

Level 1 Board Prep: A Quick Guide to Success

- The problem: Dozens of books/products that all claim to be the secret to getting you the score you want.
- The solution: Use the gold standard Level 1 prep materials and take the most minimalist approach possible.

Understanding the breakdown of the COMLEX

- Questions: 400 total, 50 per section
- Total testing time: 8 hours, more with your tutorial and lunch break
- Exam: two sessions with four (1 hr) sections in each. 4 hours to complete each session.
- Once you confirm and end the section, you CANNOT go back to review or change any answers within that section. A clock is provided to assist you with time management. Warnings are given to remind you of the time remaining before the end of each four (4)-hour session. Taking a bathroom break counts AGAINST your total time, but your lunch (45 minutes) does not.

Navigating the Day of the Exam

- Sleep the night before.
- Arrive 45 minutes before your testing time.
- Bring your ID.
- Dress in layers.
- If you drink caffeine, bring more than enough.

Timeline for Success

- **December:** Start to look into/purchasing resources that fit your learning style.
- **January:** Start toying with your study materials. Determine how they work for you. Identify very general weaknesses in your knowledge base (i.e. pharmacology).
- **February:** Finalize study materials/resources you will be using. You should be getting comfortable with all of them. Start covering First Aid and doing questions.
- **March:** Set a goal score and solidify a general study plan. You should be reading/doing questions daily now.
- **April-test day:** You should now be very comfortable with your prep materials. Create and enact a specific study plan. Follow through on it. Use practice tests to gauge your progress.

Gold Standard Prep Materials

- **First Aid for the USMLE Step 1:** Comprehensive review book. A must-have.
- **Pathoma vs. Rapid Review:** It doesn't really matter which. Both are best used to follow along with coursework and then go back to later. Pathoma comes with an excellent lecture series for those needing more instruction in their pathology review.
- **OMT Review by Robert G. Savarese:** OMM review book for COMLEX. Question sets in back of book. SOMA's High Yield OMM guide can replace a second read of this text as there is some unnecessary detail present in Savarese.

- **Uworld/COMBANK/COMQUEST (pick two):** Finish 2 qbanks. Read all of the answers/explanations. Uworld is very challenging and teaches you a lot about medicine. COMBANK and COMQUEST will get you oriented to the COMLEX style of question writing and provide good practice for OMM questions.
- **That's it.** Supplement if you need to with other books/lecture series/services but the basic recipe for success is what's listed above.

Tips and Tricks

- Get PDF files of your study books. Ctrl+F allows you to rapidly search by keyword, allowing you to find topics instantly while doing question banks. This saves untold time.
- You can search by keyword in Uworld. This allows you again to rapidly find all of the questions in the entire qbank about Lambert-Eaton syndrome, etc.
- Identify your weaknesses early.
- Attack your weaknesses early. Over the course of 6 weeks to several months it's amazing how much you can improve in an area of study.
- Don't resource overload. The gold standards are above. Reading 1/4 of 7 different supplemental books isn't going to help you enough to justify the time/money spent.
- Read all of the answers/explanations to questions you got wrong.
- Read all of the answers/explanations to questions you got right (you may still be wrong).
- Don't cheat yourself. You practice tests/timed qbanks are to gauge your preparedness. If you're looking up answers, your practice score is a lie.
- Set your plan and follow it rigidly, but realize that you will slip up. You will not study everything you wanted to get through.
- If you find yourself at a place where you're through everything you wanted to get through before your test, you haven't tried to get through enough.
- Keep track of concepts that you have struggled with. Write them down. Re-read them. Repeat until you can explain them outloud comfortably.
- Set a lofty, yet realistic goal. Look at fields you like. Shoot for 25-50 points higher. Don't let up. Even if you fall a little short on test day, you'll be in a great spot.
- If you need to push your test back, do it. Summer can wait, your career cannot.
- Take care of yourself. This is a huge step in your path and it will change you as a person. Don't let part of that change be a loss of your own health.

Summary

- Understand how the test works to ensure no surprises on test day.
- Read First Aid at least once. Twice is better. Three times is better. Etc.
- Complete at least one question bank. Two is better.
- Take at least one practice exam. Make sure your timing is down.
- Read Savarese once.
- Do whatever else you need to do, but keep in mind that simplicity and efficiency are very powerful in this setting.
- If you prep like this, and stick to it, you'll be able to say you're ready for the COMLEX!