School Resource Guide

New UI and Structure Updates

Comprehensive Basic Science Exam
Comprehensive Clinical Science Exam

What's Inside

- Includes overview of updates, new examinee experience, proctor and administration information, and FAQs.

Resources

- Access this guide at **https://www.nbme.org/institutions/assess-learn/subject-exams/comprehensive**
- E-mail questions concerning the administration of the exam to **subjectexams@nbme.org**

What's New

- Initial information about the upcoming exam updates.

This manual contains proprietary information that must remain confidential

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Beginning February 22, 2027, the Comprehensive Basic Science Exam (CBSE) and Comprehensive Clinical Science Exam (CCSE) will use an updated user interface and a new block and break structure. The total number of questions, total exam time, content, scoring and examinee performance reporting will not change.

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OVERVIEW OF THE CHANGE

NBME is updating the CBSE and CCSE experience to more closely align with the current USMLE® Step 1 and Step 2 Clinical Knowledge (CK) experience. The updated interface will offer improved navigation, searchable lab values, notes, text resizing up to 200%, image controls, a dark theme and improved highlighting. The exams will also move from 4 Test Blocks each containing 50 exam questions (items) to 10 Test Blocks each containing 20 items, with a new break experience between blocks.

Schools should prepare examinees and proctors for the new break structure, which includes Authorized Breaks and Unauthorized Breaks. Authorized Breaks provide examinees freedom to use break timing as needed while maintaining exam security and occur only after the Tutorial or between Test Blocks. Unauthorized Breaks occur during an active Test Block and are intended for personal emergencies.

Exam Feature	Before February 22, 2027	As of February 22, 2027
Total Questions	200	200
Total Exam Time (Standard-Time)	5 hours, 30 minutes	5 hours, 30 minutes
Number of Test Blocks	4	10
Questions per Test Block	50	20
Time per Test Block	1 hour, 15 minutes	30 minutes
Tutorial	15 minutes	10 minutes
Authorized Break time	15 minutes	20 minutes

BENEFITS FOR SCHOOLS AND EXAMINEES

- A more consistent testing experience that more closely aligns with the block and break structure of the USMLE Step 1 and Step 2 CK.
- Shorter Test Blocks that may make pacing feel more manageable during the exam.
- More flexible Authorized Break time that can be used based on individual examinee needs.
- Updated interface features that support usability, including improved navigation and tools designed to support the testing experience.

HELPFUL DEFINITIONS

Block: A block is a fixed segment of the exam. Blocks can either content instructions and information for examinees (Tutorial) or exam questions (Test Block). Once an examinee completes a block, they are unable to return to that block or any previous blocks.

Authorized Break: Authorized Break is the type of break occurring between blocks. During an Authorized Break, exam security is maintained as there is no exam content visible on the screen and examinees cannot return to previous blocks or access previous exam content. Set time is allocated for the Authorized Break and does not count against time for the Tutorial or Test Blocks. The Authorized Break format is similar to the experience on the USMLE Steps 1 and 2 CK.

- Examinees may take more than one Authorized Breaks during an exam between different blocks based on their remaining break time.
- Standard-time examinees begin with 20 minutes of Authorized Break time, which may be used as needed between blocks.
- Authorized Break time is adjusted for 1.25x, 1.5x and 2.0x timing accommodations. For example, an examinee with 2.0x timing starts with 40 minutes of Authorized Break time.

Unauthorized Break: Unauthorized Break is a break taken during a block and is available if an examinee has an emergency situation. After ending an Unauthorized Break, examinees return to their current block and can continue to access all exam content in that block. No set time is provided for the Unauthorized Break, and any time spent in an Unauthorized Break comes from time allocated for the current block.

EXAMINEE EXPERIENCE

Experience Using Authorized Break

1. **Complete and review the Test Block.** After answering all items, the toolbar's red End Block button changes to an arrow. The examinee may review answers, including marked items, before leaving the block.

2. **End the Test Block.** When ready, the examinee selects "End Block" and receives a warning that the completed block cannot be reopened. The examinee selects "End Block" again to confirm.

3. **Review the Break Screen.** After the block closes, the Break Screen appears and displays the length of the next Test Block, remaining Authorized Break time and an overview of all exam blocks, including standard time and number of items.

4. **Choose whether to continue or take an Authorized Break.** On the Break Screen the examinee selects "Start Next Block" to continue testing and begin the next Test Block or "Take a Break" to begin an Authorized Break. If no selection is made within 30 seconds, an Authorized Break begins automatically.

5. **Take an Authorized Break.** Examinees take an Authorized Break if needed. During this time, no exam content is visible and previously completed blocks cannot be reopened.
    - Examinees do not need to be escorted during an Authorized Break as the exam content remains secure.

6. **Start the next Test Block.** The examinee selects “Start Next Block” on the Break Screen. The next Test Block opens, and the examinee continues the exam.

Experience Using Unauthorized Break

1. **Take an Unauthorized Break only during an emergency.** If an examinee must step away during an active open Test Block, they select the Lock button. Exam content is hidden, but the Test Block timer continues to run. If the examinee steps away without selecting the Lock button, the exam automatically enters Unauthorized Break status after 5 minutes of inactivity. If the Unauthorized Break exceeds the time remaining in the Test Block, the exam moves to Authorized Break status.
    - **Examinees need to be escorted during an Unauthorized Break** as the previous exam content in the active block can be accessed after returning from the Unauthorized Break.

2. **Continue the active open Test Block.** Once the examinee returns from their Unauthorized Break, the examinee selects “Return to Exam” to resume the active block.

Maintaining Consistent Total Exam Time

To maintain consistent total exam time for all examinees within an administration, Authorized Break time may be adjusted based on an examinee’s activity.

If an examinee ends the Tutorial or a Test Block before the allotted time expires, the remaining time is added to the examinee’s remaining Authorized Break time. The examinee can use that time later in the exam between blocks.

If an examinee exceeds available Authorized Break time, a warning will appear on the Break Screen indicating that the examinee has run out of Authorized Break time and that time from future Test Blocks may be reduced. The overage time used in Authorized Break will be deducted from remaining test sections, beginning with the last Test Block

GUIDANCE FOR PROCTORS AND SCHOOLS

All Administrations

Confirm whether the examinee’s screen shows an Authorized Break or Unauthorized Break.

- Do not escort examinees during Authorized Breaks. Examinees cannot view questions or return to completed blocks.
- For Unauthorized Breaks examinees should be escorted to prevent access to test preparation materials.

File a standard incident report for an Unauthorized Break, documenting the reason for the break and how long the examinee was away from the exam.

Accommodated Administrations

Examinees on 1.25x, 1.5x, or 2.0x time administrations will have their Authorized Break time adjusted according to the time multiplier. For example, an examinee on 2.0x time administration would receive 40 minutes of Authorized Break time.

For examinees on accommodated administrations that span two days, current processes and policies still apply. At the end of Day 1, the proctor quits the exam by exiting the secure browser. On Day 2, the exam is resumed. Timing impacts from Day 1 will continue to Day 2.

SCHOOL PREPARATION CHECKLIST

- Share the February 22, 2027 go-live date with examinees, faculty, testing staff, and proctors.
- Explain that exam content, scoring, performance reporting, total questions and total exam time are unchanged.
- Prepare examinees for 10 shorter Test Blocks and the updated break structure.
- Review the difference between Authorized and Unauthorized Breaks with examinees and proctors.
- Review timing implications with staff who support accommodated administrations.
- Use the preview exams when available and monitor NBME Updates for announcements about additional support resources.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Scope of Impact

When will the updated CBSE and CCSE user interface and structure go live?
The updated CBSE and CCSE user interface and structure are scheduled to be available for administration on February 22, 2027.

Which exams are included in this update?
This update applies to the Comprehensive Basic Science Examination (CBSE) and Comprehensive Clinical Science Examination (CCSE).

Are similar updates planned for the Comprehensive Basic Science Self-Assessment (CBSSA), Comprehensive Clinical Science Self-Assessment (CCSSA), or Comprehensive Clinical Medicine Self-Assessment (CCMSA)?
The CBSSA, CCSSA, and CCMSA have already been updated with the new user interface. NBME plans to update CBSSA, CCSSA, and CCMSA to a structure aligned with USMEL Step Exams. Specific timing for these updates will be announced at a future date.

Why are CBSE and CCSE being updated?
CBSE and CCSE are being updated to create a more consistent testing experience with USMLE Step 1 and Step 2 CK. This update supports a more consistent interface, shorter test blocks, clearer break transitions, and a more flexible approach to Authorized Break time.

Is the total number of questions changing?
No. The total number of questions is not changing. CBSE and CCSE will continue to include 200 multiple-choice questions.

Does this update change exam content?
No. This update changes the user interface and structure of the exam. It does not change exam content.

Is the total exam time changing?
No. The total exam time for standard-time administrations will remain 5 hours and 30 minutes.

What is changing about user interface?
The updated user interface aligns the look and feel of the CBSE and CCSE with Step exams and NBME Self-Assessments, creating a more consistent and familiar testing experience.
Key features of the updated user interface include improved navigation for viewing items, searchable lab values, notes feature, text resize – up to 200%, image controls (invert color, contrast, zoom), dark theme, improved highlighting.

What is changing about the exam block structure?
The exam will move from 4 Test Blocks of 50 questions each to 10 Test Blocks of 20 questions each. Each updated Test Block will be 30 minutes.

Is the Tutorial changing?
Yes. The timing of the Tutorial will change from 15 minutes to 10 minutes to provide more break time during the exam. The Tutorial will also be updated to provide instructions on Authorized and Unauthorized Break Time.

Does this update change scoring?
No. This update does not change exam scoring or performance feedback.

Does this update change how schools should interpret CBSE or CCSE performance?
No. The update changes the testing interface and structure. It does not change how performance is calculated or how scores should be interpreted.

Break Time

Is the amount of break time changing?
Yes. Standard-time examinees will begin the exam with 20 minutes of Authorized Break time. This is an increase from the current 15 minutes of break time.

When can examinees take Authorized Breaks?
Authorized Breaks may be taken after the Tutorial or between Test Blocks. Authorized Breaks are not taken during an active Test Block.

How will examinees know how much Authorized Break time remains?
The Break Screen will show the total Authorized Break time remaining. It will also show the length of the next Test Block and an overview of the exam blocks.

What happens if an examinee finishes a block early?
If an examinee finishes a Test Block or the Tutorial before the allotted time expires, the remaining time is added to the examinee's remaining Authorized Break time. That time may be used later in the exam for an Authorized Break between blocks.

What happens if an examinee uses more than the available Authorized Break time?
If an examinee continues an Authorized Break beyond the remaining Authorized Break time, time may be deducted from remaining Test Blocks, beginning with the last Test Block. This helps keep total exam time consistent for all examinees.

What happens if an examinee does not select an option on the Break Screen?
If an examinee does not make a selection within 30 seconds, an Authorized Break will automatically begin.

How does an examinee start an Authorized Break?
To start an Authorized Break between blocks, an examinee selects "Take a Break" on the Break Screen, which is present once the examinee complete a block.

How does an examinee end an Authorized Break?
To end an Authorized Break and return to the exam, an examinee selects "Start Next Block".

What is an Unauthorized Break?
An Unauthorized Break occurs when an examinee takes a break during an active Test Block. This is intended to support personal emergencies. The Test Block timer does not stop during an Unauthorized Break.

How does an examinee start an Unauthorized Break?
The examinee selects the Lock button. The exam content is hidden, and an Unauthorized Break Screen is displayed.

How does an examinee end an Unauthorized Break?
To end an Unauthorized Break and return to their active block, an examinee selects "Return to Exam" to continue the exam.

What happens if an examinee steps away from their exam without selecting the Lock button?
If an examinee steps away from the exam without selecting the Lock button, the exam automatically enters Unauthorized Break status after 5 minutes of inactivity.

Proctoring

What should proctors do during an Authorized Break?
Proctors are not required to escort or monitor examinees during an Authorized Break. Because Authorized Breaks do not allow examinees to revisit previous items or Test Blocks or view future items or Test Blocks, exam security is maintained during an Authorized Break.

What should proctors do during an Unauthorized Break?
The proctor should check the examinee's screen to confirm whether the examinee is on an Authorized Break or Unauthorized Break screen. For local administrations, examinees are escorted during Unauthorized Breaks to ensure no access to test preparation materials. If required, the test center files an incident report documenting what happened and how long the examinee was away from the exam.

Student Support

How does this update affect examinees with timing accommodations?
Total exam time for examinees with timing accommodations is not impacted by this update. Examinees on 1.25x, 1.5x, or 2.0x time administrations will have their Authorized Break time adjusted accordingly. For accommodated administrations that span two days, current processes and policies continue to apply.

What should schools tell students before the go-live date?
Schools should tell students that CBSE and CCSE are being updated on February 22, 2027, to more closely align with the testing experience on USMLE Step 1 and Step 2 CK. Students should know that the total number of questions and total exam time are not changing, but the exam will be delivered in shorter blocks with updated break screens and Authorized Break rules. Instructions on how to manage Authorized Break time will be included for examinees in the exam Tutorial.

Support Resources

Can schools view a sample of the new structure?
Yes. Preview exams for CBSE and CCSE will be available before the update. These previews will contain the updated Tutorial, updated user interface, and new break functionality. An announcement will be made in NBME Updates when these exam previews are available.

What resources will NBME provide to support proctors and schools for local administrations?
The Web-based Examinations Chief Proctor's Manual will be updated to include appropriate proctoring instructions for CBSE and CCSE and screenshots of Authorized and Unauthorized Break Screens. An exam preview will also be available. Announcements will be made in NBME Updates when these resources are available.

Who should schools contact with questions?
Questions should be directed to a school's dedicated Customer Success representative or to subjectexams@nbme.org.

RESOURCES

Currently Available

- This School Resource Guide for medical schools administering the CBSE and CCSE.
- Current local administration policies and procedures.
- NBME Updates for implementation announcements.

Available in the Future

NBME plans to provide additional resources to support this update. Announcements will be made through NBME Updates when additional resources are available. Potential additional resources include:

- CBSE and CCSE preview exams with the updated Tutorial, user interface, and break functionality.
- An updated Web-based Exams Chief Proctor's Manual with CBSE and CCSE proctoring instructions and screenshots of Authorized and Unauthorized Break screens.
- Future timing information for structure updates to the Comprehensive Basic Science Self-Assessment, Comprehensive Clinical Science Self-Assessment and Comprehensive Clinical Medicine Self-Assessment.