Thinking about working in North America after graduation, or maybe doing the Internship Match? If so, you’ll have to take the North American Veterinary Licensing Examination (NAVLE). Preparing for the NAVLE is a long process, and there’s more to it than just sitting down for a 360 multiple choice questions exam for 6 hours.

As it turns out, there is not a lot out there on the internet with regard to study plans. In this article, I’ll try to summarize a few goals and study practices I set for myself, as well as have gleaned from my friends, so that hopefully you’ll be able to benefit from them. Please don’t take these notes as the end-all passing method. Modify your plan to suit your time frame and learning level, and write it down!

Additionally, I would like to note that my timeframe and planning coincides with test taking during the Fall exam period (November-December). There is an additional month in April that testing is offered as well, but will not be outlined in detail here. These times are currently TBA, but can be found on the website link at the end of this article.

Getting Started

1. **Are You Eligible?**
   
   Check current American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) accreditation. There is additional testing and paperwork required for North American licensing if your school has not received the accreditation. For space, I will not cover that here. Many British, Irish, Caribbean, and other international schools are accredited. For a list of current schools accredited, please check AVMA’s List of Accredited Colleges: https://www.avma.org/ProfessionalDevelopment/Education/Accreditation/Colleges/Pages/colleges-accredited.aspx

2. **Register for A Study Aid:**
   
   There are a few options for studying for the NAVLE through a program. Vet Prep and Zuku Review are two predominant companies. Many vet schools have representatives that will advertise sales beginning from January all the way through summer. If not, there are specials available online as well for both companies.
   
   Personally, I loved the PowerLectures from Vet Prep, and thought they were well worth the extra 50 bucks or so for the ability to listen to a concise mini lecture while doing the dishes or on the bus. Zuku Review is a tried and trusted program also, although I have not used it personally. Shop around, but I highly recommend studying using some kind of program, as compared to studying your school notes alone. Not only do the question types mimic the unique NAVLE format, but the subject matter is highly representative of what the exam will feature.
   
   *Passing the vet boards… Is there an app for that?* Unfortunately not yet, but the web browser on your smartphone will allow you to access the site from the bus, walking around campus, or even your couch.

3. **Register to Take the NAVLE**
   
   - **A Letter of Good Standing:** You will need to write your veterinary school’s front office, providing them with your student number and full address of the destination. Do this EARLY (right after you take exams is perfect timing).
   
   - **Register with Your State:** The letter from your school will be sent to the State you are registering to take the NAVLE through. It’s best just to pick one, and research their specific due dates. A lot of my classmates ended up having to transfer their results when they decided to pursue jobs in other states. Don’t over think it, but pick one without too many additional testing requirements (states such as California have additional state-specific boards, so be extra clear on what is required on a state-by-state basis).
Register with the NBVME (National Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners) and pay the fee (for 2015, the cost was $605 USD, with an additional fee of $282 for taking it internationally)

Wait: The NVMBE will send you an email around September, which allows you to register with Prometric Testing Centers near you. Book early so you can get a good time and spot (give yourself a few days break before from rotations or EMS for final study cramming and research).

If you are in rotations while studying (which you likely are), prepare to feel squeezed between the workload of rotations and cramming. It’s going to feel like all you want to do is run home and study, but finding a healthy balance and using your NAVLE study to help you with rotations is important. Try narrowing down big subjects or focus your study around a case already in clinics.

*There are several topics the NAVLE traditionally focuses on more so than the average veterinary school curriculum. Causes of pig and calf diarrhoea, as well as toxic North American plants, are covered in multiple questions. There will also be obscure fish and bird questions, but the main focus is companion animals and food animals, especially sheep and cattle.

**Studying**

*A Rough Timeline:*

- **Start:** I began to casually study in June with my intention of testing in November, then daily the 2d week of August (3 months before my exam). You can modify the study questions by subject, which can help with rotations.
- **Progress:** Vet Prep practice questions take more time because you must go through them one by one; the tests are quicker to get through the program. Note how many hours it takes you usually to go 1% (you’ll underestimate it). If your goal is to make it to 100%, multiply the time it took you by 100. In the end, the time frame may be slightly less than that full time, as the program goes faster as you gain familiarity with the material and have repeat questions.
- **One month prior to Exam:** Now is the time to really begin studying committedly. Cramming extra hours at the last minute is not fun, nor is it conducive to storing the information long term. I recommend you aim to be 75% through your study program the month before your exam.

**Final Study Notes:**

- **Practice Exams:** the NBVME also has 5 smaller practice exams at $50 each. Taking these seriously gives you a better perspective of how the exam is going to go, especially compared to previous years. I took two exams the weekend before my exam, but if I could do it over again, I’d do one a week, starting 5 weeks out.
- **Completing Your Prep:** It is possible to finish 100% of your study program. Not all of my class did, nor do you have to in order to pass. I wanted to get through it to get my money’s worth (at the time of this article, you get a free renewed subscription if you finish 80% and don’t pass the first time). The best thing you can do is decide early on whether you are going to finish it or not, and then track your progress adequately. There is no use putting additional pressure on yourself if it’s not actually going to help you achieve a passable score.
- **Be organized.** I recommend buying a big notebook, labelling big sections of blank paper by species, and whenever you get a question wrong, write a good note about it. Review these frequently, even before bed a couple times a week.
- **Be happy.** No, not about the exam, but continue to live your life! Take study breaks, listen to music, go outside. This will likely be the longest test-prep marathon of your life, and going crazy and freaking yourself out WILL NOT help you. Tackling real world applications, that is what you should be concerned regarding. This is your chance to prove to yourself how much you really know!

**Day of the exam:** Be well rested, make a pre-exam music playlist (author strongly suggests Queen’s “We Will Rock You” and Survivor’s “Eye of the Tiger”) and buy yourself something nice to eat for your snacks and lunch. This is a 6-hour exam if you use all the time, so plan accordingly, and relax! Good luck and remember, it’s only an exam. You’re going to do great. Assume you’re going to pass until proven otherwise!
Additional Resources:

- General Information:  
  https://www.nbvm.org/navle-general-information/navle/
- Regulations by State:  
  https://www.nbvm.org/?id=78&page=NAVLE#Application_Procedure_Chart
- Zuku Review:  
  https://zukureview.com/
- Vet Prep:  
  http://www.vetprep.com/newsite/