

Instructions for Working Qbank Questions: Step 1 Method (Pre ISP)

The following instructions are adapted from “A Step by Step Guide to Success on the USMLE Step 1 Exam” (Gebremedhin, 2012). Please note these instructions are intended for working questions during coursework and prior to your Intensive Study Period (ISP). This process can help you develop an effective approach to utilizing practice questions as a study tool that increases understanding and long-term retention of concepts.

1. Identify a question bank.

- CMU COM offer free access to **USMLE Easy** and **Board Vitals** through the CoM Medical Library Services.

2. Select questions that align with your current course.

- Do questions one at a time, in practice quiz or tutor mode, utilizing a systems approach (select the organ system and then select ALL select foundational science disciplinary options).

3. Read the lead-in (question) first.

- This will prime you for what type of question you will need to answer.
- Consider what element of a framework you are looking for (e.g., mechanism/pathogenesis, diagnosis/treatment, and course/complications).

4. Read the body of the question.

- Read carefully to know whether to identify signs and symptoms of a disease process or a topic.
- Identify important clues related to the patient history and physical exam. Consider risk factors.
- Translate the clinical clues into appropriate medical terminology. (This is the process of code switching.)
- Look for clinical facts and build a differential diagnosis sentence by sentence or segment by segment. Remember to consider what is most likely or common.
- Look for abnormal and unique symptoms.
- Summarize the key clues or significant details and create a short, one-sentence statement, or a “one-liner.” (This is also called the stem.)
- Double check your one-liner by fact-checking the key signs and symptoms (be careful about jumping to a conclusion here). *See S1M, Chapter 5.*
- Use this “one-liner” or stem to answer the question.

5. Read the lead-in (question) and anticipate the answer.

- Draw out or talk out the entire framework related to this topic (presentation, mechanism/pathogenesis, course/complications, diagnosis/treatment).

6. Rule in or rule out answer options based on your one-liner.

- Crosslink your proposed best answer with the pathophysiology. Does it match in ALL conditions?
- Alternatively, rule in or out options by reviewing the body of the question sentence by sentence. Make sure the answer fits the clinical scenario and answers the question asked.
- Ensure you have read the question correctly and haven’t made a mistake.
- Select the best answer option and move on.
- If you’re unfamiliar with response options, make a note to spend time studying these terms, topics, or concepts later.

7. Read the answer explanations and annotate your central text.

- Note important details and annotate any missing framework information in your central text (e.g., First Aid) or in your study notebook/OneNote.
 - For tips how to annotate in First Aid, visit <http://www.medschooltutors.com/blog/three-ways-to-get-ahead-with-first-aid-for-usmle-step-1>
- Consider the framework information for this topic. Imagine other elements of the framework that you could be tested on.
 - For more framework examples, visit <http://www.step1method.com/the-infamous-difficult-frameworks/> or review Chapter 4, S1M book.
- You can also ask “What would I have to change in the body of the question to make each distractor the best or right answer?” to dig deeper into specific question content.
- Don’t worry about speed. Focus on learning material and retaining information. If you find an area of weakness, it is okay to spend more time.
- Be mindful of topics that you have never heard of and are not in your central text. Keep your review of these topics limited to annotating the framework for this topic.
- Be systematic and patient. You will get more efficient. In the meantime, you are reinforcing a strategy which will become a habit.
- Aim for completing 3 - 5 questions per night (or 25 – 40 questions on the weekend). You will want to finish about 50 – 75% of your question bank (quality over quantity) before your ISP starts.
- After completing a series of questions, identify your strengths and weaknesses. Prioritize weaker areas to spend more time on learning or relearning.

Additional Study Tips

- When studying, always “insert the patient” into the concept/topic you are studying. Consider various questions that could be asked in a case or clinical vignette.
- As you learn new concepts, draw out the disease or topic framework.
- If you find yourself distracted or confused by unnecessary details in a qbank question, make a note to revisit the concept/topic. Revisit a primary text or alternative resource and work to understand the entire framework of the concept/topic.
- Practice “free association.” As you review frameworks or study concepts watch for themes or similarities. Compare and contrast similar concepts or topics. This will help to build differential diagnoses.

Extra Time to Study?

- Revisit prior first year challenging concepts (biochem, micro, phys, pharm, path)
- Isolate challenging topics by creating small qbank to help you identify and “attack” weaker areas during coursework (e.g., GI and Pharm).
- Identify a comprehensive resource. Many students utilize First Aid. In this comprehensive resource, begin to annotate and elaborate content information.

Gebremedhin, D. (2012). *A step by step guide to success on the USMLE Step 1 exam*. Gebremedhin.