

NBME Step Preparation Exams – Trek Curriculum

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General Information

What do all the NBME abbreviations stand for?

There are four different exams that the NBME offers to help students prepare for Step 1 and Step 2. All exams contain 200 items (i.e., test questions) and standard-paced timing is 5 hours. See Table 1 for a description of each exam and how they compare.

Table 1. NBME Step Preparation Exams

	Step 1	Step 2	Details
Self-assessment	CBSSA	CCSSA	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Not proctored and can be taken on-demand• Flexible timing: Standard-paced or Self-paced• Students can review items and how they answered• Students can purchase themselves; results not provided to the school for self-purchased tokens
Comprehensive Exam	CBSE	CCSE	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Proctored in-person• Timed for each student according to any test accommodations• Items are secure and not available for student review afterward• Not available for student purchase• School receives administration-level performance information not available for self-assessments

Are these exams required? When are they taken during the curriculum?

Students are required to take the CBSE three times (twice during the Plains year and once at the end of the Advanced Science Courses (ASCs)) and the CCSE once at the end of the Foothills year. See Table 2 for a schedule of when these exams are offered during the Trek curriculum. During the Alpine Basecamp, the school will offer an optional CCSSA token for students to use as they prepare for Step 2. Student results from school-purchased tokens will be shared with the School of Medicine (CUSOM).

The CUSOM requires comprehensive exams instead of self-assessments for numerous reasons. First, because students can purchase CBSSA and CCSSA tokens themselves, administering the CBSE and CCSE to the class provides a practice opportunity otherwise not available to students. Furthermore, numerous studies have demonstrated benefits from taking practice exams in proctored settings over self-administered practice exams, with the proctored exams better reflecting the Step test environment and resulting in more accurate Step score predictions.

Table 2. NBME Step Preparation Exam Schedule

	Plains	Foothills	ASCs	Alpine
Step 1 preparation	CBSE given 2 times in Traverse weeks 3 & 5		CBSE at end of ASCs	
Step 2 preparation		CCSE at end of year		Optional CCSSA

When will we receive our results?

The NBME usually releases score reports to schools within 3 business days after conclusion of a CBSE or CCSE testing window. We then strive to review, upload, and release score reports through Oasis by the end of the following business day. Students will be emailed when score reports are available, typically within one week of taking the exam.

How do I access my results?

Students will be able to review their performance report and question level feedback report in Oasis. Students will also be able to view their performance on all NBME exams in the Dashfolio. Here, you will be able to track your performance over time, view your overall score, as well as your content area results. Additionally, you will be able to compare your performance in each area to the class average. [You may access your class specific Dashfolio here.](#)

What if I have questions that aren't answered in this document?

For general exam inquiries:

Office of Assessment, Evaluation, and Outcomes (AEO) - Assessment Team
som.ume-assessment@ucdenver.edu

For NBME step prep exam scheduling & administration:

Office of AEO - Marisha Roberts
Marisha.Roberts@CUAnschutz.edu

For Dashfolio support:

Office of AEO - Sean Marshall
Sean.Marshall@CUAnschutz.edu

For Step exam preparation and support:

Office of AEO - Tai Lockspeiser, MD
Tai.Lockspeiser@CUAnschutz.edu

Step 1:

Office of Student Life (OSL) - Deb Seymour, PsyD

Deb.Seymour@CUAnschutz.edu

Step 2:

OSL - Nida Awadallah, MD

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CBSE Information

How is the CBSE scored?

Now that Step 1 is pass/fail, the score you receive on the CBSE is an equated percent correct (EPC) that ranges from 0 to 100. This does **NOT** refer to what percentage of questions you answered correctly like your scores on the Plains exams, but rather takes into consideration the difficulty of the items and gives an estimate of how much of the material you have mastered. NBME has published that the low-passing range for Step 1 is between an EPC of 62 and 68.

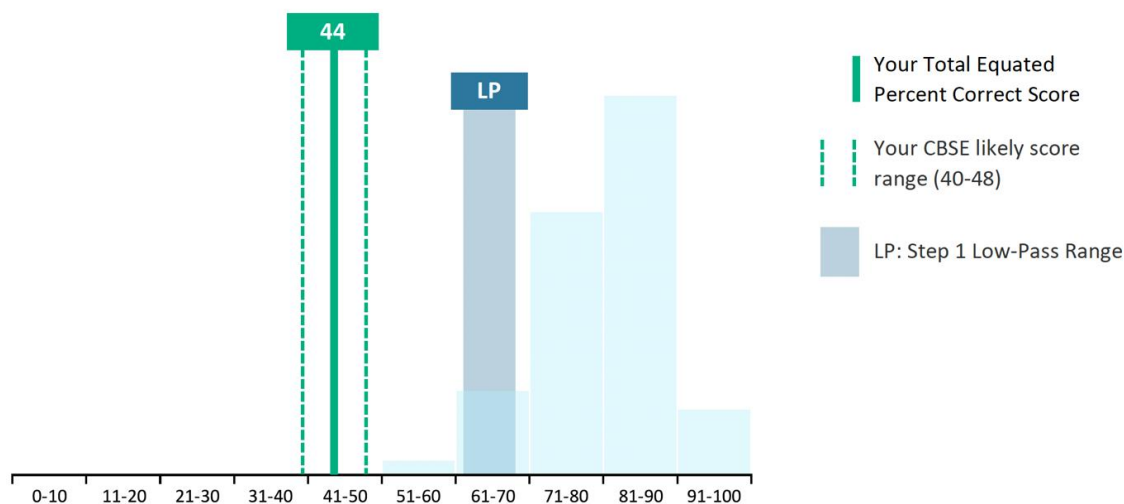
How do I interpret my CBSE results?

You will receive two score reports:










1. Performance Report – Contains your overall EPC score and a breakdown of your comparative performance by Physician Task, System, and Discipline. This is similar to the data you see in your Dashfolio.
2. Question Level Feedback Report – Contains a content area description of each item, whether you answered the item correctly, and what the national % correct was for that item.

CBSE Performance Report

Based on your performance on this CBSE, your estimated probability of passing Step 1 if you test within a week is 7%.



The first chart shows your equated percent correct (EPC) score in comparison to a recent national cohort of students (visualized in light blue). If you took the CBSE again tomorrow, chances are your score wouldn't be exactly the same. You can see your predicted score range at the right of the chart, which is +/- 4 from your Total EPC. This report also provides the probability of passing Step 1 if you were testing within a week. Don't let a low percentage during the Plains worry you as you will learn additional Step 1 content during the ASCs.

	Your EPC Score	Comparison Group Average EPC Score	Score Comparison:			% of Questions
			Lower	Same	Higher	
Performance by Discipline						
Pathology	41	81				44 - 52%
Physiology	46	80				25 - 35%
Microbiology & Immunology	41	81				16 - 26%
Biochemistry and Nutrition	38	81				14 - 24%
Pharmacology	54	83				15 - 22%
Gross Anatomy & Embryology	36	76				11 - 15%
Behavioral Sciences	54	87				8 - 13%
Histology & Cell Biology	44	78				8 - 13%
Genetics	45	80				5 - 9%

The next page of your score report includes information about your areas of relative strength and weakness by System, Discipline, and Physician Task. Use the EPC scores to help identify your strengths and areas for growth. In the example above, the student’s EPC score is highest in Pharmacology and Behavioral Sciences, and lowest in Gross Anatomy & Embryology. This would suggest more attention to Gross Anatomy & Embryology, or reflection on why that Discipline is a weakness would be a worthwhile use of time. It can be helpful to compare this with your Plains and ASC exam performance data in the Dashfolio to see if there are similarities or differences. If you do not know how to access your Dashfolio, email Sean Marshall (Sean.Marshall@CUAnschutz.edu).

CBSE Question-Level Feedback Report

This report includes the topic for each of the questions you answered, whether you answered it correctly, and what the national % correct was for that question. This report has even more detail than the Performance Report and can give you a good sense of what information you are retaining and what you need to review. As a reminder, this is a secure exam, so you do not have access to the questions you answered as you would for a self-assessment.

Plains: Why are we taking a practice Step 1 exam so early in our medical training?

The CBSE is an exam created by the NBME to simulate Step 1. The blueprint (what topics are covered and in what percentages) is the same as Step 1. This exam can be seen as a type of “progress test.” Progress testing refers to using repeated assessments representing the goal of what is to be learned over time to track a learner’s growth. Progress testing is an educational modality known to support student learning and long-term retention. Having more experience with the type of questions that you will see on Step 1 will help you understand what you are aiming for to pass this exam. In addition, because Step 1 is primarily vignette style questions, it provides practice in reasoning through patient scenarios like what you will do in clinical settings. In the Plains courses we usually only provide patients

with problems relevant to the topic being covered (e.g., a child with nephrotic syndrome during the Renal & Urinary Systems block). However, this isn't how Step 1 or the clinical world work – a child will come in with swollen eyes and it is up to you to determine if that is from a renal etiology or something else (e.g., allergies, irritants, infection). Sometimes you might not know about all the different diseases that could cause a particular presentation, but your medical training should at least provide you with a foundation to reason through the case and make an informed guess. Answering Step 1 questions on the CBSE gives you the opportunity to practice this skill.

Plains: Should I study for the CBSE?

This is not a test that you can cram for because it covers such a wide range of material. The most important thing to do is to go into the exam with an open mind and try your best to apply the knowledge you have learned so far in the Plains. Students have used their experience with the CBSE as another means of feedback to adjust study practices for the overall curriculum and future standardized exams.

Plains: What should I do when I see a question that we haven't learned anything about?

We know that you haven't learned everything yet, which is why we don't expect you to answer all questions correctly. Don't be worried when you come to a question that you have no idea how to answer. Instead of getting frustrated, see if you can reason your way to an answer or make an informed guess. If you can't, just select an answer and move on (it is in your best interest to answer every question because points are not deducted for incorrect answers).

Plains: Is there a passing score for the CBSE?

Our goal is mostly to help you assess your progress as you move through the Plains. However, we do expect all students to take this exam seriously and demonstrate the knowledge they have gained. In addition, we want to identify any student who may struggle on the standardized tests needed to become a physician. **Therefore, there is a cut score for the Traverse 5 CBSE (end of Plains) based on national averages for students at the end of their pre-clinical time.**

- Students who cannot obtain a **score of at least 41** on the Traverse 5 CBSE will be required to retake the CBSE prior to the start of the LIC basecamp.
 - Students who cannot obtain a score of at least 41 on the retake will not be able to start the Foothills on time and will be referred to the Promotions Committee for discussion.

Students who cannot obtain a **score of at least 46** on the Traverse 5 CBSE will be noted as a concern that will be reviewed by the Trek Progress Committee in addition to their performance on the other exams in the Plains.

ASCs: Is there a passing score for the CBSE?

No. This CBSE is the final Step 1 preparation opportunity the CUSOM offers, and we trust students will take it seriously. However, after the Office of Student Life (OSL) reviews the CBSE results, they may reach out to individual students who they feel may be in danger of not passing Step 1.

CCSE Information

How is the CCSE scored?

The CCSE utilizes the same scoring methodology as the Step 2 clinical knowledge (CK) exam and results are reported on a scale ranging from 1-300. The NBME has published that the low-passing range for Step 2 is between 214 and 226.

You cannot figure out your percentage of correct answers from your scaled score (e.g., A score of 225 is not equivalent to 75%). However, you will receive equated percent correct (EPC) scores for each content area on the exam, which estimates the percentage of the content that you mastered on the exam. This does **NOT** refer to the exact percentage of questions you answered correctly, but rather takes into consideration the difficulty of the items and gives an estimate of how much of the material you have mastered.

How do I interpret my CCSE results?

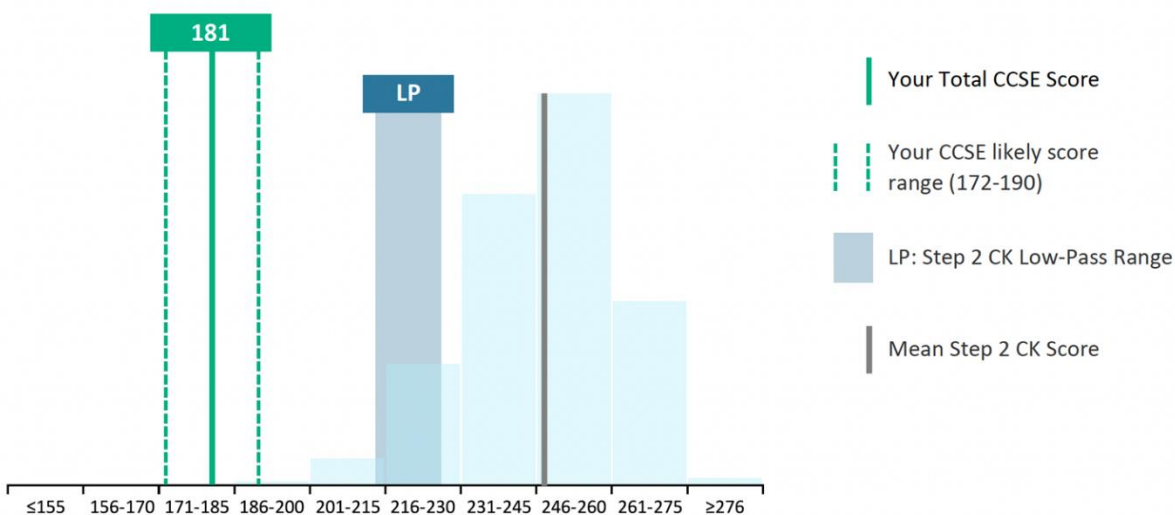
You will receive two score reports:

1. Performance Report – Contains your overall EPC score and a breakdown of your comparative performance by Physician Task, System, and Discipline. This is similar to the data you see in your Dashfolio.
2. Question Level Feedback Report – Contains a content area description of each item, whether you answered the item correctly, and what the national % correct was for that item.






CCSE Performance Report

The first chart shows your score **in comparison to students taking Step 2 CK** (visualized in light blue). This chart also shows your likelihood of passing Step 2 if you were to take it within a week. It is 100% okay for this number to be low if you are not taking Step 2 within a week!

Based on your performance on this CCSE, your estimated probability of passing Step 2 CK if you test within a week is 20%.



The next page of your score report includes information on your areas of relative strength and weakness by System, Discipline, and Physician Task. An EPC score is included for each section as well as the average EPC score for the comparison group (students taking Step 2 for the first time). When you review this report, look to see if there are particular areas of strength or weakness. In the example below, the student's EPC score is highest in psychiatry and lowest in surgery. This would suggest more attention to surgery, or reflection on why surgery is a weakness would be a worthwhile use of time. Your relative strengths and weaknesses are a great place to start when planning your studying for Step 2. You can also look at this information by System or Physician Task.

	Your EPC Score	Comparison Group Average EPC Score	Score Comparison:			% of Questions
			Lower	Same	Higher	
Performance by Discipline						
Medicine	47	75				50 - 60%
Surgery	42	74				25 - 30%
Pediatrics	46	76				20 - 25%
Obstetrics & Gynecology	72	77				10 - 20%
Psychiatry	75	81				10 - 15%

CCSE Question-Level Feedback Report

This report includes the topic for each of the questions you answered, whether you answered it correctly or not, and what the national % correct was for that question. This report has even more detail than the Performance Report and can give you a good sense of what information you are retaining and what you need to review. As a reminder, this is a secure exam, so you do not have access to the questions you answered as you would for a self-assessment.

Foothills: Is there a passing score for the CCSE?

Our goal with this exam is mostly to help you assess your progress as you move through the Foothills. However, we do expect all students to take this seriously and demonstrate the knowledge they have gained. In addition, we want to identify any student who may struggle on the standardized tests needed to become a physician. Therefore, there is a cut-off score for the CCSE at the end of the Foothills year. Students who cannot obtain a score **of at least 161** will be reviewed by the Trek Progress Committee in addition to their performance on the other exams in the Foothills.