

# OSA S.T.E.P. to Success



## July: Succeeding on the Wards

The clerkship year is an exciting but challenging time. Success on the wards comes from balancing clinical knowledge, communication skills, and professional habits while learning to navigate the healthcare team. Intentional strategies now can make your rotations more productive, rewarding, and less stressful.

**Office of Student Affairs**  
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### OSA Career Advising

### OSA STEPS to Success

- S. Self-Assessment
- T. Target Specialty
- E. Experience
- P. Preparation & Planning

### OSA Student Handbook

- [Administrative Support](#)
- [Commitment to Professionalism](#)
- [Commitment to Wellbeing](#)
- [School Policies](#)

### AAMC Resources

- [Four-phase career planning process](#)
- [Compare Specialties tool](#)
- [Residency Preference Exercise \(RPE\)](#)
- [Specialty Indecision Scale \(SIS\)](#)

### Time Management

*Clerkships move fast—plan your days, prioritize tasks, and use downtime wisely. A simple checklist can help you stay on top of patient care, assignments, and study.*

#### **Create a Light Daily Framework**

- Plan key tasks: patient care, rounds, studying, personal time
- Prioritize urgent vs. non-urgent tasks
- Stay flexible for teaching moments or unexpected needs

#### **Track Your Tasks and Progress**

- Use a checklist or brief journal for patient tasks, notes, and follow-ups
- Record teaching points, feedback, and small wins

#### **Use Downtime Strategically**

- Review cases, read key topics, or prep presentations
- Keep sessions short and focused to avoid burnout

#### **Balance Studying with Clinical Time**

- Review high-yield topics during downtime, not during patient care
- Learn from real-time clinical experiences

### Standing Out

*Clerkships aren't just for learning—they're a chance to show professionalism, initiative, and teamwork. Consistent small actions help you build skills, relationships, and a positive impression.*

#### **Be Reliable and Prepared**

- Arrive on time and know your patients' key details
- Complete tasks accurately and follow through

#### **Engage Actively in Learning**

- Ask thoughtful questions and contribute during rounds. Don't interrupt
- Volunteer for tasks or presentations

#### **Demonstrate Professionalism and Teamwork**

- Communicate respectfully & on time with everyone
- Help make the team look great, not just you
- Be approachable, helpful, & adaptable

#### **Balance Initiative with Observation**

- Step up to meaningful tasks while observing experienced clinicians
- Contribute safely without overstepping

## Exploring Specialty Interests on the Wards

Clerkships are not just about learning medicine—they're a unique opportunity to explore what kind of physician you want to become. Observing different specialties in real time helps you notice the work environment, patient interactions, and daily responsibilities that resonate with you. Pay attention to both what excites you and what drains you—these observations are key to clarifying your interests.

### **What to Look For:**

- **Patient Population & Cases:** Are you energized by acute, complex cases or chronic, longitudinal care? Do certain patient populations inspire you?
- **Team Dynamics:** How do attendings, residents, nurses, and support staff collaborate? Do you thrive in fast-paced, high-intensity environments or more steady, predictable ones?
- **Clinical Focus:** Are you drawn to procedures, diagnostics, counseling, or broader population health work?
- **Teaching & Mentorship:** How approachable and invested are faculty in teaching? Mentorship style can influence your satisfaction in a specialty.
- **Work-Life Considerations:** Observe workflow, pace, and how clinicians balance responsibilities—they often provide clues about lifestyle and fit.

### Tips for Reflection:

- Keep a brief log of experiences that excite or interest you
- Sort out the difference in liking the person/faculty member versus the specialty
- Note patient encounters, teaching moments, and feedback that stand out
- Discuss observations with mentors or peers to gain perspective
- You can love the experience and still not want to do it for your job. That's ok!

## **OSA Insider Podcasts**

### [Apple Podcasts](#)

E127: Deciding on Specialty in the 3<sup>rd</sup> year

E117: Situational Awareness

E116: Medical student and Physician Safety

## **How Can OSA Help You?**

### **Registration**

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### **Specialty Advisors**

#### **OSA Career Advisors**

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## Seeking and Using Feedback

Feedback is one of the most valuable tools for growth during clerkships. Actively seeking constructive feedback helps you improve clinical skills, communication, and professionalism while demonstrating initiative and a commitment to learning.

### **How to Ask for Feedback:**

- Be specific: Ask about particular skills, presentations, or patient encounters
- Choose the right moment: Request feedback after rounds, patient encounters, or end-of-day debriefs
- Don't wait till the end of the rotation.
- Show openness: Listen without defensiveness and clarify points if needed
- Make this part of your agenda not just part of the course objectives

### **Incorporating Feedback:**

- Reflect immediately: Consider what went well and what could improve
- Set concrete goals: Focus on one or two actionable changes at a time
- Track progress: Use a brief log or journal to monitor improvements and revisit feedback
- Use or interpret feedback from one rotation in the next rotation. Patterns become problematic.
- Feedback is designed to help you grow and refine your practice, beyond what shows up in the clerkship grade.