eligible for Step 2 CK, you must be in one of the following categories at the time of application and on the test day:

- A medical student officially enrolled in, or a graduate of, a US or Canadian medical school.
- Program leading to the MD degree that is accredited by the Liaison Committee on Medical Education (LCME).
- A medical student officially enrolled in, or a graduate of, a US medical school leading to the DO degree that is accredited by the American Osteopathic Association (AOA).
- A medical student officially enrolled in, or a graduate of, a medical school outside the United States and Canada and eligible for examination by the ECFMG.

HOW TO PREPARE FOR STEP 2 CK

The best material used for Step 2 CK includes

- Kaplan Lecture Notes for Step 2 CK
- Kaplan Video Lectures for Step 2 CK
- USMLE WORLD for Step 2 CK (**THE BEST PREP MATERIAL**)
- Kaplan Qbank for Step 2 CK (**OPTIONAL – explained below**)
- Master The Boards For Step 2 CK by Conrad Fischer (**Excellent Book, MUST read this**)
- Comprehensive Cases Video Lectures by Conrad Fischer
- Google Images for additional ECGs, CT scans, MRIs, X-rays etc.

IF YOU ARE GIVING STEP 2 CK AFTER STEP 1, there is no need to do Kaplan Qbank during step 2 CK preparation. However, some people decide to give **Step 2 CK before Step 1** (which in my opinion is **NOT A GOOD IDEA**) and for those people, I recommend doing both KQB as well as UWorld. The total time required to prepare Step 2 CK is approximately 4-5 months (if you study 6-8 hours a day for this exam). It took me 4 months to give Step 2 CK after giving Step 1 by following the pattern given below

- **1st Two Months** – 1st read of **KAPLAN LECTURE NOTES** and **USMLE WORLD**, along with the Kaplan video lectures. Read a minimum of 40 pages of Kaplan lecture notes per day (takes around 6 hours if you do it with full concentration) and watch the videos of the same topics once you are done. The best video lectures of Kaplan are those of Internal Medicine, Gynecology and Obstetrics. After finishing one subject (and its videos), go through the USMLE WORLD OF THE SAME SUBJECT. Do 100 question per day (takes around 3 hours to do 50 questions, 6hrs for 100). USMLE WORLD is available online as well as in book format (in Pakistan and India). To save money, the UWORLD can be done in book format during the 1st read. However, it is crucial that you go through UWORLD “ONLINE” AT LEAST ONCE (preferably twice) before going to the exam.

- **3rd Month – 2nd read of KAPLAN LECTURE NOTES** along with **USMLE WORLD** 2nd time (no need to go through the video lectures again). This is the most crucial time period in this exam prep. Things will begin to consolidate and everything makes much more sense. This time, do 80 pages of Kaplan Lecture Notes per day (will take less time as it's the 2nd time you are going through them). At the end of every subject, do 200 questions of USMLE WORLD OF THE SAME SUBJECT (it's easy, as you will be doing it for the 2nd time). An alternative is to do 100 questions of KAPLAN QBANK OF THE SAME SUBJECT (esp. if you are giving step 2 CK before step 1). I personally didn't use Kaplan Qbank to save time, and UWorld proved to be sufficient for me. During this read of UWorld, make sure you concentrate on the questions you got wrong and the important points you made on the books. I preferred using books as you can make hand written notes on them which are extremely helpful, a few days before the exam (again, it's a subjective opinion). Keeping in mind that the online version of the same material will also be used later.
- **4th Month** – At this point, you have gone through KLN and UW twice (or UW once + KQB once). There is no need to go back to Kaplan Lecture Notes after this. In the first 15 days of this month, go through **MASTER THE BOARDS FOR STEP 2 CK** and combine it with **COMPREHENSIVE CASES VIDEOS** by Conrad Fischer. Try to watch the videos of the same system (or topics) you study from MTB (both explain things in the same manner as both are products of Dr. Conrad Fischer). Read 40 pages of MTB per day. It will hardly take 4 hours to do that as this book skips most of the un-necessary material and everything is pretty much 'to the point'. MTB is one of the very best tools for Step 2 CK and you can't afford to skip this in your preparation. I also recommend using 'Google Images' for mastering ECGs, MRIs, CT scans etc (they are highly tested in this exam). After 15 days, give NBME 4 and if your score is 240+, apply for the exam and choose a date. At this point, buy **UWORLD ONLINE** for a month and start solving it in exam mode. Buy the UWorld package which includes UWorld Self-Assessment 1 (**USWSA 1**). Doing 4-5 blocks per day will be enough. I recommend combining it with the notes you made (on your books or separately). You should be done with UWorld ONLINE once at the end of this month.
- **5th Month** – At the beginning of this month, give **UWORLD SELF ASSESSMENT 1 (USWSA 1)**. Your score should be 240+ (preferably 250+ as it's relatively easier than NBME 4). In the next 15-30 days, the following material should be used
 - ✓ **UWORLD ONLINE** (combine it with UWorld offline book **NOTES**)
 - ✓ Your **NOTES** on the other books.
 - ✓ **MTB** for CK (2nd time, depending on individual's weaknesses + **NOTES**).
 - ✓ **Kaplan Qbank** book revision (difficult questions – if you did this Qbank during the 3rd month of your preparation).
 - ✓ **MANAGEMENT** in 2 subjects is highly tested on this exam. **Internal Medicine, Gynecology & Obstetrics**. Make sure you have made notes/points of these 2 subjects sufficiently (on books or separately). Going through them is crucial at this stage of your preparation.

HOW TO APPLY FOR STEP 2 CK

1. Go to www.ecfmg.org
2. Click on “Online Services >>> IWA”
3. If you already don’t have an ECFMG account, make a new ID and Password (otherwise skip to the next step).
4. Apply for the exam you want to take using your id and password.
5. Have a credit card on hand when applying.
6. ECFMG will send you a confirmation email that your application has been accepted.
7. You will have to print certain documents and mail them to ECFMG (they will be mentioned on the website during the application process)
- 8. I advise you to read ECFMG information bulletin before applying for the exam.
9. Exam Fee is \$820 (+ \$165 if you are taking your test in a country other than USA).

PERSONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- ✓ Step 2 CK preparation should start from the very first day of Final Year MBBS.
- ✓ Students should read Kaplan Lecture Notes and watch the video lectures of the same topics being taught in their medical college at one specific point (to save time and for better consolidation).
- ✓ Know the **CLINICAL IMPORTANCE** of whatever you study. This exam will be 100% clinical scenarios. The question stems will be very long, so practicing UWorld in online timed mode is extremely important. **Develop a good reading speed**. Learn how to scan through the question stems and to highlight the important points quickly.
- ✓ **IF A QUESTION IS VERY LONG**, I recommend that you **READ THE LAST LINE OF THE QUESTION 1ST**. This tells you what information you need to pick up in the question stem from the very beginning (most of the long stem questions have a lot of irrelevant points and this technique will help you ignore them).
- ✓ Do UWORLD (with or without Kaplan Qbank) before your final professional exam. It will help you score higher in your final professional exam as well.
- ✓ Step 2 CK should ideally be given right after giving the final professional exam. But for this, you need to go through Step 2 CK material during final year. Give NBME 4 as a self assessment guide after final year professional exam, and if you score well, that’s the best time to give Step 2 CK.

- ✓ **DO NOT GIVE STEP 2 CK BEFORE STEP 1** (it's like trying to write an essay without learning the alphabets). If you give CK before Step 1, you'll pass, BUT your score will not be as high as it could've been if you had given Step 1 first.
- ✓ **COMPREHENSIVE CASES VIDEOS by Conrad Fischer** must be done during Step 2 CK exam preparation. I will provide these videos to Dr. Majid and he will distribute them to every student who needs them.

NBMEs: IMPORTANCE & USAGE

The NBMEs are a group of **SELF ASSESSMENT EXAMS** which can be bought from the NBME website. Each NBME exam costs \$50-\$60 each. Every NBME consists of about 200 questions in 4 blocks (50 questions per block). The purpose of these exams is to get a rough idea about the exam preparation at one specific point. So if you were to score a 240 on NBME 7, you'll likely end up getting 235-245 on the real exam (more likely 240+). However, it must be kept in mind that they only give you a rough idea about your expected score. Also, getting a low NBME score can be improved by looking at your weaknesses and working on them before taking the exam. For Step 2 CK, NBME 1, 2, 3 and 4 are the newest NBMEs, and hence, have the highest predictive value (NBME 4 being the most predictive). Every student should give at least one or two NBMEs before taking the exam. One should be taken 1 month before the exam, and the other one should be taken 1-2 weeks before the exam. The NBMEs can also be found offline (i.e. for free - downloadable .pdf or Microsoft word file), but I recommend that you do one online and the other 3 offline. The offline ones, of course, won't give you a score and you'll have to calculate the percentage by searching for answers by yourself.

RECOMMENDED WEBSITES

<http://www.ecfmg.org/>

<http://www.nbme.org/>

<http://www.usmle-forums.com/> (**THE BEST** source of information for USMLEs)

<http://prep4usmle.com/>

<http://nbmeanswerkeys.blogspot.com/> (a relatively good site for offline NBME questions & answers)

(**Best of luck . . .** Shahzaib Nabi)