

# 4th Year's Guide to the Shelf

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Chapter

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*“Wherever the art of Medicine is loved, there is also a love of Humanity.”*

- Hippocrates

Disclaimer: The most important part of the 3rd and 4th years of medical school is your interactions with patients: the time you spend with them, the information you learn from them, and the comfort your presence and attention can offer them. During your rotations, you will likely have more time to spend with each individual patient than you will have throughout the rest of your career, so take advantage of that opportunity. The best learning is done by reading information that is directly relevant to the care of one of your patients. Whenever you have that opportunity, take it. Those experiences stick with you much longer than just reading through a textbook or a study guide.

However, the reality of our current medical education system is not always conducive to the aforementioned style of learning. Performance on NBME Shelf Exams has a considerable impact on the final clerkship grade. The grades in your clinical years are ranked highly among factors that residency program directors use in selecting applicants to interview. The purpose of this document is to provide some tips for studying for the Shelf Exams that will hopefully allow you to use your time efficiently learning the necessary material to perform well on the Shelf Exam while still enjoying all the wonders of the 3rd and 4th year.

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# I. General Shelf Tips

Find someone whose advice you trust, has a similar study style and has already taken the Shelf. Ask them what the best study resources are as well as other insights on the rotation and preceptors.

Pick one to two resources to study for the Shelf before the rotation starts. There are a lot of different resources out there. It is unlikely you will be able to fully utilize more than three resources for a single Shelf Exam. It's best to stick with a couple and use them to their fullest extent than haphazardly using a handful of resources.

Start studying on the first day of the rotation.

Set a goal to study about two hours every weeknight including practice questions. If possible, try to go through your study resource in the order of topics that are covered in each week's academic half day.

NBME practice exams are \$20 and give you a good idea of the range of questions that are fair game on a Shelf. It is suggested to do an exam early in the final week and review it with a friend.

Go ahead and invest in a full year subscription of UWorld's Qbank as you will be using it to study for nearly all of your Shelf exams and USMLE Step 2.

PreTest makes books of 500 questions for each Shelf Exam. They are generally great for all rotations for those that love studying with practice questions. Don't substitute UWorld questions with these. It should mostly be used as a supplement to UWorld questions.

## II. Specific Shelf Tips

### A. Internal Medicine

- Internal medicine is a great rotation to really develop good habits in history taking, physical exam skills, note writing, and oral presentations. Find a good system for each of these tasks/skills and stick with it. Read on your patients' problems as much as you can.
- Internal medicine half days are organized by system, so it makes it easy to organize your studying by sections in Step Up to Medicine. Not all material on the Shelf is covered by the academic half days. Make sure to study all the sections in Step Up with special attention to the MSK and Ambulatory sections since you will not see much or any of that during this rotation, but it will be tested.
- **Study Plan:**
  - Read through 2 sections in Step Up each week (including the section for that week's academic half day.
  - Do at least 20 UWorld questions a night organized by the sections you're reading each week. There are a lot for IM, so if questions really help you, you can definitely do more than 20 a night and still have questions left over.
- **Resources:**
  - UWorld is overall considered the most useful resource for the Internal Medicine NBME. Write down a pearl from each question and review these before the week before the shelf. UWorld cites specific studies for topics and these are typically not tested.
  - Step Up to Medicine is a commonly used resource to study the essential material in each topic in Internal Medicine.
  - "High Yield Internal Medicine" PPT and Video by Emma Ramahi

## B. Surgery

- Surgery can be very tough to schedule time for Shelf studying, as there are many topics to learn about in order to be proficient in the OR. These include tool names, surgical techniques, suture tying, and anatomy/other trivia. You may need to devote the first few days or even the first week of studying to these topics until you feel somewhat comfortable in the OR. By week 2, you need to begin fitting studying for the Shelf in to your schedule in addition to preparing for the next day's cases.
- If you have not had your Internal Medicine rotation yet, consider reviewing the GI and Cardiology sections in Step Up to Medicine, these are the most tested subjects on the Shelf.
- Surgical Recall is a great book to read before cases, it will cover questions that your attending may ask you during the surgery. It is not helpful for Shelf studying.
- UWorld has a limited number of questions for surgery, consider doing Pretest questions for more practice questions.
- **Study Plan:**
  - Divide up the material in the resources you choose by the days until the Shelf Exam and complete that much of the material each day to stay on track.
  - Do at least 20 UWorld questions a night organized by the sections you're reading each week.
- **Resources:**
  - Dr. Pestana Surgery Notes Book is extremely high yield. If possible, read through twice as you pick up additional pearls a second time.
  - NMS Casebook
  - "High Yield Surgery" PPT and Video by Emma Ramahi
  - CaseFiles Surgery
  - The online UWorld lectures can be helpful to gain a better understanding of a surgery, but not necessarily applicable for the Shelf

## C. Psychiatry

- You may hear students from other campuses/schools throw around the term “Psychation” to describe the Psychiatry rotation. This is not necessarily the case, especially when rotating in Augusta. Clinical hours can be demanding. For this reason, it is important to start studying early, as these four weeks pass very quickly. Since this is usually considered an “easier topic”, a higher score is necessary on this Shelf to attain an A.
- Pay extra attention when a Psychiatry diagnosis is based on a time period. These can be quite tricky during testing.
- A lot of the questions on the Shelf have to do with determining if something is normal or a psychiatric condition. Make sure you can distinguish between the two.
- 5-10% of questions are Neurology.
- **Study Plan:**
  - Divide up the material in the resources you choose by the days until the Shelf Exam and complete that much of the material each day to stay on track.
  - Do at least 20 UWorld questions a night
- **Resources:**
  - First Aid for Psychiatry Clerkship
  - Lange Q&A can be done alongside First Aid. Take notes to review before the shelf.

## D. Neurology

- Overall, students agree that this is a difficult shelf. Similar with psychiatry, it is very important to start studying early as the four weeks pass quicker than anticipated. There is a great deal of Neurology on Step 2, so it is worth the time to learn this material well during the rotation.
- It seems like no matter what specialty you end up in, it will behoove you to become very familiar with diagnosis and management of strokes, headaches, and seizures. Make sure you have those down packed by the end of this rotation.
- Drill down the main points. Neuropathies seemed to be emphasized more than expected.
- 5-10% of questions are Psychiatry
- **Study Plan:**
  - Divide up Blueprints by the days until the Shelf Exam and complete that much of the material each day to stay on track.
  - Do at least 20 UWorld questions a night
- **Resources:**
  - Blueprints for Neurology provides a strong foundation of knowledge. It is useful to finish Blueprints a week in advance and leave extra time to focus on questions.
  - Neurology PreTest questions are harder than UWorld. PreTest can be done first and then UWorld act as more as a summary. Take notes on pearls and review a week before the shelf.



## E. Family Medicine

- Family Medicine Shelf can be challenging to study for because it is VERY broad field. There isn't one particularly good resource. Try to focus on breadth and not depth.
- Review high yield preventive medicine and screening guidelines - these are commonly tested on many Shelf exams.
- Study MSK and Dermatology, these topics are emphasized on the Shelf.
- Read the ambulatory section of Step Up To Medicine.
- The AAFP website also has articles that are quick reads if you are consistently getting AAFP questions wrong about one topic. They are good at spelling out the level that you need to know about that topic.
- **Study Plan:**
  - Divide up the material in the resources you choose by the days until the Shelf Exam and complete that much of the material each day to stay on track.
  - Resources available are primary questions, so it is recommended to do more questions than normal. Do at least 40 AAFP or Pre-test questions a night.
- **Resources:**
  - AAFP questions
  - Pre-Test for Family Medicine
  - Pocket Primary Care (by Mass Gen) was extremely useful on the rotation for quick reference as well as being thorough enough in terms of certain Shelf content

## F. Pediatrics

- Pediatrics in Augusta requires 2 weeks of inpatient and 4 weeks of outpatient. It is important to keep in mind that studying during inpatient weeks can be difficult so plan accordingly.
- The Pediatrics rotation has a lot of extra work and assignments outside of academic half day and clinic hours. Try and take care of as much as you can early so you can focus on Shelf studying.
- Pay attention and take notes during academic half day! If you do that, you will have everything you need to study right before the departmental exam.
- Unfortunately there are definitely questions on obscure rare diseases. Immunodeficiencies should not be ignored!
- The BRS pediatrics book is the best pediatric study book out there, but beware, it is quite extensive. If you decide to tackle that challenge, be sure you are committed to sticking to your plan so you finish the book during the rotation. It's better to finish a less comprehensive source, than get half way through BRS.
- **Study Plan:**
  - Divide up the material in the resources you choose by the days until the Shelf Exam and complete that much of the material each day to stay on track.
  - Do at least 20 UWorld questions a night organized by the sections you're reading each week.
- **Resources:**
  - BRS Pediatrics
  - "High Yield Pediatrics" PPT and Video by Emma Ramahi
  - "High Yield Shelf Notes" available on D2L
  - PreTest Pediatrics is very helpful question book combined with UWorld.

## G. OB/GYN

- OB/GYN is another rotation like surgery that can feel like another world. This can make it difficult to make time for studying for the Shelf. Try to learn enough in the first week to feel comfortable in the clinical setting.
- Know all about the stages of labor, fetal monitoring, and delivery method in the first week of your OB rotation even though some of these things won't be emphasized on the Shelf.
- Make sure to do your best to put yourself in position to be allowed by your preceptor to do a delivery on your own no matter how scary it may seem.
- **Study Plan:**
  - Divide up the material in the resources you choose by the days until the Shelf Exam and complete that much of the material each day to stay on track.
  - Do at least 20 UWorld questions or ACOG questions a night organized by the sections you're reading each week.
- **Resources:**
  - ACOG UWorld online questions are extremely helpful. ACOG Questions and UWorld questions as a combined resource are great preparation together.
  - Master the Boards Gyn/Ob sections were extremely thorough for Shelf
  - Beckman is one of the few textbooks assigned for the rotation that is a good study tool for the Shelf.
  - Case Files
  - OB/GYN High Yield Shelf notes