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100

MCAT STUDY TIPS

**Tips and Tricks to Help You
Ace the MCAT**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



KEN TAO

DIRECTOR OF MCAT
AT MEDSCHOOLCOACH

Ken Tao graduated from UC Berkeley with a Bachelor of Science in Bioengineering and a Bachelor of Arts in Molecular and Cell Biology. He was a member of Phi Beta Kappa and Tau Beta Pi as well as the recipient of the Jeffrey A. Winer Memorial Prize, the award given to the top graduating senior in the Neurobiology. Ken is now pursuing his Ph.D. in Neuroscience from Harvard University.

Ken is nationally recognized as a premier MCAT mind. He has worked with thousands of undergraduate students as a graduate teaching assistant and MCAT instructor/tutor for the Princeton Review. At Princeton Review, Ken was the only tutor certified in all subjects, was one of the highest rated MCAT tutors ever and was a teacher trainer for Princeton Review's MCAT division. Additionally, Ken was the founder of Magoosh's MCAT division. He has written content for dozens of MCAT books and guides.

Ken's track record for improving student scores on the MCAT is exceptional. Scores of his students have achieved MCAT scores >40 on the old exam and >520 on the current exam.



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Study Plan

1

Create a study plan. The MCAT is a big deal and not a test you want to take without an action plan.

2

Identify your target score. Check out the MCAT scores for your top choice medical schools to determine your goal score.

3

Take a diagnostic test. It's helpful to know how far you are from your target score and which sections that will require extra attention.

4

Make sure your study plan gives you ample time to prepare your exam. If you realize you won't have enough time to study, consider pushing back your test date.

5

Include break days in your study plan. We all need study breaks and it's best to preplan them, so you don't fall behind in your studies later.

6

Ask your pre-medical peers for personal study tips. It's great to get advice from others who have conquered the MCAT exam!

7

Front-load your studies. Studying hard early on is much less stressful than cramming later.

8

Make sure your study plan involves content review. Let's be honest. You've forgotten a lot of content from your college courses and need to review.

9

Switch subjects for content review on a regular basis. You do not want to study one subject at a time, as the MCAT will not test you on one subject at a time.

10

Complete all the MCAT prerequisite courses. Even harder than reviewing content you've forgotten is learning content for the first time.

11

Make sure your study plan involves practice passages. Memorizing scientific facts alone is not enough to get you your target score.

13

Make sure your study plan includes multiple full-length practice tests. Practice tests are important for building up the mental stamina to take the 7.5-hour long MCAT exam.

15

Pick up a set of MCAT books. College textbooks are great but contain too much information that you don't need to know for the exam.

17

Time yourself when completing practice passages and full-length practice tests. The MCAT is a timed exam so you need to get used to doing questions timed as well.

12

Do practice passages and questions in the morning. The MCAT starts at 8 AM and you want to get your brain used to doing practice questions in the morning.

14

Do your best to simulate test day conditions when taking full-length practice tests. This includes waking up at the same time that you're going to wake up on test day, using a computer with a mouse (not a trackpad), and making sure to follow all the breaks between the sections.

16

Make sure you're using MCAT books for the new MCAT. The MCAT only changed a few years ago and you want to make sure that you're not using MCAT books for the old exam.

18

Make sure to complete all the AAMC practice questions. There are no better practice questions than those written by the creators of the MCAT.

19

Find a study buddy. A study buddy can provide motivation to keep you focused in your studies.

20

Find a reliable study buddy. Studying can be fun but make sure that your study buddy doesn't distract you so much that you aren't making progress.



21

Help yourself by teaching your study buddy. You know you understand the material well if you can explain it to someone else.

22

At some point during your studies, make sure to go through the AAMC MCAT Content Outline and compile a list of all the unfamiliar terms that you need to study. The AAMC MCAT Content Outline contains a comprehensive list of all the topics tested on the exam.

23

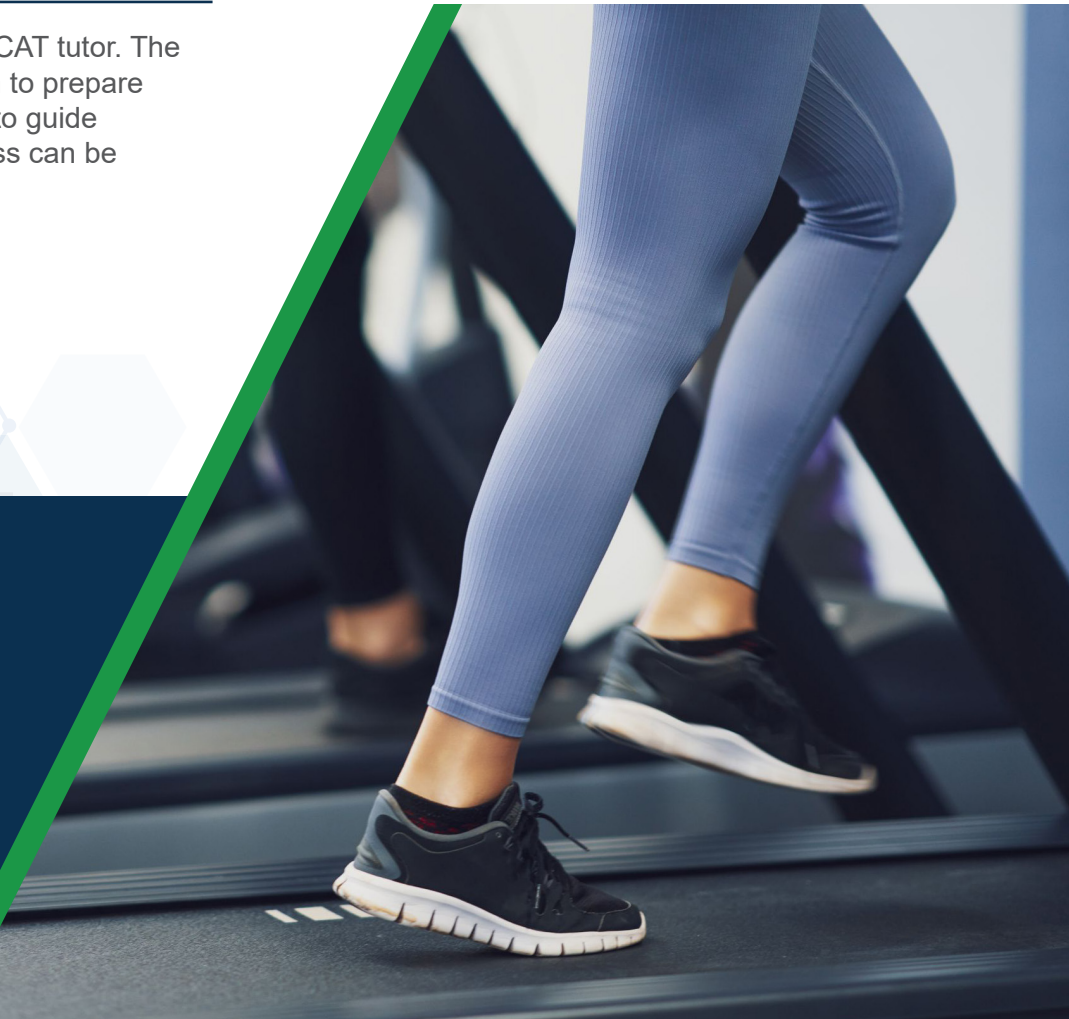
Include review days in your study plan. You're bound to forget material as you study, so it's good to reserve a few days in your study schedule to review previous topics.

24

Eat healthy and get exercise. Good nutrition will provide the energy you need to study, and exercise will help you relieve stress.

25

Consider getting an MCAT tutor. The MCAT is a tough exam to prepare for and getting a tutor to guide you through the process can be tremendously helpful.





Strategies and Techniques

26

Use mnemonics to help memorize difficult concepts and terms. The more outrageous your mnemonics, the more effective they are.

28

Set up checkpoints for yourself during the exam (e.g. ~42 minutes after passage 5, ~18 minutes after passage 8). With checkpoints, you can make sure that you don't end up with 5 minutes left and 2-3 uncompleted passages!

30

Don't highlight everything. Highlighting everything is the same as not highlighting at all.

27

Instead of doing one practice passage at a time, do a set of several passages in a row. Pacing is an important skill to develop for the MCAT and you can't learn it by doing one passage at a time.

29

Try different approaches for highlighting the passage text. There are many ways to use the highlighting tool and you need to find a method that works for you.

31

Come up with a plan to organize your note board booklet (i.e. scratch paper) during the exam. Good organization can save you time when reviewing questions by allowing you to more efficiently find your work, notes, and calculations for questions.



32

Don't expect score improvements immediately when trying new strategies. It takes time to get used to new strategies, so it may be awhile before you start to see improvements.

33

Before reviewing the solutions to practice questions, try re-applying your strategies to all the questions you got wrong. If your strategies still don't work when you have unlimited time when reviewing questions, you may need to adjust your approach.

34

Review all the questions you get wrong AND all the questions you get right. Sometimes you get questions right with flawed logic and that flawed logic may not work with other questions.

35

Keep a record of all the questions you get wrong. This will allow you to identify trends in your weaknesses and come up with strategies to get those questions correct in future practice passages.

36

Use process of elimination when approaching questions. You don't have to figure out the right answer if you can find three wrong answer choices!

37

Know when to skip questions. Every question on the MCAT is worth the same amount of points, so you want to make sure you complete all the easy questions first before coming back to the harder ones.



Chemistry / Physics



38

Take biochemistry before you take your MCAT. Biochemistry was not a big deal on the old MCAT. On the current exam, there are more biochemistry questions than general chemistry, organic chemistry, or physics questions.

39

Try to connect the different science subjects together. Unlike college courses, the MCAT will require you to synthesize concepts across multiple scientific disciplines.

40

High Yield Biochemistry Topic: Amino acids. Make sure you know the one- and three-letter codes, can recognize the chemical structure of the side chains, and are able to classify each side chain as acidic, basic, polar, or nonpolar.

41

High Yield General Chemistry Topic: Acid/ Base chemistry. Make sure you know the difference between strong vs. weak acids/ bases, know what buffers are, and can calculate the pH of solutions.

42

High Yield General Chemistry Topic: Periodic Trends. Make sure you know the trends of and can define each of the following terms: effective nuclear charge/shielding, atomic radius, ionization energy, electron affinity, and electronegativity.

43

High Yield General Chemistry Topic: Electrochemistry. Make sure you are able to recognize redox reactions and understand how they are applied in electrochemical cells.





44

High Yield Organic Chemistry Topic: Isomers. Make sure you know how to classify isomers as constitutional/ structural isomers, conformational isomers/ rotamers, geometric isomers, stereoisomers, enantiomers, and diastereomers.

45

High Yield Organic Chemistry Topic: Separation techniques. Make sure you know all the different types of separation techniques, including chromatography (TLC, column, HPLC, size-exclusion, ion-exchange, and affinity), distillation, extraction, and resolution.

46

High Yield Organic Chemistry Topic: Structure and stability. Make sure you understand how the structure of an organic molecule, particularly the distribution of electrons, can affect its stability

47

High Yield Organic Chemistry Topic: Analytical techniques. Make sure you know all the different types of analytical techniques, including mass spectrometry, ultraviolet-visible spectroscopy, IR spectroscopy, and proton NMR.

48

High Yield Physics Topic: Fluids. Make sure you understand the concepts of hydrostatic pressure, buoyancy, and ideal fluid flow.

49

High Yield Physics Topic: Waves. Make sure you understand the general characteristics of waves and the properties of light and sound.



50

High Yield Physics Topic: Optics. Make sure you understand how lenses and mirrors produce images from objects.

51

Make sure you know all the equations and constants for physics and general chemistry. While some MCAT questions will provide you with equations and constants, there are many others that will not provide them for you.

52

Learn how to use unit analysis. There are many lengthy calculation questions that can be solved quickly and easily by analyzing the units.

53

Focus on understanding the general concepts and trends. The MCAT covers a wide breadth of topics but doesn't require a comprehensive understanding of each topic.





CARS

54

If you are a slow reader, consider using speed reading software. Learning to increase your reading pace will not only help you answer more questions but can also increase your accuracy.

56

Focus on understanding the main idea of each passage. Knowing the main idea alone will help you answer many MCAT CARS questions.

58

Eliminate extreme answer choices. Between a moderate and an extreme answer choice, the answer is almost never the extreme one.

55

Read every MCAT CARS passage as if it is the most exciting text that you have ever read. You can't expect to understand a CARS passage well if all you're thinking is how boring it is.

57

Skip hard passages and come back to them later. Running into tough CARS passages can be like running into a wall. There's no reason why you can't run around the wall and revisit it later.

59

Eliminate confusing or obscure answer choices. With these answer choices, students often think: "Hmm...I don't really understand this so maybe it's the answer?" Watch out for these traps!

60

Read MCAT-like text on a regular basis. The best CARS test takers are those who read regularly. There are multiple online websites with MCAT-like text that you can read on a weekly basis.

61

Focus on improving your accuracy before worrying about pacing. If your accuracy is still low with unlimited time, then you have more important issues to deal with than passage timing!

62

Don't be afraid to ask for help. For many students, it may seem impossible to see any improvement on the CARS section. An MCAT tutor can teach you new strategies and approaches that you never considered before.





Bio/ Biochemistry



63

Try taking physiology and other advanced biology courses before your MCAT. While these courses aren't required for the MCAT, they give you a better understanding of the topics tested on the Bio/Biochemistry section.

65

Be familiar with common laboratory techniques in biology. Many of the research passages on this section will require a general understanding of the different techniques used in biotechnology, including western/southern/northern blot, immunoprecipitation, gel electrophoresis, and fluorescence microscopy.

67

High Yield Biology Topic: Genetics. Make sure you understand the central dogma and how genetic information is inherited.

64

Read a few peer-reviewed scientific journal articles. Familiarizing yourself with scientific jargon will help you with MCAT passages adapted from scientific journal articles.

66

High Yield Biology Topic: Biological Macromolecules. Make sure you know the physiological roles of proteins, carbohydrates, lipids, and nucleic acids.

68

High Yield Biology Topic: Eukaryotes vs. Prokaryotes. Make sure you know the major differences between eukaryotic and prokaryotic cells.



69

High Yield Biology Topic: Organ Systems. Make sure you understand how all the key organ systems work, including the nervous, respiratory, circulatory, endocrine, lymphatic, immune, digestive, excretory, skeletal, skin, and reproductive systems.

70

High Yield Biology Topic: Hormones. Make sure you know the glands that secrete each hormone, the target cells of each hormone, the effect exerted by each hormone, and how the release of each hormone is regulated.

71

High Yield Biochemistry Topic: Enzyme kinetics and inhibition. Make sure you are familiar with Michael-Menten kinetics and the different types of enzyme inhibitors (competitive, uncompetitive, mixed/ noncompetitive).

72

High Yield Biochemistry Topic: Carbohydrate metabolism. Make sure you know all the major biochemical pathways for carbohydrate metabolism, including glycolysis, the Krebs cycle, electron transport chain, gluconeogenesis, glycogenesis, glycogenolysis, and the pentose phosphate pathway.





Psychology and Sociology



73

Memorize a bunch of a terms. Compared with the other sections of the exam, the Psych/Soc. section is the only one where you can expect significant improvement in your score from memorizing a whole bunch of terms.

75

High Yield Psychology Topic: Development. Make sure you know all the major psychological theories of development.

77

High Yield Psychology Topic: Personality. Make sure you know all the major psychological theories of personality.

74

Be able to recognize the key figures associated with major psychological and sociological theories. Unfortunately, you do need to know the names of famous psychologists and sociologists for the Psych/Soc section.

76

High yield Psychology Topic: Emotion and Stress. Make sure you know all the major psychological theories of emotion and the biological nature of emotion and stress.

78

High Yield Psychology Topic: Psychological Disorders. Make sure you know the difference between the major psychological disorders and the known biological bases of neurological disorders.

79

High Yield Psychology/Sociology Topic: Self-identity. Make sure you understand the different aspects of self-identity and how self-identity forms during development.

80

High Yield Sociology Topic: Theoretical Approaches. Make sure you know the major theoretical perspectives of sociology, including functionalism, conflict theory, symbolic interactionism, social constructionism, exchange-rational choice, and feminist theory.

81

High Yield Sociology Topic: Demography. Make sure you understand the different demographic characteristics and processes.

82

High Yield Sociology Topic: Social inequality. Make sure you understand the different types of social inequality and their impacts on society.





Test Day Preparation



83

Get used to the keyboard shortcuts on the MCAT. Learning the keyboard shortcuts can save you time going the passages and questions on the exam.

84

Consider visiting the testing center before your test day. Doing a dry run of your MCAT test day is helpful for relieving stress.

85

Plan out your transportation to the testing center. You don't want to have to scramble to figure out how you're going to get to the testing center on the day of your exam.

86

Plan out your snacks and lunch on test day. The more you figure out before your test day, the less stressed you will be.

87

Be careful of burn out. Studying for the MCAT is a tiring process and sometimes a break can be more helpful than doing another practice test.

88

As you approach your test day, focus on memorizing all the things you need to know for the exam. This includes the amino acids, hormones, organic functional groups, biochemical pathways, and more!

89

If your practice test scores are far below your target score, consider pushing back your test date. Even worse than pushing back your test date is having to retake the MCAT.



Test Day



90

Get a good night of sleep before test day. The MCAT is a 7.5-hour long exam and you need your rest to stay focused throughout the entire exam.

91

Eat breakfast! Your brain needs energy to function optimally.

92

Make sure to bring valid identification. You will need this to take your exam!

93

Make sure to bring snacks and a lunch! It's tough to stay focused when your stomach is rumbling.

94

Plan on arriving to your testing center early. Traffic can be unpredictable at times and you don't want to be late for your MCAT. Don't bring study materials with you. You are not allowed to bring any written materials to the testing center.

95

Turn your cell phone off. You are not allowed to use your cell phone at any point during the exam, including the breaks.





96

Take advantage of your breaks. Eat your snacks, get a drink of water, use the restroom, or at least walk around a bit during your breaks.

98

Remember, you've done a ton of practice tests. Approach it as such and you'll do great.

100

Celebrate! Once you finish, stop thinking about the MCAT for a few days! Go out with your friends and hug your family members!

97

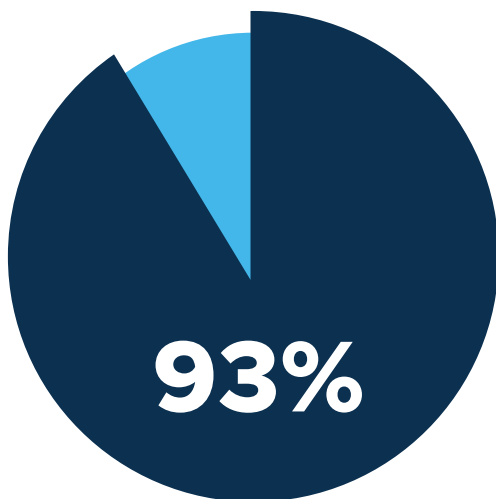
Don't panic. If you get to a tough passage or question, take a few deep breaths to calm yourself.

99

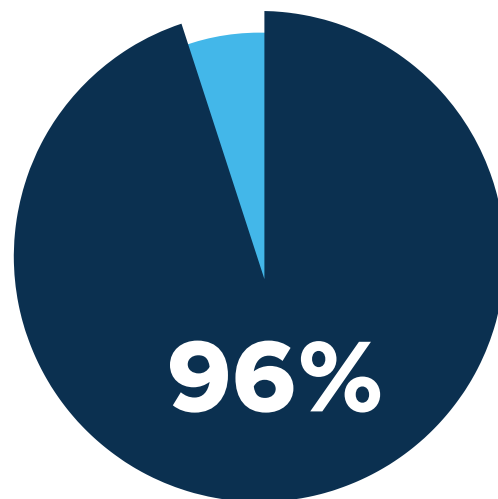
Check the review screen before the end of each section. You don't want to leave any questions unanswered!



Proven Results



of our customers found
MedSchoolCoach "very helpful"
or "extremely helpful" in the
application process



of our customers would
recommend our services to
a friend



Meet Some of Our Tutors



KEN TAO

Director of MCAT

Ken graduated from UC Berkeley with a BS in Bioengineering, a BA in Molecular and Cell Biology, and is a doctoral candidate at Harvard Medical School. Ken is nationally recognized as a premier MCAT tutor and leads the most elite tutoring team in the industry.



ALEX STARKS

Associate Director of MCAT

Alex scored in the 99th percentile on his MCAT and has over 13 years of teaching experience. He joined MedSchoolCoach to help lead our content division, focused on creating the most realistic practice questions and highest quality video content available anywhere.



KATHRYN HENSHAW

Master Tutor

Kathryn scored in the 99th Percentile on her MCAT.



THEODORE MORALES

Tutor

Theo is an experienced teacher and scored in the 99th percentile on multiple MCAT sections.



RISHAV ADHIKARI

Master Tutor

Rishav is a passionate educator, having worked for Teach for America. He scored in >99th percentile on the MCAT.



ROSE HUANG

Master Tutor

Rose scored in the 99th percentile on the MCAT CARS and Psychology and Sociology sections.



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