

Apologies in advance for any grammar or spelling mistakes in this document. I am busy writing secondary essays so I haven't given this thing a hard grammatical run down. The Foreword is composed of my thoughts and reflections on the MCAT. While I think there are some important ideas included there-in, it is not critical that you read that section. If you just want to know how I recommend studying, skip it.

Foreword

If you are reading this document then two things are true. One, you are willing to ask for help and learn from others. Two, you are researching and preparing for the MCAT in any way you can. These factors combined bode well for your performance and I applaud you for taking these necessary steps on the path to success!hye

The MCAT is hard, but there are certain misconceptions about the exam that must be dispelled before you move any further in your preparation. Here is the truth about the MCAT.

One, the MCAT does not tell you how smart you are. I scored a 518 (97th percentile) and I will be the first one to say that there are plenty of times where I am the dumbest person in the room. The MCAT only tests how well you prepared for the MCAT. I have seen plenty of posts online describing people who have 3.2 GPA's but scored 525 on the MCAT. Anyone can do it, including me. Including you.

Two, time does not equate to performance. Often, I will get asked how many hours I spent studying for the exam. While I understand where the people who ask me this are coming from, there is a sinister implication in that question. An active studier who reviews material in a productive way and benchmarks his or her progress for 100 hours **WILL** score better than someone who half-asses 1000 hours. In my opinion, 450 strong hours will get you a great score if you have done well in your science pre-reqs. If you have done poorly in your science pre-reqs, you will need to study more to make up for those holes in your knowledge.

Three, BIO is not the most important section on the MCAT. In fact, studies show that CARS is just as effective as BIO in predicting medical school success, if not more so! You should focus on getting each one of the sections as high as humanely possible instead of focusing on one of them specifically. The only real rule when it comes to subsection scores is that you do not want any of your scores to be below a 125. 125's across the board is a 500 (50th percentile). In a sense, 125 sets the baseline. If you have less than a 125, you are considered below baseline for a section. It won't kill an application, but it is a yellow flag. A 132/122/130/130 may seem like a good score (514, 91st percentile!!) but a 122 in CARS is 22nd percentile. If I see this score as an admissions committee, I'm going to be wondering why you suck so bad at reading, not how impressive your score is.

There are plenty of other misconceptions and myths surrounding the MCAT and, while I'm no expert, I've spoken with enough people about the test that I may be able to confirm or deny something you have heard. If you would like to ask me something specifically, you can contact me at spietru95@gmail.com or 904-859-6201 (if you call me after midnight I **will** tell you to screw yourself.)

Now, without further ado, let's jump into the MCAT.

Basics of the MCAT

The MCAT consists of four sections all scored from 118 to 132.

- Chemistry and Physics (CP). Tests knowledge of fundamental principles in the physical sciences as well as ability to interpret experimental designs and instruments. Classes needed: GENCHEM 1 & 2, OCHEM 1 & 2, PHYSICS 1 & 2.
- Critical Analysis and Reasoning Skills (CARS). Tests reading ability, ability to extrapolate, ability to think critically, and ability to draw connections. Classes needed: None. Would recommend Philosophy and Humanities courses.
- Biology and Biochemistry (BB). Tests knowledge of fundamental principles regarding governing living organisms as well as ability to interpret experimental designs. Classes needed: GENCHEM 1 & 2, OCHEM 1 & 2, BIO 1 & 2, BIOCHEM 1. Classes recommended: BIOCHEM 2, ANATOMY/PHYSIOLOGY 1 & 2.
 - Note, you may notice that I have included BIOCHEM 1 as a NEEDED class. I stick by this. Some people say you don't need BIOCHEM to do well on the MCAT and that you can just learn the material on your own. I counter with the fact that that same logic can be applied to chemistry, biology, sociology, or the entire MCAT. I would **HIGHLY** recommend you take biochem 1 before taking the MCAT.
- Behavioral Sciences (BS). Tests ability to identify which psychological or sociological theory applies to a given situation. Also asks for basic experimental interpretation. Courses needed: None. Would recommend PSYCH 1 or SOC 1.

A 118 in all 4 sections is a 472. A 132 in all 4 sections is a 528. There are some basic cutoffs for MCAT score in terms of how competitive you are.

SCORE	SIGNIFICANCE
Less than 500	DO NOT APPLY
503	AVERAGE DO APPLICANT
506	CONSIDERED COMPETITIVE FOR DO
508	AVERAGE MD APPLICANT
511	CONSIDERED COMPETITIVE FOR MD
515	STRONG MID TIER MD, WEAK TOP
518	STRONG TOP TIER MD
522+	holy shit!

Based off of your goals, you should shoot for one of these scores while always keeping in mind that higher is better.

Studying for the MCAT

Now it's time to get into the nitty gritty. There are two main components to studying for the MCAT: content review and test practice. Content review is reading the materials, understanding concepts, and memorizing pertinent facts. Test practice is how you translate that knowledge into getting questions right on the exam. You cannot score well on the exam without both. I think the best way to study is to focus on content review, gradually mix in test practice, and then focus on test practice for the last few weeks.

Content Review

THINGS YOU WILL NEED.

- THE KAPLAN 7 BOOK SET
- ANKI, A SMARTER VERSION OF FLASHCARDS (side note. Do not tell me you're not a flashcard person. I never used flashcards before the MCAT either, but they work. The science supports flashcards, whether you use them or not.
- LOTS OF PAPER AND PENS

Content review is all about understanding and memorizing. If you're going to learn what you need to know before test day, you need to be active. There are hundreds of articles that support the claim that active learning is the best way to retain information and if you don't already incorporate this technique, you need to consider doing so. So, how do you actively learn with the Kaplan books?

- Start a chapter and read up until the first section check. Take notes with a pen and paper on things you find interesting, surprising, or worthy of noting. On your way to the section check, you will see bold words. Put these words into an Anki deck labeled "NAME OF BOOK, CHAPTER NUMBER". You need to enter these words into the deck as soon as you read the sentence the word is in.
- With pen and paper, answer the section check. Do not read the section check, think, "I don't know" and then flip to the answer. Read the section check, and try to think of the answer. If you **REALLY** don't know, go back and flip through the book to find the answer. Write the answer down with your pen. On the paper. Seriously, this helps you remember. Once you answer all the section check questions (usually 3 or 4) go to the back of the book and check your answers. Correct the ones you got wrong.
- Repeat this until you get to the end of the chapter. Each chapter has a 15 question test at the end. Just like with the section checks, you need to take out an actual sheet of paper and answer the questions as if it were a real test. Also just like the section checks, if you really don't remember something at all and have no chance of getting the question right, go back and re-read. Do not ever just flip to the back of the book for the answer. The Kaplan books are good

I've seen the way some of my peers study. Look at the book for a minute, check Snapchat. Look at the book for a minute, check Instagram. This will not work. You will not do well on the MCAT. Phone needs to be off. Put on classical music, not pop. FOCUS.

Quick note on the Anki Deck. It has a lot of cool features that make it awesome. However, if you don't feel like learning how it works, the only thing you **REALLY NEED** to do is change the daily flashcard limit. I think Anki recommends 20, but you'll need closer to 100 a day

because not only do they give you the answers to these questions, they give you the explanations as to why the answers are right. If you got an answer right but you aren't exactly sure **WHY** it was right, you need to read the explanation.

- Once you finish a chapter, review the Anki deck you made.
- Rinse and repeat the above steps. I recommend doing 2 chapters a day. You can do up to 4 but any more than that and you're dealing with hundreds of new vocab words in the Anki deck as well as tons of information. It's just too hard.
- While you're doing all of this, go to this site <https://www.kaptest.com/pages/booksonline#mcat>
- Click "register" for the book you have, answer the security question, and viola you have more free content review practice. Kaplan creates MCAT style tests for specific chapters and you should be taking them. There is also a free practice exam I'd recommend taking when it's time.
- Do this with each book. This can take 1.5 to 5 months depending on how fast you are going.

Test Practice

THINGS YOU WILL NEED.

- AAMC PRACTICE TEST UNSCORED
- AAMC PRACTICE TEST SCORED
- AAMC SECTION BANKS
- AAMC Q-PACKS
- 5 PRACTICE MCATS OF YOUR CHOICE (I recommend Examcrackers!)

All together, you should end up taking 8 practice MCATs. 2 from AAMC, 1 from Kaplan online (free) and the 5 extra you get. I would highly recommend sharing this stuff with friends. When you buy the AAMC material, you get 20 attempts. There is no point in taking the tests more than once as you already know the answers, so let other people use them! Keep track of your scores as well as your subsections. It's fun to track progress and you'll see which sections you need to focus on.

So now that you have all this practice test stuff, where do you start? This is the generally accepted order of completion.

- The non AAMC MCATS should be taken every 1 to 2 weeks depending on your study schedule. Scroll to the bottom of this document for a sample schedule.
- Start to integrate test practice into your study schedule with the Q packs.
- If you are scoring well on the Q packs then it is time to move away from content review and do more test practice. If you are not doing well on the Q packs, you probably need a few more weeks of straight content review.
- After Q packs, work through the Section banks, taking practice MCATS as you go. Do not take the AAMC MCATs yet.

- Section Banks should be completed 2-4 weeks before your exam date. Once you're done with the section bank, you should have a pretty good idea on what you need to focus on before test day.
- Take the AAMC unscored 2 weeks before your real test.
- Take the AAMC scored 1 week before your real test. If you score significantly lower on the AAMC unscored and the AAMC scored than you want to score on your real exam, do not take the exam. Re-schedule when you are ready. The AAMC materials are the most accurate indicators out there for how you will do on the real exam (For reference, I got a 517 on the AAMC Scored and got a 518 on the real thing a week later.)

Sample Study Schedule

So, let's say I want to take 12 weeks to study for the MCAT. There are only 6 books you really need out of the Kaplan set. Let's assume each book has about 14 chapters each. That's 84 chapters total. If you're getting through 2 chapters a day, then we can start to put together an actual timeline

Week 1: First things first, take a full length practice MCAT. Relax, put on some music, and go at your own pace. Take breaks if you need to. You will bomb it. It's okay. This will just give you an idea of where you need to focus. Otherwise, straight content review. 14/84 chapters complete. Also completing the Kaplan online tests for appropriate chapters. Reviewing Anki every morning and night 15 minutes each or to completion.

Week 2: Straight content review. 28/84 chapters complete. Also completing the Kaplan online tests for appropriate chapters. Reviewing Anki every morning and night 15 minutes each or to completion.

Week 3: Straight content review. 42/84 chapters complete. Also completing the Kaplan online tests for appropriate chapters. Reviewing Anki every morning and night 15 minutes each or to completion. Take a full length practice test in a relaxed setting at your own pace.

Week 4: Straight content review. 56/84 chapters complete. Also completing the Kaplan online tests for appropriate chapters. Reviewing Anki every morning and night 15 minutes each or to completion.

Week 5: Mostly content review. 70/84 chapters complete. Also completing the Kaplan online tests for appropriate chapters. Reviewing Anki every morning and night 15 minutes each or to completion. Take a full length practice test in a relaxed setting at your own pace.

Week 6: Mostly Test Practice. 84/84 chapters complete. Also completing the Kaplan online tests for appropriate chapters. Reviewing Anki every morning and night 15 minutes each or to completion.

Week 7: Mostly Test Practice. Q-pack for subjects you feel like you need to work on. Reviewing Anki every morning and night 15 minutes each or to completion. Take a full length practice test in a relaxed setting at your own pace.

Week 8: Mostly Test Practice. Q-pack for subjects you feel like you need to work on. Reviewing Anki every morning and night 15 minutes each or to completion.

Week 9: Mostly Test Practice. Section Bank. Reviewing Anki every morning and night 15 minutes each or to completion. Take a full length practice test in a testing environment. No music. No breaks. Timed. Make note of what you missed and make sure to look over those topics.

Week 10: Mostly Test practice. Finish Section Bank if you haven't. If not, do more Q-packs for sections you feel you need to work on. Reviewing Anki every morning and night 15 minutes each or to completion. Take AMCAS UNSCORED practice test in a testing environment. No music. No breaks. Timed. Make note of what you missed and make sure to look over those topics.

Week 11: Mostly Test practice. Q-pack for subjects you feel like you need to work on. Reviewing Anki every morning and night 15 minutes each or to completion. If you have finished the Q-pack then content review for subjects you feel like you could improve on. Take AMCAS SCORED practice test in a testing environment. No music. No breaks. Timed. Make note of what you missed and make sure to look over those topics. This score will likely be + or – 3 points on your real score so if you do not like the score you get on it, you need to consider re-scheduling the MCAT.

Week 12: First 3 days, content review any subjects that you think you need to. Last 4 days, chill. Seriously, I recommend very light content review. Do your flashcards, but other than that just relax a little bit. Take one last practice test but take it in a relaxed setting. Good luck on your test!

Miscellaneous Tips

Here are some last minute things I think will help you on the exam.

- You will feel yourself getting tired of taking the exam. DO NOT RUSH. I started to rush as time went by because I was sick of taking the MCAT and it hurt my score. If you feel like you're rushing, take a moment. Breathe. Remember that no matter how fast you finish, you will not get the scores for another month.
- On the BS section, if you have done your content review and you have never heard of one of the answers, don't click it! The BS section is notorious for putting up fake terms like, "Gender Relativity" or "Absolute Personality". If you have never heard of one of the answers, it might be a fake!
- The MCAT is a basic science test. Every single question can be answered with basic science knowledge. If you feel like you're trying to answer a question with some crazy high level reasoning, you're probably overthinking the question. Look for the simple way to answer the question.
- Make sure you use the text to justify every single answer you pick in the CARS section. A lot of people will just kind of throw their hands in the air and just pick an answer because it feels right.
- Use process of elimination. Usually, there are 2 answers to each question that are just dead wrong. Kill those and you're already up to a 50/50 shot. The last two answers will usually be a little tougher to distinguish between. Use your content review and test practice skills to pick the right one!

- Start doing cardio. Not only does cardiovascular health have a pronounced effect on mental acuity, it also builds endurance. You're going to get tired when you take the exam. The more endurance you have the better.
- Eat a small breakfast. Bring snacks to the exam. Don't show up empty but don't show up super full either.
- Fix your sleep schedule WEEKS in advance. You will be excited to take the MCAT after all the studying you've done and it will be hard to fall asleep. Many an MCAT score has been tanked because a person accidentally stayed up all night the night before the exam.

And that's all I've got. This guide is far from perfect so if you have anything you'd like me to address specifically, contact me at spietru95@gmail.com or 904-859-6201. Best of luck on the MCAT!