School Resource Guide

Short Answer, Rational Provision (SHARP) Items

Medicine Subject 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/clinical-science/**
- 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 1, 2027, NBME plans to add Short Answer, Rationale Provision (SHARP) items to the Medicine Subject Exam. The new items will appear in a separate block after the current multiple-choice questions (MCQ) content and will give examinees an opportunity to demonstrate clinical reasoning. At launch, SHARP responses will be used for pretesting and data collection, will not affect Medicine Subject Exam scoring, and will increase the total exam time for standard-time administrations to 3 hours, 15 minutes.

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OVERVIEW OF THE CHANGE

SHARP items present clinical situations that ask examinees to apply clinical reasoning. Each item includes a patient chart and two response components - a short answer about diagnosis or management and selection of chart elements that support the examinee's rationale for their answer.

After the current Medicine Subject Exam MCQ items in their current Test Block, examinees will complete a 10-minute SHARP Tutorial followed by a separate 20-minute Test Block containing 5 SHARP items. The separate Tutorial and Test Block focused on SHARP limits disruption to the current exam experience and provides focused instructions before examinees begin the new item type.

Exam Feature	Before February 1, 2027	As of February 1, 2027
Total Questions	200 MCQ	200 MCQ, 5 SHARP
Total Exam Time (Standard-Time)	2 hours, 45 minutes	3 hours, 15 minutes
Number of Test Blocks	1 MCQ	1 MCQ, 1 SHARP
Tutorial(s)	1 Tutorial - 15 minutes for MCQ and general exam navigation	2 Tutorials - 15 minutes for MCQ and general exam navigation, 10 minutes for SHARP

BENEFITS FOR SCHOOLS AND EXAMINEES

- An opportunity for examinees to demonstrate clinical reasoning through situations designed to reflect decisions encountered in clinical practice.
- A separate SHARP experience that preserves the current testing experience.
- No impact to Medicine Subject Exam scoring during the introduction of SHARP items.
- Temporary administration flexibility for schools that cannot immediately support the longer administration time.

EXAMINEE EXPERIENCE

1. **Complete the current MCQ Test Block.** The current Medicine Subject Exam content remains unchanged. Following the current process, once examinees wish to end the Test Block, they click the End Block button. A window will appear asking the examinee to confirm they want to end the block.

2. **Complete the SHARP Tutorial.** Examinees begin a 10-minute SHARP Tutorial covering instruction on entering short answers, selecting supporting chart elements, navigating the SHARP item and Test Block, using supported keyboard and accessibility functions, and accessing help.

3. **Complete the SHARP Test Block.** Examinees begin a 20-minute Test Block containing 5 SHARP items. Once examinees wish to end the Test Block, they click the End Block button. A window will appear asking the examinee to confirm they want to end the block.

4. **Complete the end-of-exam survey.** Examinees will have the opportunity to complete an end-of-exam survey to provide feedback on their exam experience, including questions about SHARP items.

GUIDANCE FOR PROCTORS AND SCHOOLS

Total Exam Time

The SHARP Tutorial and Test Block add 30 minutes to standard-time administrations. Schools should use the updated total exam time when scheduling administrations.

For extended-time administrations, additional time will be applied proportionally to the SHARP Tutorial and Test Block.

- 1.25x administrations will increase to a total exam time of 4 hours, 3 minutes, and 45 seconds.
- 1.5x administrations will increase to a total exam time of 4 hours, 52 minutes, and 30 seconds.
- 2x administrations will increase to a total exam time of 6 hours and 30 minutes.

For schools unable to accommodate the longer local administration when SHARP launches on the Medicine Subject Exam, NBME will provide a process that allows applicable administration cohorts to skip the SHARP Tutorial and Test Block and proceed from the end of the current MCQ Test Block to the end-of-exam survey. Instructions for this process will be included in the Chief Proctor's Manual at a future date.

Scoring and Reporting

Performance on SHARP items will not contribute to an examinee's Medicine Subject Exam score when the SHARP items are introduced. Schools and examinees will not receive SHARP performance feedback during the initial pretesting period. Examinee responses to SHARP items will be used to investigate and confirm the measurement properties of these items and enhance their value.

Current planning identifies the following tentative performance feedback milestones:

- Performance feedback for selectable responses available in late 2028.
    - This performance feedback will be separate from the total exam score and available for schools to use at their discretion.
- Performance feedback for short-answer and selectable responses available in late 2029.

These milestones are targets and may change based on research findings, system development, and resource availability.

SCHOOL PREPARATION CHECKLIST

- Share the February 1, 2027 go-live date with examinees, faculty, testing staff, and proctors.
- Explain that the current exam content and scoring reporting is not impacted by the introduction of SHARP items.
- Ensure administration resources can support the updated total exam time for standard, 1.25x, 1.5x, and 2x administration.
    - Review the process for examinees to skip the SHARP Tutorial and Test Block and proceed to the end-of-exam survey until the school can accommodate the updated total exam time.
- Use the preview exams when it becomes available and monitor NBME Updates for announcements about additional support resources.
- Confirm testing devices meet current system requirements.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

General Information

What is changing on the Medicine Subject Exam?
NBME plans to add SHARP items to the Medicine Subject Exam on February 1, 2027. The items will appear in a separate block after the exam's multiple-choice question (MCQ) content. There will be no change to the current MCQ content or scoring results for the exam.

What are SHARP items?
SHARP items present clinical situations asking examinees to apply clinical reasoning. The item includes a patient chart and two response components - a short answer question about diagnosis or management and the selection of elements from the patient chart supporting the examinee's rationale for their short answer.

When will SHARP items be added?
SHARP items are scheduled to be added to the Medicine Subject Exam on February 1, 2027.

Why is NBME adding SHARP items?
Extensive conversations with medical schools highlighted the need to assess clinical reasoning skills of medical students. NBME created SHARP items after consulting with schools, conducting additional research, and completing several development cycles to address this need.

How were SHARP items developed?
NBME developed SHARP items through an iterative research and development process. Early

studies included pilots with medical students, cognitive interviews, automated scoring research, and psychometric modeling.

Findings indicated that examinees used clinical reasoning while completing the items and generally viewed the patient chart format as relevant to clinical practice.

What topics do the SHARP items cover?
SHARP items cover diagnosis or management questions over topics in the current Medicine Subject Exam blueprint.

Who wrote the SHARP items on the Medicine Subject Exam?
SHARP content was created using the same process as MCQ items on the Medicine Subject Exam. This includes initial authoring by trained subject matter experts, including medical school faculty and practicing physicians. SHARP content then went through the same rigorous quality review process as current items on the Medicine Subject Exam.

Which exam is changing?
The February 1, 2027 update applies only to the Medicine Subject Exam. NBME will communicate separately about any future inclusion of SHARP items on other exams.

Exam Experience

Where will SHARP items appear?
Following the Medicine Subject Exam's current MCQ Test Block, examinees will have a Tutorial focused on SHARP items. After this Tutorial there will be a separate Test Block consisting of five SHARP items.

Will the Medicine Subject Exam still include MSQs?
Yes. The Medicine Subject Exam will continue to include MCQs. SHARP items will be added in a separate Test Block after the current testing experience.

What types of responses will examinees provide?
Each SHARP item includes a patient chart and two response components:

- a short answer question about diagnosis or management answered via a textbox
- selection of elements from the patient chart supporting the examinee's rationale for their short answer answered via clicking on individual elements on the patient chart

Will examinees receive instructions on how to complete SHARP items?
Yes. A SHARP Tutorial will be available prior to the SHARP Test Block and include instructions on how to complete and navigate SHARP items.

Will SHARP items be available on supported iPads?
SHARP items will be available on, and designed to function on, all supported devices, including iPads. Schools should confirm that testing devices meet current system requirements.

Will SHARP items support accessibility features?
NBME has reviewed the SHARP item experience to support accessibility across approved testing environments, including keyboard navigation, text enlargement, navigation on supported devices, and more.

Scoring and Reporting

Will SHARP items count toward an examinee's score?
No. At launch, SHARP items will not impact or change scoring for the Medicine Subject Exam. Examinee responses to SHARP items will be used to investigate and confirm the measurement properties of these items and enhance their value. Performance feedback on SHARP items will not be included in examinees' exam scores during this time.

Any future changes to score reports will be communicated before implementation.

Will examinees or schools receive performance feedback on SHARP items? / When will examinees or schools receive performance feedback on SHARP items?
At launch, SHARP items will not impact or change scoring for the Medicine Subject Exam. Examinee responses to SHARP items will be used to investigate and confirm the measurement properties of these items and enhance their value. Performance feedback on SHARP items will not be included in examinees' exam scores during this time.

After this investigation and confirmation, NBME plans to provide performance feedback on SHARP items in phases:

- First, NBME will provide performance feedback on an examinee's selection of elements in the patient chart that indicates the rationale for the examinee's short-answer question. This performance feedback will be separate from the total exam score. NBME currently plans to provide this performance feedback beginning late 2028.
- Next, performance feedback will be provided on the full SHARP item, including examinees' short answer submission and rationale for the examinee's short-answer question. NBME currently plans to provide this performance feedback beginning late 2029.

Timing may change based on research, system development, and resource availability. Advance notice will be given to schools before performance feedback is provided.

Ordering, Administration, and Proctoring

Will total exam time change?
Yes. The standard-time administration will increase by 30 minutes, from 2 hours and 45 minutes to 3 hours and 15 minutes. This total includes the current Tutorial time. Additional time will be applied proportionally to extended-time administrations.

For schools that are unable to accommodate this change in total exam time, examinees will have the ability to skip the SHARP Tutorial and Test Block. This feature is intended to support schools as they transition to accommodating the new total exam time.

Why is additional time being added?
The additional time allows examinees to complete the SHARP Tutorial and Test Block without impacting the current experience of the Medicine Subject Exam. Schools should use the updated total exam time when scheduling exam administrations.

How will extended-time administrations be affected?
The added SHARP time will be adjusted according to the examinee's approved extended-time schedule. Schools should use the updated administration times when planning exam sessions.

For extended-time administrations, additional time will be applied proportionally to the SHARP tutorial and test block.

- 1.25x administrations will increase to a total exam time of 4 hours, 3 minutes, and 45 seconds.
- 1.5x administrations will increase to a total exam time of 4 hours, 52 minutes, and 30 seconds.
- 2x administrations will increase to a total exam time of 6 hours and 30 minutes.

What if a school does not have the resources, e.g. available room or available proctors, to support a longer local administration of the Medicine Subject Exam?
NBME understands the additional administration time for the Medicine Subject Exam may impact some schools' ability to conduct local administrations. To support these situations, NBME will provide schools the ability for examinees to skip the SHARP Tutorial and Test Block and move from the end of the current MCQ test block to the end-of-exam survey.

This feature is intended to be used consistently for applicable administration cohorts and not on an individual examinee level.

Instructions for this process will be available in the Chief Proctor's Manual prior to the publication of SHARP items on the Medicine Subject Exam.

How are administrations at a Prometric Test Center impacted by SHARP items?
When SHARP items are published, administrations of the Medicine Subject Exam at a Prometric Test center will support the updated total exam time. Schools and examinees do not need to adjust their current ordering or scheduling process for the exam.

Do schools need to order a different version of the exam?
No. All available forms of the Medicine Subject Exam will contain SHARP items. Schools will continue to follow their current ordering process.

Will proctoring procedures change?
Most standard proctoring procedures are expected to remain the same. Two impacts to proctoring are:

- accounting for new total exam time for local administrations
- when applicable, instructing examinees how to skip the SHARP tutorial and test block and move from the end of the current MCQ test block to the end-of-exam survey. Instructions will be available in the Chief Proctor's Manual at a future date.

Support

Will schools or examinees be able to preview the SHARP items?
Yes. NBME plans to provide an exam preview containing the SHARP Tutorial and sample SHARP items before SHARP items are published on the Medicine Subject Exam. A notice will be made via NBME Update when the preview is available.

What should a proctor do if a technical issue occurs?
Proctors should follow the standard support and escalation procedures for the Medicine Subject Exam.

Who should schools contact with questions?
Questions regarding SHARP items 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 Medicine Subject Exam.
- 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:

- SHARP preview exam with the SHARP Tutorial and sample items.
- An updated Web-based Exams Chief Proctor's Manual with instructions on how administration cohorts to skip the SHARP Tutorial and Test Block and proceed to the end-of-exam survey for schools unable to accommodate the longer local administration when SHARP launches.