

## Studying for NBME Subject Exams during Busy Rotations

To assist you in meeting your goals for shelf exam scores, consider the recommendations below:

1. Understand the exam format. Visit NBME [Subject Examinations](#) to view the content outline for your specific exam. You can also preview and test yourself on sample items contained within the NBME [Subject Examination's Content Outlines and Sample Items](#) document. Within this document, you'll find approximately 20 sample questions and an answer key.
2. Begin review for the shelf exam on the first day of rotation. While it may be tempting to delay the start of your preparation – don't. You may find you need additional time to review the material and study it effectively.
3. Create a study plan and schedule to keep yourself on track based on the shelf exam content outline. Work to create a regular time daily for at least one or more of the following: reading, studying, making study tools, or reviewing Qbanks. If you are pressed for time, work on a few Qbank questions. (Similar to studying for Step 1, review the right and wrong answers in Qbank questions.)
4. Read actively about your current patients. For example, ask yourself the questions below, as applicable:
  - a. What are the symptoms of the disease?
  - b. What are the signs of the disease?
  - c. What is the differential diagnosis?
  - d. How are those diagnoses differentiated from one another?
  - e. How do you work-up or evaluate the disease?
  - f. What test(s) are available to confirm the diagnosis?
  - g. What are the treatment options?
  - h. What is the prognosis?
  - i. What is the pathogenesis?
5. Take advantage of down time and/or combine activities (e.g., listening to a podcast on content or reviewing flashcards, while walking or waiting for rounds).
6. Implement the [Pomodoro Technique](#) to take advantage of 25 – 35 minute blocks of time.
7. Download or carry copies of reading material (e.g., chapters or articles), Qbanks, or flashcards to have readily available when you have a short block of time to study.
8. Organize your study plan to include time to revisit previously studied concepts in a randomized fashion.
9. Check with your Clerkship Director or peers for recommendations about a comprehensive text and/or a text used for exam preparation.
10. Stay positive. Studies have shown that student performance on NBME subject examinations improves with increasing clerkship experiences.
11. Be proactive in asking for learning or study strategy support from your peers, Clerkship Directors, OSA, or Academic Success, as applicable.
12. Pace yourself during the exam and manage your time. If you are spending too much time on one question, skip it and come back to it. If you're still not sure, make an educated guess and then move on. Try to avoid becoming emotionally engaged or frustrated.

13. During the exam, read the question before the vignette. This will help you focus on relevant information in the vignette (Desai & Katta, 2007).

For additional time management strategies, visit A [Guide for Time Management](#) or [Do More with the Time You Have: 13 Management Tips for Harried Residents](#). While the last article focuses on residents, many of the tips can be “repurposed” for application to your clerkship experience(s).

#### *Reference*

Desai, S. P. & Katta, R. (2007). *250 biggest mistakes 3<sup>rd</sup> year medical students make and how to avoid them*. Houston, TX: Desai & Katta.