

How to Beat the

MCAT



And Ace Your Premed Classes

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Table of Contents

Introduction	5
1. What You Need to Know About the MCAT	6
Why The MCAT Matters.....	6
The Great Equalizer.....	6
MCAT Basics.....	7
Brains and the Periodic Table.....	7
Physical and Biological Sciences.....	9
How the MCAT is Scored.....	9
What MCAT Score Do I Need.....	10
When to Take the MCAT and Why.....	11
September MCAT.....	12
Retaking the MCAT.....	13
How Med Schools Really View Retakes.....	15
When to Start Studying.....	16
2. Goal Setting and Preparation	17
First Take a MCAT Diagnostic.....	17
3. Mind Over Matter	20
Mental MCAT Preparation.....	20
Choose Your MCAT Score.....	21
MCAT Visualization.....	22
4. Know Thyself for Success	24
Lone Wolf or Group Think.....	24
Know Thyself.....	25
Attitude for Tests.....	25
Taking Learning to a Higher Level.....	26
Almost Failed Medical School.....	27
In-Depth Learning for Success.....	28
5. A Systematic Approach to Studying	30
Actually Studying the Sciences.....	30
Active Versus Passive.....	31
Basic Sciences First.....	32
Primary Materials First.....	33
Synthesize and Conceptualize.....	34
Self-test and Then Review.....	37
Lists for Study Sessions.....	38
Length of Study Sessions.....	40
6. Tricks to Beat the MCAT	42
Discrete Questions First.....	42
Answer Passages in Order Presented.....	42
Solving Science Based Passages.....	43
Types of Science Questions.....	44
Educated Guess Then Look.....	45
Unique/Unknown Is Wrong.....	46
Stick to One Letter.....	46
Use the Strike Out Function.....	47

Reverse Thinking.....	47
Six Steps to Answering Science Questions.....	48
7. Know Your Author in Verbal Reasoning.....	49
The Verbal Overview.....	49
The Author Says It All.....	50
Reading Strategies and Tactics.....	50
How to Get the Main Idea.....	52
Answering Verbal Questions.....	52
Going Back to the Passage.....	54
Answer Choice Options.....	54
Verbal Reasoning Passage Types.....	55
Choosing the Correct Verbal Answer.....	56
Verbal Reasoning Study Plan.....	56
8. Write Your Way to MCAT Success.....	57
The Writing Sample.....	57
What The Writing Sample Tests.....	57
Writing Sample Prompt.....	58
Writing For Success.....	58
Transition Words.....	59
9. Perfect Practice.....	61
No Clocks Then Timers.....	61
Timed to Untimed.....	61
Sports and MCAT.....	62
How to Get More Rest.....	63
Practice Tests and Problems.....	63
Marathon Practice Tests.....	64
Practice Materials.....	65
10. Error Analysis Form.....	67
The End.....	68

Introduction

Dear Premed Student,

Welcome to How to Beat the MCAT, your guide to overcoming the biggest hurdle, which stands between you and medical school admission. This is a one of a kind book that is designed to help you achieve your best performance on the MCAT and in your premedical science courses.

I wrote this book after realizing a lot students struggle with the MCAT and in their premed courses. Finally, you have a work by someone who understands and gets what you are going through.

This book is not like any of the other review books that you'll find. Seriously, I am not going to teach you any science content.

My goal is twofold: 1.) Teach you how to study for the sciences 2.) Teach you how to beat the MCAT.

That's all there it is to it because there's no need make a difficult process more complex.

As you read this guide you will come across a lot of tips and advice you may have never heard before, but I ask you to try them because you have nothing to lose. You are about to discover a way to overhaul your approach to the sciences that is going to take time but will be worth it in the end.

Be patient and trust the process that has been laid out before you. More importantly, believe and have confidence in yourself. If you have been on the failing end of the class curve things can change for the better and it does not mean you're dumb or an idiot. It simply means you have not been given the appropriate study tools to reach your full potential and get the grades you want.

You now have the key to unlock the toolkit for success on the MCAT and in your premed coursework.

Best of Luck,

Jason Spears

Chapter 1

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE MCAT

Why The MCAT Matters

Getting into medical school boils down to two main factors:

- Your science grade point average (GPA)
- Your Medical College Admissions Test (MCAT) score

Here's the mentality you need to have when taking the MCAT as spoken by a MD/Ph.D. who sits on the admissions committee at the University of Chicago Pritzker School of Medicine, "The MCAT is a test you want to take once and only once!"

This exam plays a significant role in determining if and where you will get admitted to medical school so do not take it lightly under any circumstances.

Getting admitted is already competitive and you need to give yourself every advantage possible. The best way is by having a great score on the MCAT the first time.

I'll return to the subject of why it is important to take the exam once and how medical schools actually view retakes shortly.

But, let's cover why the MCAT matters.

The Great Equalizer

Think of the MCAT as the great equalizer when it comes to getting into medical school.

You have to remember that everyone applying to medical school has gone to different colleges/universities where there are different courses and grading systems in place.

Obviously, with all of these differences medical schools need a way to make direct comparisons between applicants. I'm sure you can guess how this is done.

Just as you thought, the MCAT achieves this goal. This exam allows the admissions committee to make apples to apples and oranges to oranges comparisons between premed students coming from very different backgrounds.

If you thought that where you went to undergrad automatically gives you an extra boost in getting admitted to medical school, this is not the complete picture. The MCAT is a test that helps to make the admissions process objective regardless of where you went to undergrad.

This means the excuse of “but I went to an Ivy League college” is thrown out the window if you don’t have the MCAT score to back it up. The same goes for students who went to a “State” university and believe their 4.0 GPA carries a lot more weight, well the MCAT will tell the admissions committee whether it does or not.

If you think there is some bias in the above statement between Ivy League schools and State institutions, you are correct.

Med schools know the grading between schools varies widely again proving the point of the MCAT as the great equalizer.

You should see this as a benefit regardless of where you attend college because it evens the playing field for all applicants.

MCAT Basics

The Medical College Admission Test (MCAT) is a computer-based test (CBT) that has four sections:

1. Physical Sciences
2. Verbal Reasoning
3. Writing Sample
4. Biological Sciences

The test is administered in the above order, so you start with the Physical Sciences and end with the Biological Sciences.

The Physical Sciences section is comprised of both Inorganic Chemistry and Physics in equal proportions. The Biological Sciences section is composed of Biology and Organic chemistry but this section is approximately 70% Biology and 30% Organic chemistry.

The Verbal Reasoning section covers topics ranging from the social sciences to the humanities, psychology, history, art, religion, politics, the environment, etc. This is not an area where you can study the subject matter in advance but there are steps you can take to perform well here.

Additionally, the same goes for the Writing Sample where you will be asked to write two essays relating to a particular prompt where the goal is to discuss the issue, then write a contradicting point and finally explaining how you would reconcile the two.

The Total Content Time of the MCAT will be 4 hours, 20 minutes but when you factor in breaks you can expect to be at the testing center for approximately 5 hours and 30 minutes.

Here’s an overview of what the test looks like broadly speaking:

Test Section	Number of Questions	Number of Passages	Maximum Time
Tutorial (optional)			5 min.
Physical Sciences	52 multiple choice	7-8	70 min.
Break (optional)			10 min.
Verbal Reasoning	40 multiple choice	7	60 min.
Break (optional)			10 min.
Writing Sample	2 essays		60 min.
Break (optional)			5 min.
Biological Sciences	52 multiple choice	7-8	70 min.
Survey			5 min.
Total Content Time			4 hrs. 20 min.
Total Test Time			4 hrs. 50 min.
Total Appt. Time			5 hrs. 30 min.

Brains And The Periodic Table

For the MCAT no outside sources will be allowed into the testing center. This means that although you will be tested on math and science, calculators of any sort are NOT PERMITTED.

You cannot use a calculator; slide rulers, computers or reference materials.

A lot of students get spooked at the notion that they cannot use a calculator or that any problem solving has to be done using scratch paper but this should not be an issue for you.

The MCAT is not a math test nor is it calculus based.

The goal is to see how you reason and problem solve, not how well you can complete equations and do calculations. With that said you would need to know:

- Basic math
- Scientific notation
- Make conversions between units
- Logarithms (think acid/base)
- Basic algebra/trigonometry (physics)

This may seem like it is very complex but it really is not. Also many of the numbers you will use can be rounded or are setup for you to be able to compute with ease.

To limit cheating and even the possibility that you would be tempted to do so in the first place watches, cellphones or other digital devices are not allowed.

Continuing with the theme of what is not allowed you cannot bring any food or beverages into the testing room. This includes clear bottles of water too. You may access these items on your break only.

The rules are harsh and a lot is at stake but the AAMC will allow you to have access to a periodic table while taking the exam.

The periodic table is available on the computer during your exam and you simply click on a button for it to pop-up at your convenience.

So no you don't have memorize the periodic table but you will have to know trends and the information provided on the periodic table to answer certain questions.

Physical and Biological Sciences

As the name rightly implies this is the science section of the MCAT and covers the content areas of:

- General Chemistry
- Biology
- Organic Chemistry
- Physics

In these sections the setup is pretty straightforward and can be broken down into two components:

1. Passage based. This is where you will read a passage and be asked to answer four to eight questions associated with the passage.

2. Discrete questions. These are questions that are not based on a passage and will test your general knowledge about specific topics and ideas. These are typically questions where your recall of facts and basic science concepts will be important.

How The MCAT Is Scored

Each correct answer to a multiple-choice question on the MCAT is worth one point. An important note: there are some items on the MCAT that are being tested for future use and therefore will not be scored. Unfortunately, the MCAT does not reveal which items are being field-tested.

Your raw score is then converted into a scaled score for each section of the exam. The range of scaled scores is from a low of 1 to a high of 15. When you receive your MCAT score report it will show your scaled score and percentile rankings. This is the same score report that is sent to the medical schools you designate/apply.

Your Writing Sample score is reported as a letter on a scale ranging from a low of J to a high of T.

There is not penalty for guessing on the MCAT so always mark an answer for each and every question, even if it is a guess.

What MCAT Score Do I Need?

If you want to get into medical school you're probably asking, "What MCAT score do I need to get?"

What if I told you Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine gave this response for the MCAT score: "Medical school is very competitive, aim for the stars and do the best you can."

Yes, they really said this when asked about the score required to get in.

This is actually great advice because they are not placing any limitations on the applicant. Because I am sure if in a hypothetical situation they responded by saying, "Just get a combined (total) score of 25," you'd only strive for this and be happy if you got 25 or better.

That may be all good and well, but what if all the other applicants never heard this advice and they were generating combined MCAT scores of 33 and higher.

Now you are at a huge disadvantage because the bar has been raised and you are barely on the medical school's radar. They have too many applicants with better scores so why would they take a chance on admitting you.

Therefore, get the highest score possible and ensure you get into the school of your dreams.

I'm not going to leave you hanging though...

Here are some responses in regards to the MCAT score you should strive for:

1. Some medical schools will tell you, "Last year's entering class had an average MCAT score of 37 with a range of 33 to 44. Therefore it is strongly encouraged that you fall within this range and more importantly on the upper end of the scale to ensure you are competitive."
2. Here's what a Dean had to say to students enrolled in a Masters in Biomedical Sciences program at Tufts University School of Medicine, "I can almost guarantee you that if you perform well in our program and have a 3.5 GPA and MCAT score above 30 you should get into at least one medical school."

As you can tell everyone has their own opinions and advice on what type of score you will need to get into med school.

It's best if you take this information with a grain of salt.

The best thing you can do for yourself is to realize there are a total of 45 points awarded on the MCAT. Do everything possible to get as many of these points as you can. I've never heard of an applicant not getting into medical school because they performed too well on the MCAT!

There are certainly steps you can take to ensure you get the MCAT score you want and it all begins with....

When To Take the MCAT & Why

A little background information on the application cycle and the history of the MCAT to put things into perspective.

When the MCAT was previously administered on paper it was only offered twice a year in April and August.

Now let's put this in context with the ideal application cycle to medical school:

- Apply to medical school in June
- Secondaries completed over the summer
- Interview in fall and winter
- Acceptances given throughout fall, winter and spring.

So determining when to take the MCAT was a no brainer.

Now that the MCAT is offered multiple times throughout the year students are confused about when to take the MCAT because no longer April your only option.

Don't get me wrong; there are some advantages to multiple test dates:

- Take exam when ready
- Can retake sooner
- You have options if not prepared by time of your test.

Obviously, you should be aiming to take the MCAT once (I cannot drill that in your head enough).

But another key point is to consider the application cycle for medical school. You want to have all parts of your application complete and ready to go by June.

For this to be a reality you will want to take the MCAT no later than the end of spring in the year you are applying to medical school. This gives you a window of opportunity from January through early May to sit for the MCAT.

Ideally, March/April is the latest that you will want to take the MCAT.

Why?

You want to ensure you get your MCAT score back in a timely fashion. It takes approximately 30 days to score your exam.

As you can see with a March/April MCAT sitting there is ample time even with the 30-day lag time to have your score back to you before June when you will begin to submit your medical school application.

By having your score back before applying to medical schools you are in the driver's seat and can accurately pinpoint appropriate medical schools to apply to instead, of applying and then having to make alternate plans if your score comes back higher or lower than what you expected.

For instance, if you bombed the MCAT (which I know you won't do, because you have this guide) I would not be applying to schools like Harvard and University of Pennsylvania because this would amount to paying money just to receive a rejection letter in the mail.

On a side note you can actually apply to medical schools before you receive your MCAT score. What will happen is the school will put your application on hold until they receive your score.

What cannot be overstated enough...applying to med school early i.e. June/July helps tremendously.

As they say, "the early bird gets the worm" which in this case is a medical school acceptance so do everything in your power to apply early and to appropriate medical schools.

September MCAT

Taking the MCAT in September of the year you are applying is very bad and NOT recommended at all.

You will be 3-4 months behind all of the other applicants to medical school and it will severely limit your chances of getting into medical school.

If you were this far behind I would strongly encourage you to consider applying the next year. There simply is nothing to be gained by taking the September MCAT and applying in that same application cycle.

Let's say you're not applying to medical school this year, should you take the September MCAT?

No!

Your MCAT scores do NOT last forever.

For most medical schools they will only consider your MCAT score valid for two to three years. Therefore, once your MCAT score expires you will have to retake the exam and pay the \$245 fee all over again too.

Let me be clear on what is meant by expired MCAT scores. It means that at the time of applying the medical schools want you to have a recent MCAT score otherwise they will not consider your application. The caveat being, your “expired” scores are permanent so the medical schools will see all of your previous MCAT attempts.

I’m sure you know studying for the MCAT is not a fun process and it can be expensive if you have to take a MCAT prep course again which will cost you \$1,000s.

Here’s why you do not take the September MCAT.

If you take it you will be considered apart of the current application cycle meaning you have just cut off a full year of eligibility on your MCAT score.

By waiting the four months until January you have just gained one complete year of eligibility for your MCAT score.

See these are the things you always have to consider when applying to medical school. There is a strategic aspect and there are consequences for every action you take or do not take.

You never know what can happen when applying to medical school so always error on the side of caution just in case you would have to retake the MCAT.

My goal here is to ensure that you do not have to retake the MCAT.

But be sure to read the next section on retaking the MCAT because I offer some great advice to help you decide what to do if you are not scoring, as you should or simply want to know what options you have.

Retaking the MCAT

I cannot drill this point home enough, “The MCAT is a test you want to take ONCE and only ONCE!”

Do everything in your power to avoid repeating the MCAT.

If your MCAT test date is approaching and your preparation is not what it needs to be you have options.

Don’t take the MCAT.

You always have the option of postponing your exam by switching to another test day. This will cost you money but it beats coming to the MCAT and doing poorly on the exam.

Some premeds FALSELY believe that once you sign up for the MCAT the medical schools know when you will be taking the exam and they will see that you have changed your test date. This is NOT true.

The only way a medical school will know you took your exam is if you actually come to the test center start your exam and choose not to void your score at the end of the MCAT.

If your test date is approaching and you are unprepared for the exam then push back your test date. Only do this if preparation is the issue and not because of jittery nerves.

Medical schools have stated, they'd rather see you push back your test date and apply slightly later in the application cycle than to take the MCAT and score poorly.

Take your MCAT early to give yourself some leeway in case you would need to retake the exam.

You do not want to delay your med school application because of waiting on test scores or having to retake the exam. Taking the MCAT early the first time means you can apply on time even if you have to retake the exam because you gave yourself enough time before the June deadline.

Here is what would happen if you took the MCAT in late April/early May:

You'd get your MCAT score back in June (scores returned in 30 days) and realize you did poorly on the exam meaning you have to retake the MCAT. It is now June, where everyone else is applying and you need at least four weeks to study before retaking the MCAT.

This now puts you into mid-July before you can take the MCAT again (granted there are seats still available).

So now you've retaken the MCAT and are waiting 30 days to get your score back, which puts you into mid-August. Now that you have a decent set of scores you're ready to begin working on your application.

Meanwhile, straight-A Joe took the MCAT once in April and has already completed his secondary applications by the time you are just submitting your application to medical schools.

How Med Schools Really View Retakes

In an ideal world you would only take the MCAT once and only once, but there are cases when this is not possible, so here's insight as to how your multiple MCAT scores will be viewed by the medical schools.

For starters, what medical schools say they do and their policies are not always one and the same.

I'm sure you know each medical school has varying policies on how they account for retaking the MCAT, which may include:

1. Some medical schools say they take the most recent set of MCAT scores.
2. Others say they take the highest score from each section regardless of when the tests were taken.
3. And others will take the average score from all the MCATs you've taken.

Here's the real deal on what actually happens.

This is insider information taken from a professor at a Boston area medical school who also is the chairman of the admissions committee.

He was very blunt in how MCAT retakes are viewed, *"Let's say you take the MCAT and get a 26, take it again and get a 29, and then take it a third time and score a 32. To me and anyone else on the committee there is no way we'll consider you to be a 32. We're all scientists and pin you closer to a 29. You only scored that 32 after multiple attempts, besides you just left me a trail of data (previous MCAT scores) to more accurately gauge your ability in the sciences. Now if you'd only taken the MCAT once and scored a 32, I would have to say you're a 32 because that's all the data I have on you."*

So remember what is said as the formal policy may not be the reality of what takes place.

You have to remember the med school admissions committee is made up of people and there is the human element (for better or worse) that must be factored in when getting into med school.

Not to run off on a tangent, but remember medical schools have an objective of filling their classes with the most qualified students. So every time you retake the MCAT you are doing yourself a disservice in at least two ways:

1. Not following rule of taking the MCAT ONCE
2. Leaving a trail of data that can discredit your score.

When To Start Studying

There are no hard and fast rules on how much time you should give yourself in your MCAT preparation. Everyone comes to the table with a different level of knowledge and needs in getting ready for the MCAT.

Typically, to be successful on the MCAT you want to give yourself three to six months of MCAT preparation time.

You'll need this amount of time because this is a test that covers approximately three years worth of premed classes and you want to give yourself ample time to adequately study/review everything that you'll see on the exam.

If you're in school full-time or working full-time this is going to limit how much time you can devote to your MCAT preparation while if the MCAT is your only responsibility you may be able to cut down on how much time you'll need to study.

I always say error on the side of caution and give yourself more time than needed because you never know what can happen. Besides it won't hurt to be over prepared.

But don't let time get away from you.

Don't give yourself so much extra time that you never have a sense of urgency to study and all of a sudden your exam date is approaching and you have not put in the necessary study time.

It is a fine balancing act that I think you are more than capable of managing and I will give you several tips to ensure you are fully prepared for the MCAT. Overall, you know yourself, the demands on your time and additional obligations in your life. So decide wisely on how much time you'll need for your MCAT preparation.

Now that you've decided on when you'll be taking the MCAT and when you will begin studying there are key steps that you must take.

End of First Chapter

Like what you read? Are you looking for the competitive edge academically? Want even more great tips and advice?

Well, this is just a teaser because you'll need to go ahead and purchase the rest of the ebook to find out exactly what you can be doing to get the MCAT score that will get you into Med School.

[Click to Get The Full Version of Beating The MCAT Here](#)