COMLEX Level 1 and USMLE Step 1 Study Guide (2)

This guide was created by a student and shared with our office
Resources:
- UFAP (Uworld, First Aid, Pathoma)
- Goljan Lectures + High yield notes (during dedicated study time)+ Rapid Review Pathology (only during the year)
- USMLE-Rx Qbank + some of Kaplan Qbank
- NBMES 2-12 offline + practice tests above
- OMM specific: Green OMM book, COMBANK, crampages (http://www.gkeonline.com/ilog/crampages.pdf), and other MSUCOM test review pages made for OMM exams

Throughout the year:
Started FA in the Fall Semester. Casually read FA with every system we had. I would try and read it before the system began so I had a general overview of what to expect, then try and read it in the middle of the system. Felt it was a good way to organize a lot of the topics we were learning and I would steal the mnemonics that I liked for classes. Started pathoma with our first systems course also. Tried to do the same thing with doing it early and then in the middle for review. I’m big on layering and seeing the information multiple times. Did a few Goljan lectures with our systems courses also (renal and ob/gyn).

I started with USMLE-Rx 1 year before Step. I just did it along with systems. I barely did any USMLE-Rx during dedicated. I think I finished >50% or something of this qbank. It was good and bad – almost useless if you haven’t read FA because it’s a lot of those nitty gritty facts, but good overall resource. Good introduction for how questions are asked so you have some sort of understanding earlier rather than later. This was great to have when we didn’t have many practice questions provided during many our systems courses. I highly recommend doing practice questions WAY BEFORE dedicated study time comes around.

I did Kaplan Qbank in the Fall before Step. I had an old, offline version that was probably about 75% of the qbank or so. I just used it as a learning tool and wrote down the things I got wrong/felt weird about in a notebook. I re-read these incorrects/explanations at the start of my dedicated period. I finished the ~75% by the end of Christmas break before Step. I pretty much did this all in tutor mode. Around Christmas break I also did a very slow read of pathoma while taking summary notes in every margin (meaning I read every sentence and made sure I knew what it was saying). I didn’t really open the pathoma book once during dedicated study time (see below for details on this). I really liked Rapid Review Path (I had the smaller, 3rd edition I think). I read it with a few of the systems courses. Never had time for it during dedicated. Read 9 of the intro chapters or something on our Feb or March break. Love Goljan. Pathoma is great for learning, Goljan is great for integrating.

Dedicated study period:
I was pretty wiped out after respiratory. I felt I needed a lecture style approach but there was no way I was going to pay for DIT. My first week of studying started slow, but I still did full days of studying. Warmed up to waking up earlier and taking mid-day breaks – pretty much just building a sustainable schedule.
Morning: I would wake up and review Micro using some pdfs an upper year had made – it was pretty much FA w/ more pictures and some more explanation. Then I would do a full pathoma chapter of lectures + one or two Goljan lectures. I used Goljan/Sattar pretty much every day and treated them like morning classes.

I haven’t really seen this strategy before but this is what I needed to do for the lectures:

- I took hard copy notes of pathoma videos and made them little booklets for each chapter; I then reviewed these rather than the book
- I also made a typed document w/ images for all of Goljan’s lectures. I started doing these in the last few weeks of our last systems course starting with the respiratory. It was essentially a transcript of his lectures w/ images and my own little notes beside things he didn’t explain fully etc. ended up being about 150 pages after I put the pics in.

Lunch: Depending how long lectures would take me, I would then read FA until lunch. Take an hour long break for work out/shower/reddit.

Afternoon: I started the afternoon with questions pretty much every day. I did at least 2 blocks of Uworld everyday. I wrote down the answers/main topic for every single question I got incorrect and every single question I guessed on/felt uncomfortable with. I just got a big notebook to put these in. I would write a one-liner about the key concept and maybe some extra information, then I would draw a big line across the page for the start of the next question. Some days I would do 3 or 4 blocks of questions depending on motivation/energy/time/didn’t feel like doing lectures. I would often re-write tables I thought were high-yield or were on concepts I hadn’t reviewed yet/felt uncomfortable with. I always used Uworld in with All Disciplines, Random, Timed mode.

UWorld is a textbook. It’s not just to test what you know, and for building the test-taking stamina. Every single key concept that is the center of a question is important. It is as close as you can get to the real deal.

So I pretty much just used Uworld, First Aid, Pathoma (UFAP) every day. Around the middle of dedicated I started doing blocks of the old NBMEs for extra practice. I would pretty much treat them like regular NBMEs. Sometimes I did two blocks morning and two block after my lunch break. I thought this was great. I would write little notes about these in my notebook about things I got wrong/missed. It was important for me to do a lot of questions.

I did the Pretest USMLE style vignettes book during dedicated for more questions – felt they were kind of useless but were somewhat representative of the kind of left-field questions that people say may appear on the real thing. Don’t really recommend this book though.
OMM/COMLEX:
I did about 25% of COMBANK a few weeks into dedicated period. This felt like doing flashcards after how hard I had been using Uworld because the question stems are much shorter, generally. Sometimes I would do 1 or 2 blocks of 50 combank questions near the end of a regular day of studying.

I took Step 1 on a Monday and COMLEX on the following Friday. I finished an additional 25% of COMBANK in between the two exams. I had read the Green saverese book on Feb or March break or something so I knew I was exposed to everything at least once. I spent some time skimming the chapters of that book during dedicated and between the two exams. I didn’t do any questions out of the book.

I read some old review sheets we had used for our OMM exams during the year for cranial and sacrum and I also read crampages and another high-yield study guide I found along with the youtube videos a few times sporadically during dedicated period. Chapman points and autonomic youtube videos were helpful – also know the House of Golden. I actually tried to pay attention during OMM and had Dr. Rowan for 3 semesters of OMM in a row so I think I felt pretty comfortable with a lot of OMM concepts before going in. My COMSAE D score was pretty good so I felt I couldn’t go down after ~7 weeks of studying so I didn’t stress too hard about COMLEX (don’t get me wrong though, I was still stressed out about it).

Break Times and Relaxing in general:
- I always woke up early and had my coffee/breakfast while browsing the news and trying to think about other stuff.
- I always took an hour or so off in the middle of the day for lunch/showering/reddit.
- I think I went out for dinner/just hung out with friends at least 1-2 evening per week. Sometimes a little less when I felt like I didn’t work hard enough during the day. Sometimes I would go back to studying in the late evening after seeing them if I felt like it. Sometimes we would study together for part of an afternoon, or do questions at least beside each other. We also usually did our practice NBMEs in the same room at the same time – I thought that was pretty nice/supportive. You may hear stories of some friends being a little toxic during this time – my advice is to run away from those people, and people that bring you down in anyway. We had a really good group of supportive friends so that was awesome. This is a good time when friends outside of medicine can be a great support.

I think I burned out in the last 2 weeks of studying. I started freaking out as I was forgetting very simple things. My scores started going up and down and I didn’t know what to think. I didn’t know if this was because the UWSA scores fluctuating or what, but my last NBME went well so I think I was doing something right (Uworld was calibrating during this time because of the change to 40q/block that happened the year of our exam). I bought the Uworld Biostats Review and pumped it out in an afternoon in an attempt to feel better about my situation – I do not recommend this resource – the explanations are poor and not thorough, only good if you have lots of time and need extra review. I just kept doing questions and studying the stuff I didn’t feel super hot on like neuro brainstem and glycogen storage/lysosomal storage diseases.
Take homes:
1) Regularly do NBMEs to gauge progress (or COMSAES)
2) Do the old NBMEs, and do as many questions as possible
3) Work hard and make sure to relax
4) Don’t slack on OMM and learn as much as you can during the year
5) Burn out is real and it is scary
6) Take both exams

If I could do it again:
1) Do lots more studying during the year and work harder for classes
2) Do more practice questions earlier
3) Do a bit more OMM/COMLEX review earlier in dedicated period rather than cramming it between USMLE AND COMLEX. My COMLEX score wasn’t bad, but it was a little stressful.
4) Would probably write it a little earlier so that I was taking the exams during what felt like my peak
5) Maybe do sketchy micro – a lot of people that seem to do well use this - I was old school about it I guess