



A Guide to First Year Medical Students

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Acknowledgments:

This guide is a compilation of MMC mentors' experiences, tips, and tricks to help you navigate your first year in medical school. Special thanks to all the mentors who contributed!



1. Academics

I. Studying

A. What advice would you give your 1st year self about studying?

- Do your best to stay on top of the material. It is better to start studying earlier, rather than studying at the last minute. There is too much to learn for a short period of time;
- Have a workflow: preview, learn, review, reinforce, practice;
- Explore resources early so you know which resources are best for you;
- Keep yourself organized. Find a good schedule and plan out what you will study each day on the week of an exam;
- Medical school is a marathon, not a sprint. Try to get a good 45-60 min of studying every day rather than cramming.

B. What are some study habits/tips that have worked especially well for you?

- Summarizing notes and creating concept maps/tables/logic trees for lectures helps you consolidate your learning by seeing the big picture, which you can then fill in with the details.
- Cross reference with different external resources to reinforce concepts and gain a better understanding of complex topics.
- Make sure to block out time and set study goals; what are you hoping to accomplish in a given study session?
- Keep a routine, study around the same time and use the same time blocking method (e.g., Pomodoro).
- Make sure to take breaks, exercise and socialize to keep yourself motivated when studying!

C. How can you best prepare for exams?

- Try to review concepts early and on a daily basis so that you remember key information around cumulative exam time!
- Focus on having a good understanding of the broader topics/concepts instead of the details. You can often logically work out details if you have a strong foundation of general physiology.
- Make practice questions after your lectures, refer to them when studying for exams.



D. The amount of material in medical school can be overwhelming — how do you know what to focus on when studying?

- Focus on understanding instead of memorizing key concepts, so you can critically reason about the rest.
- Focus on the clinically relevant material (e.g., clinical features, investigations, differential diagnoses and treatment options).
- Pay attention to the learning objectives and focus on concepts that keep being repeated because it is impossible to know/remember absolutely everything.

E. Are there any studying/note-taking resources you would recommend, and why?

- Note-taking:
 - OneNote for annotating lecture PDFs and keeping everything in one place
- Subscription-based medical learning platform (concept videos + practice :
 - Sketchy for microbiology and pharmacology
 - Osmosis
 - AMBOSS
 - Boards & Beyond
- Flashcards/question practice:
 - Quizlet for practicing questions
 - Anki
- Textbooks:
 - Bates Guide to Physical Exams
 - First Aid for the USMLE Step 1 (textbook)
 - Merck Manual of Diagnosis

II. Research

A. How do you find research opportunities in medical school?

There are several ways to go about finding research opportunities. Here are a few:

- Don't be afraid to reach out to staff or residents with interests that overlap with your potential research interests;



- Check if your medical school has a summer or longitudinal research program;
- Ask upper years who they recommend as research supervisors;
- Start your own project (especially if it's not involving data collection or wet work, e.g. a lit review) and find someone willing to supervise you;
- Some researchers might announce that they are looking for students, so be on the lookout.

B. Any advice for balancing research & medical school?

- Make sure you get settled in medical school and assess how much free time you have before trying to do research. Don't bite off more than you can chew!
- Put in some time to work on your research project every day/week; it will be a lot easier than trying to cram for deadlines and will make a better impression on researchers. For example, you could wake up a little bit earlier to do some research before your virtual classes.
- Clinically-focused research (e.g. case reports) might be easier to balance with medical school than wet lab work, even though both are still a possibility.
- Doing research during the school year is not essential! If you're interested in research you can do some really good projects just working over the summer. If you're not interested in doing research at all, don't do it! You may hear lots of people talking about their research projects, but spend your time wisely doing things that you enjoy/care about.



III. MD/PhD

A. What advice do you have for incoming MD/PhD students about managing the academic load of this program?

- Take advantage of the MD/PhD events offered by your program - it's a great opportunity to get to know your classmates and upper years who have invaluable advice.
- For the most part, focus on the degree program that you're in. Your job in PhD is to become the best scientist you can and your job in MD is to become the best med student/future doctor that you can. Obviously, there are times when there may be overlap (whether out of necessity or by choice) and it may make sense to continue shadowing etc in PhD, but definitely don't worry about trying to get too much of a jump start on research if you are starting in MD or about trying to study ahead for MD if you're in PhD.
- If the two programs do overlap, make sure you set aside an appropriate amount of time for each - PhD may be easier to push off because the deadlines tend to be more flexible, so set deadlines for yourself and allocate time accordingly.

2. Social

I. Networking

A. How have you been able to connect with your peers during the pandemic?

- You can study with your peers on Facetime/Zoom, check in on each other often, and participate in socially-distanced gatherings;
- You can get involved in projects of interest to you during the year; you can get to meet a lot of amazing people this way.



B. What social events do you recommend incoming medical students to attend?

- All events that seem interesting to you! You will meet people best in environments where you are most comfortable.

II. Hobbies

A. Any advice on balancing hobbies & medical school?

- You will only have time for what you make time for. You have to schedule your priorities. It is important to take care of your mental health and this means actively setting time aside for the things you love. Give yourself a well-deserved break from med school, because med school never stops. We know that this is easier said than done, but it can help to make a schedule and stick to it. Set a time where you finish work and are done with it, and start focusing on what you love to do.

B. Are there any hobbies that you would recommend to incoming medical students?

- Learn how to cook if you don't already; it's great for sustenance, socialisation, creativity, etc.

III. Time management & work-life balance?

A. Any tips on finding time for ourselves or time management during medical school?

- "As mentioned elsewhere, med school will eat up all your time if you let it - there is always more to read and study and learn. You will have to make time for the things that matter to you. Especially in pre-clerkship (classroom phase of med school), you definitely have time to take at least an hour or two for yourself every day (most of the time), so make the decision to spend time on things/people that you care about. Also, med school will be full of high-achieving people who always seem to be doing more things than you....just focus on yourself!



- Remember that everyone manages med school differently and everyone has different life commitments outside of med school.
- Also, know when to stop studying. There will always be more to study, but at a certain point it may just be diminishing returns. Once you feel you've learned enough or have reached your limit, take a break and come back to it another time. It's very worth it to maintain a life outside of med school - whether that's with clubs or at the gym or with your family. Don't ever feel guilty about giving some of your time to something that isn't med school!"

B. Do you have any advice about balancing medical school's workload with one's personal life?

- "Takes time to cultivate, but eventually you realise there's always more time to learn your medicine (for the most part), but certain life events can't be rescheduled. You have to roll with the punches, understanding that you're in medicine for the long haul of becoming an excellent physician, not just to ace your upcoming test."
- "Same as hobbies, balance is key and you have to make time for the things that matter to you. It might mean not being able to see your friends every time they gather but making sure to do it sometimes so that you take care of yourself."

3. ECs & other activities

I. Medicine-related ECs

A. Is shadowing important?

- Shadowing, especially earlier on in your medical studies, can be helpful in exploring and figuring out your clinical interests. It could also be helpful in networking.



B. How can one find shadowing/observership opportunities?

- Do not be shy to contact staff and residents, regardless of whether you have previously met them or not. You can also find opportunities through class facebook pages or word of mouth including from upper year students, so keep an eye open for those.

C. Would you recommend incoming medical students to join speciality interest clubs, and why?

- Joining a specialty interest club could have some advantages. First, these clubs are a good opportunity to make connections in your specialty of interest, for research and general networking purposes. Second, executive positions could be valuable for students looking to have more leadership experience. Third, specialty interest clubs can constitute a source of community for people sharing an interest. That being said, all of the above can also be done independently, outside of a specialty interest club.

II. Non-med related ECs

A. What are some non-medical opportunities/activities you would recommend?

- “Personally, I love educational outreach. I get to meet people from different backgrounds and give back/try and inspire youth to pursue their dreams. I'm still in touch with students from 6+ years ago!” - MMC mentor

B. What are some financial opportunities/manageable ways to make some money as a med student?

- “Freelance writing (if you're good at it). In general, think about what your talents are/what you enjoy doing, and figure out how to monetize it.” - MMC mentor



4. Mental health & well-being

I. How do you deal with stress/pressure as a med student?

- Have a good support system;
- Take time for yourself and what you love to do;
- Meditate, take things one day at a time, and trust the process.

II. Any general advice on mental health & well-being?

- Med school isn't worth a burnout. You are the priority, so take time for yourself;
- Eat well, sleep well, exercise, meditate;
- Don't wait for free time to arise, it won't, you have to make time for yourself intentionally.

5. COVID-19

I. What is the day of a pre-clerk med student like (during the pandemic)?

- Here is what some of our mentors have to say:
 - "8am: wake up
8-9am: social media time / check emails
9am: review and anki
10-12: deep study for tutorial
12-1 break
1-4: deep study for tutorial
4-5/6: extracurricular time
6 onwards: relax, hobbies"
 - "I do my paperwork over coffee before class, have breakfast during, then get a quick workout in during lunch. After school I workout (if lunch was short), have meetings, study, try and have a little downtime."

II. How did you adapt to the virtual learning environment?

- Finding a calm setting, free of distractions, in which to listen to your virtual classes, as well as a good sleep hygiene, are key. Try not to attend your classes in bed, no matter how tempting this can be!



III. Any tips on dealing with uncertainty?

- Uncertainty is inherent to medicine and life more generally. You just have to learn to deal with it and roll with the punches. You've made it this far; keep on keeping on!

6. General

I. What is something you wish you knew before beginning medical school?

- If you are not interested in research, it's okay!
- Your peers will be some of the most incredible people you'll meet. Learn from them!

II. What is one piece of advice you would give your 1st-year self?

- Here is some wisdom that upper year mentors want to share with you:
 - "The foundational skills you learn are the most important. Be kind to yourself; you can always study more. This is the most relaxed time of your life so enjoy it."
 - "Do not compare yourself to others. Even if you think you didn't learn anything, you grew so much and acquired so much knowledge in the last 2 years, you will come a long way. Don't pressure yourself too much."
 - "Ça va bien aller (All will be well)"

