

# The ESP Student Blog

## “Mindful Learning – Developing Entrustable Skills”

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### Volume 002 – The Core Entrustable Professional Activities (EPAs): The Next Step 1?

#### Will the EPAs become the next Step 1 because they are another exam?

No. The EPAs are not another multiple choice exam. Instead they are a list of thirteen “Core Entrustable Professional Activities for Entering Residency,” (see a summary [here](#) or download the [AAMC Learners Guide](#) ) that need to be observed by your teachers. They have recently been documented by a select committee commissioned by the AAMC that studied the essential clinical activities expected by residency program directors on the first day of residency. The EPAs are significant for future residency applicants like you because they represent a crisis due to the increasing frequency of medical graduates that were **not** able to perform these basic activities on the first day of residency, i.e. they could not be trusted to perform the activities *without supervision*. Thus, I predict that the EPAs will become as important as Step 1 (but they won’t replace it) because both are important to residency program directors, i.e. your future employers.

#### What do residency programs want and/or expect from medical graduates?

Residency programs want medical graduates to be able to continue their clinical training as they assume full responsibility for patient care, *and* for these graduates to also be able to learn enough to pass the annual in-service exams that predict success on their specialty boards. Success on specialty boards is predicted from the Step 1 score. Likewise, success in assuming patient care responsibility will be increasingly predicted from the EPAs. To be clear, the *undergraduate* medical student is never expected to be fully responsible for their patients even though they may be fully involved. Thus, this expectation that they assume responsibility for their patients on “day one” is an important step.

#### Why are the EPAs likely to be another competitive factor for matching?

Any applicant that can convince a program director that they are entrustable, will put the program director at ease. Instead of having to correct deficiencies in the new resident, they will be able to give attention to educating them in their specialty. On the other hand, applicants who cannot convince a program director that they are entrustable will create a concern about possible deficiencies.

#### What can I do to convince a residency program director that I am entrustable?

Every student will have some type of clinical performance evaluations from their medical school, but the EPAs are so new that all thirteen may not be reported consistently, thus leaving questions about that applicant’s entrustability for residency. You never want to leave anything up to the program director’s imagination if you expect to improve your competitive standing. Currently, most schools are devoting their energy and effort just to find enough qualified people to observe the EPAs. This means that for the foreseeable future, the type of reports on students will be of variable quality. But, you

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have the power to eliminate any doubts about your entrustability and that special power lies in understanding *beyond* the EPA as an activity – you need to understand “entrustable *thinking!*”

### What is entrustable thinking?

Entrustable thinking is a consistent, well-defined, integrative approach to each of the 13 EPAs, as described in the [AAMC Learners Guide](#). To fully appreciate what entrustable thinking involves, it needs to be compared to pre-entrustable thinking. A pre-entrustable student is a beginner – a novice at a beginning point where thinking is very robotic. They attempt to think from memorized knowledge and to apply rules equally to all circumstances, seemingly unaware of integrative knowledge. The danger in this thinking is that it gives a false sense of security and, thus, may be habit forming. However, as the student becomes entrustable, their thinking becomes more skilled in anticipation of contingencies, i.e. choosing between options. This extends, for example, from gathering when necessary a more focused history, to providing a rationale for recommending diagnostic tests, and to documenting a clinical encounter in the patient record. To sum up, the entrustable student is always aware of the rationale for the choices they make and the actions they take. And, now for the good news.

- You can not only learn *how* to do this, but also how to get *better* at it.
- You can begin working on this from day one of medical school while everyone else is waiting until beginning clinical training in year 3.

### How do you learn how to do entrustable thinking?

The most direct answer to this question is that the ESP teaches entrustable thinking. The ESP is a skill development program that takes a student through progressive steps that develop integrative thinking and an awareness that allows application in any clinical situation.

The progression looks something like this:

1. Establish your current way of thinking by learning about your own learning preferences.
2. Use metacognition as taught by the ESP to learn how your way of thinking affects the way you learn, i.e. learning how your brain processes information.
3. Develop a learning protocol that is designed to strengthen your weakest type of thinking and bring it into balance.
4. Apply the learning protocol to everything you do. “Sow a thought, reap an action. Sow an action, reap a habit. Sow a habit, reap a character. Sow a character, reap a destiny. – (Covey)”

To sum up, the ESP has goals that coincide with those of the EPAs. By starting on day one of medical school, you can build a way of thinking that will help you control your destiny throughout your career.

### How do I start on Day 1 of medical school?

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First, understand clearly that medical school is not about making you change who you are. Instead, it is an opportunity to *develop* who you are. This is a different battle for each individual student, but the most common starting assumption is based on the erroneous belief that success in getting in equals success in getting out. If you can set that belief aside, you are ready to begin. Second, follow the principles taught in the prematriculation block materials. This program is designed to be self-administered without reliance on a teacher. In fact, the ESP helps you understand how to best use your teachers in your education.

**Important advice for a successful transition to entrustability:** Avoid relying on memorization and recognition in place of developing and organizing your own integrated knowledge base.

### How do you demonstrate entrustable thinking to a program director?

You have two opportunities to personally demonstrate entrustable thinking.

1. In a personal statement
2. In an interview

Both of these will be covered next in a sequel blog post with explanation and examples.