

Top 5 Tips for Succeeding As A PGY-1 In Pathology

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Residency is hard. We work long hours, have unpredictable call shifts, and are pushed daily to advance our knowledge and skills. But my PGY-1 year has been the best year of my life so far. I'm incredibly thankful that I genuinely love my job – both the successes and challenges. Everyone's journey will be unique, and we all will have our individual take on what the best path is. I still distinctly remember the excitement and nerves on my first official day of service, so I want to provide my top five tips for a successful first year as a pathology resident:

1. **No one expects you to know anything about pathology. *Seriously.***
 - Pathology residency is a completely new world compared to medical school: our daily tasks are different; our learning objectives are different; our necessary skills are different.
 - One of the hardest parts of being a PGY-1 is being okay with knowing nothing. After passing all the exams and graduating medical school, it's an adjustment to feel like you're clueless, but be patient with yourself – you'll be surprised how quickly your knowledge base grows.
 - First year is mostly focused on learning basic histology, grossing skills, and the workflow of the anatomic and clinical laboratories. The most successful residents are the ones who are actively trying to learn and are open to feedback. You're not going to know the diagnosis the majority of the time. That is totally normal, and it is absolutely okay.
2. **Create your personalized toolkit for the most common tasks you perform. This includes materials you may need to help your day go as smoothly as possible.**
 - As an example, here's mine:
 - **Autopsy:** that old pair of comfy shoes you can throw away when you've completed your time on service. Despite the PPE, you will get them dirty.
 - **Blood bank/frozens:** the most comfortable pair of shoes you can find for running around the hospital. I searched for recommendations online from other healthcare workers before selecting mine.
 - **Grossing:** a second (and black) pair of my most comfortable shoes. While grossing, we stand still for long periods of time, and darker colored shoes are less likely to be ruined by spilled ink. I also bought my own safety goggles because I find the plastic ones too uncomfortable.
 - **Previewing:** (mostly provided for you) dotting pen, clear plastic ruler, lens paper. I also have a gel pad under my left wrist for comfort while at the microscope.
 - **Organization:** white board for writing down important tasks and deadlines, a planner, sticky notes, colorful pens. I also have shelves on my desk for added storage space.
3. **Don't forget to keep tabs on your wellness – physical, mental, emotional.**

- If one of your main job responsibilities (like previewing) is uncomfortable, don't just deal with it. Small modifications can save you from musculoskeletal pain. There are resources online that may offer potential solutions, but if it becomes persistent, reach out to your program director and coordinator to help you. Your institution may have resources available.
 - *PROTECT YOUR EYES.* I really can't emphasize this enough! As pathologists, our eyes are our livelihood. Start taking care of them before you need to. I found prolonged time at the microscope was giving me headaches. Though I don't need glasses, my optometrist recommended a +0.5 prescription for each eye and a blue light filter. It worked wonders for me! Additionally, you can adjust your monitor settings to reduce blue light (the setting is often called night light).
 - Test out different music or podcasts or background noise to listen to while previewing. I found that I prefer audiobooks for long periods of time at the scope, podcasts for computer work, and instrumentals or lo-fi music when I really need to focus (and I would consider getting a subscription to your favorite service to avoid commercial interruptions).
 - Keep up with your hobbies. We have the luxury of some free nights and weekends, so don't forget to do the activities that you enjoy the most.
 - Rely on your co-residents. No job is perfect, and sometimes commiserating with the other people going through this unique situation really helps.
4. **Figure out your learning style (if you haven't already) and stick to it.**
- Don't try to reinvent your study habits if they've worked in the past.
 - Working through your cases during previewing and signing out will teach you a lot, but you'll need to supplement as well.
 - Pick some resources and reference them frequently. The senior residents can give you an idea of general favorites and recommend titles.
5. **Be open to any and all new experiences.**
- While you may have an idea of what your future career will look like, be open to change. Take advantage of new opportunities that you've never considered before. The beginning of residency only scratches the surface of what this field has to offer.
 - There is no "one size fits all" method to developing yourself as a professional or diagnostician. What you end up liking the most may surprise you!

Good luck on your journey as a pathology resident! I find this field fascinating, challenging, and extremely rewarding. Over the next four years, you'll spend the majority of your time with your co-residents. Don't be afraid to ask for help when you need it and give help when you can. Congratulations on choosing the best specialty! We're ecstatic to have you!