

December 2016

BEST OF

# Study Tips

NEXT STEPS IN DERM

A review of the most popular articles on preparing for exams from Next Steps in Derm... **plus an exclusive new article by Laura McGevna, MD.**

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## From the Editor:

Welcome to the “Best Of” Study Tips from Next Steps in Derm! It’s December, which means the In-Training Exams are fast-approaching and, for graduating residents, the Board exams are right around the corner! Preparing for these exams can be very stressful, so Next Steps is recapping some of the best advice and tips from the past year to help you get ready.

This issue features a new, exclusive article from Laura McGevna, MD. Dr. McGevna, an assistant professor of dermatology at the University of Vermont, brings her own experiences and the experience of her students to you. Join her as she shares her advice for preparing for your exams. Not only does she provide great tips for study and preparation, but she also offers tips for getting through test day.

Plus, we are highlighting some of our most popular articles from 2015. In Lindsay Strowd, MD’s article titled “Resources for Dermatology Board Studying,” discover new places to get support. Additionally, we are excited to share again the very popular article featuring William Huang, MD’s tried-and-true tips for preparing for the certifying exam.

We hope these articles will provide you with new tips and tricks, and encouragement, to help you feel well-prepared your exams. Don’t forget there is more online! For more great articles, visit: [www.NextStepsInDerm.com](http://www.NextStepsInDerm.com) and select “Study Tips” from the Topics Menu at the top.

Good luck on your exams,



*Daniel M. Siegel MD, MS, FAAD, Senior Editor*

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## Study Tips



### Preparing for Your Exams

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Well here we are, nearly at the midpoint of another academic year. For some of you, it will be your last year of training. Congratulations! My, how time does fly. Just yesterday the idea of studying for the Boards seemed happily in the distant future. Now it is upon us, with the In-Training Exam around the corner and the Boards on the horizon. Some of you may be concerned or even scared, but you've made it this far and with a plan and good preparation, you will succeed.

When I was in your position, I longed for a simple strategy to help me navigate and sort through seemingly endless study material. And now, with that time but a memory, I feel compelled to share some words of advice.

#### Study and Preparation

**Start preparing early.** The earlier you begin studying and preparing, the better position you will find yourself in later. If you haven't been as vigilant as you should have, don't worry about what you should have done and instead focus on your next goal.

**There are plenty of opportunities to study.** Get work done whenever you can. The days will race by as you get closer to your exams. If you have study materials within

your reach (e.g. books, audio lectures, a smartphone), put them to good use. A little work on a regular basis lays a strong foundation. Put in the time when you have it, whether that may be in a library, coffee shop, while standing in line at the grocery store, or waiting for laundry at the laundromat, etc. The more material you cover, the more comfortable you will be answering a question and moving on.

**Don't procrastinate.** If ever there was a time to explore topics you've brushed aside during residency, it is now. Many among us may have the natural tendency to study what we love, both because it proffers positive reinforcement and because it is much preferable to the slog of drudging through topics that cannot capture our interest. But we do ourselves a great disservice in continuing with this habit in the weeks before the Boards. You will want to make sure you give yourself plenty of time to explore weaker areas, fill in gaps, and commit this new knowledge to memory. But always remember to go back and review the topics you consider mastered once more before test day. Other thoughts:

**Organize your studying into broad categories first** (e.g. surgery,

dermatopathology, general dermatology, pediatrics) and then subcategorize in a way that works for you. These categories may be based off of the index of vetted derm texts, such as Bologna, or they may go according to your training program's didactic schedule. Having structured cognitive scaffolding can really help with processing this amount of information.

**Study often and vary settings.** This reduces the degree of mindlessness that can result from endless hours of staring at books.

**Make studying an active habit.** With new or detailed information, ask yourself how the information might be tested.

**Questions, questions, questions.** You simply cannot do enough, so get your hands on the material and test yourself. Form a study group and ask group members to bring questions or concepts to cover. Teach each other and teach yourself aloud. Create questions from your text books and review materials. Find questions online and through study resources such as Journal of Drugs in Dermatology. Just like in any examination, the better you are at answering questions and figuring out what is being asked, the better you will do.

**Take every opportunity to review photos, previously known to many as "kodachromes".** Like questions, one can never see enough photos. Get your hands on as many as you can and study them for detail. Study photos in derm atlases, such as DuVivier's *Atlas of Clinical Dermatology*, Habif's *Clinical Dermatology*, and Fitzpatrick's *Color Atlas and Synopsis of Clinical Dermatology*.

**Review slides for the dermatopathology section.** I cannot stress this one enough. On the day of the examination, you will be given a set of slides to review, identify, and use for answering a question. On average, you will have approximately two minutes for each slide. This is not the time to get comfortable

using a microscope. On the day of the exam, this should be second nature. The only way to do this is by practicing. Indeed, as study materials are increasingly available on a "virtual scale" either via PowerPoints or virtual readers, many residents are using scopes less often. But on test day, you will need your microscope to answer the questions, so start practicing now. And time yourself. Two minutes never seem to fly by quite as fast as they do on test day, so get used to moving quickly as you do on the traditional question sections.

## General Tips for Test Day

How you approach the test can have a big impact on your performance. Arrive early for your exams. Be sure you know where you are going and what time to be there. If you are flying, be sure to arrive early so you aren't worried about flight delays or reservations.

On your exams, it's essentially impossible to go back and check every answer, and certainly there is no time to pontificate. You simply must choose the best option and move forward. In times like this, we are compelled to make decisions. Sometimes we choose even without knowing why we know an answer or whether we are certain. To have covered study material broadly and extensively is the only way to success here. One can't fake his or her way through exams, so the work must be done regardless of the circumstances. Pick the best answer and move forward.

## Special Notes for the Board Exam

As you approach the Board exams, seriously consider taking a Review course such as those offered at the AAD in March, four months before test day, as they can be extremely helpful. In addition to their review course, the AAD has other additional Board prep resources available to residents. Attend the Boards Blitz session

at the annual Academy meeting and take good notes. At least one year during your training, consider taking the DermPath self-assessment. Attend sessions for residents and review sessions for Boards. Many times, several of those individuals who write questions for the Boards are the same people who host these review sessions. Pay attention to what they say and look for repetition in concepts. If it's important enough to say more than once, chances are you should know it. Finally, review the JAAD CME articles for the past several years and review the AAD slide sets.

Remember the concept of 10,000 hours. Having trained at an accredited US dermatology program, you are already well-prepared for your Boards. With reading and studying at home included, most dermatology residents will clock at least 65 hours a week of dedicated dermatology practice. Over the course of three years of training, this equates to over 10,000 hours steeped in the field. Take heart in this. On test day, remind yourself how much you have prepared and accomplished, letting that knowledge navigate you through complex question stems, difficult slides, and a long process. Remind yourself that you have been preparing for years and the exam is your chance to prove it. Study hard, but have courage. You will be ready on test day.

## Mentors Are Here to Help You

Finally, and maybe most importantly in the process of training and Board preparation, your mentor is a great resource for you. Don't be afraid to ask for help from a mentor if you need it. Most of us remember well the concerns residents have regarding preparation for the Boards, finding a job, applying for fellowship, etc. If you are feeling uneasy about the process, seek help right away. We are here for that reason and we want you to succeed. Small problems can be easily fixed, but if left unattended

tend to get bigger in time. Don't waste another moment if you need help. Just ask. Good luck, and know that with dutiful preparation, confidence, and trust in the process, you will do well!

## 7 POPULAR TIPS FOR TEST DAY

### **1. Arrive to the test early.**

- Be sure to verify the time and location the day before.

### **2. Get a good night's sleep.**

### **3. Drink plenty of water.**

- Keep your brain hydrated so it can think clearly

### **4. Focus on what you know rather than what you don't know.**

- There will always be something you could have studied more
- If you come across a question you're not sure how to answer, take a deep breath, answer it the best you can, and move on

### **5. Set aside time for a healthy breakfast...**

### **6. ...but avoid caffeine!**

- Caffeine is a stimulant, and after the rush wears off, you may feel cranky and crave more

### **7. After the exam, congratulate yourself for doing the best job you could.**

- Don't compare answers with friends, it's only going to stress you out.



## Resources for Dermatology Board Studying

By LINDSAY STROWD, MD  
 “Best Of” Next Steps Online  
 from May 6, 2015

Studying for the dermatology Boards is a stressful task that can feel daunting at times. However, residents need not fear; with the proper resources and good study habits you will feel well-prepared for this exam.

There are a plethora of resources devoted to the dermatology Boards. The AAD meetings provide MOC courses to help dermatologists prepare for re-certification. These courses are comprised of 25-50 Board-quality questions and answers, and will help residents understand the type of questions asked on the Boards. There are also AAD sessions, which focus on high-yield Board topics, such as infectious diseases or genodermatoses. Many residents choose to attend private Board prep courses, such as Barron’s Board Review and Chicago Board Review, among others. These courses can be helpful for residents who struggle with self-guided study, but they can be expensive.

Online study resources are constantly expanding. Some dependable online resources include the Derm In-Review question bank and the AAD Website. The AAD Website has archives of past MOC exams as well as old JAAD CME articles. Residents can also purchase an official Kodachrome set of images. Residents should become familiar with viewing dermatopathology slides since a part of the pathology Board section is digital.

Journals provide good sources of Board-relevant material, and residents should read several each month to stay up to date on current trends in dermatology treatment.

Textbooks are traditional resources that provide the foundation of a resident’s dermatology knowledge. Some quality texts include Bologna’s *Dermatology*, Andrews’ *Diseases of the Skin*, and the du Vivier’s *Atlas of Clinical Dermatology*. These texts serve as a resource for quality images. Approximately half of the board questions contain an image, and the importance of image review cannot be understated. The Derm In-Review binder is another excellent resource. Ideally, one textbook and the Dermatology In-Review text should be reviewed during the six months prior to the Boards.

Residents should create a study schedule that allows review of all pertinent topics within the six months prior to the test date. A reasonable goal is two hours a day during the week, and 8-10 hours during the weekend. You should also schedule study-free days, which will help avoid burnout.

Do not schedule any new topics to review in the final week before the exam, as you will want this time to review areas of special weakness.

Six months prior to the Boards, you should have good knowledge of your personal dermatology strengths and weaknesses. It is tempting to shy away from studying materials with which you are less comfortable, but these should get the most attention.

In-Service Exams and other self-assessments help identify areas of weakness. You have taken many standardized tests and should know how you learn best. Do not deviate from the learning strategies you have utilized up to this point. The Boards are like any other standardized test with a set number of concepts to learn and it is a matter of mastering these.

## Tips for Preparing for the Certifying Exam

By WILLIAM HUANG, MD, MPH, FAAD  
 “Best Of” Next Steps Online  
 from May 5, 2015

When preparing yourself for “the Boards,” there are many things to take into consideration. Read on in to learn tried-and-true tips that will help you on your road to passing the exam and embarking on your career as a certified dermatologist.

**1) This is a marathon, not a race, so start preparing early** – The accumulation of knowledge for the Certifying Examination is meant to take place over the three years of your dermatology residency. This is not an exam you want to cram for. The In-Training Examination (ITE) (aka “Mock Boards” or “In-Service Exam”) is a good gauge of your strengths and weaknesses, and just as importantly, how you compare to your peers. If you struggle with basic science and dermatopathology, spend extra time on these subjects and less on other topics. Make a study plan and stay focused, especially during the time between completing your residency program and taking the examination. Set daily content review goals, get up early, study in blocks, take breaks, and end at a specified time so that you are not worn out for the next day. By the time your examination date comes along, you will feel tired of studying and will be more than ready to take this test.

**2) Know what you’re up against** – A wealth of information can be found on the American Board of Dermatology Website. The American Board of Dermatology has produced a content outline of what they consider relevant topics that can be found here. This is a good starting point for what you’ll need to know for the Certifying Examination. In addition, the general flow of the entire day including the timing and

breakdown of sections can be found on the Website. Arrive at the hotel the day before the exam and settle into your surroundings. Know where the testing site is, arrive early to the testing room on the day of your exam, and plan where you want to have your lunch for the day of the exam.

**3) Get comfortable using a microscope** – Often, dermatopathology is taught with the dermatopathologist “driving” a multi-headed microscope and residents are asked to describe what they see and what they believe the diagnosis is. In addition, you may study dermatopathology virtually online. During the examination, you will have a small cubicle with a computer and individual microscope. You will be questioned on 36 glass histopathologic slides, so you should feel comfortable using a microscope efficiently. Often, a diagnosis can be made on low power, so ‘don’t lose the forest for the trees.’ Recently, there has been the incorporation of virtual dermatopathology, so be prepared for these questions as well.

**4) Practice with as many questions as you can get your hands on** – All residents use the excellent Derm In-Review educational materials (study binder, online questions, Kodachrome application) developed by ETAS. By the time you’re ready to start preparing for the Certifying Examination, you have probably completed most of the questions in the system (often multiple times!). Look for other resources that have Board-relevant questions written in the style of the Certifying Examination. Free resources are offered through The Dermatologist’s Board Review and Fast Facts for Board Review. Nowadays, there are several annual Board review courses and several are offered online for those unable to travel.

Learn more tips for preparing for the certifying exam by reading Part 2 of this article online at: <http://nextstepsinderm.com/physician-advice/preparing-for-boards-2>.



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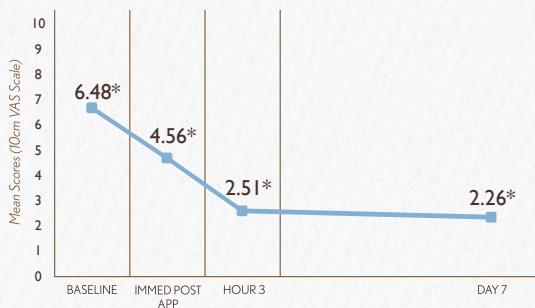
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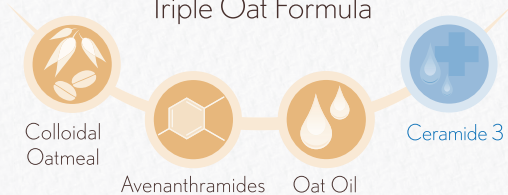
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