

# MCAT Study Tips

Preparing for the MCAT involves reviewing specific content areas and learning strategies for taking the test. See below for some tips to help you get started.



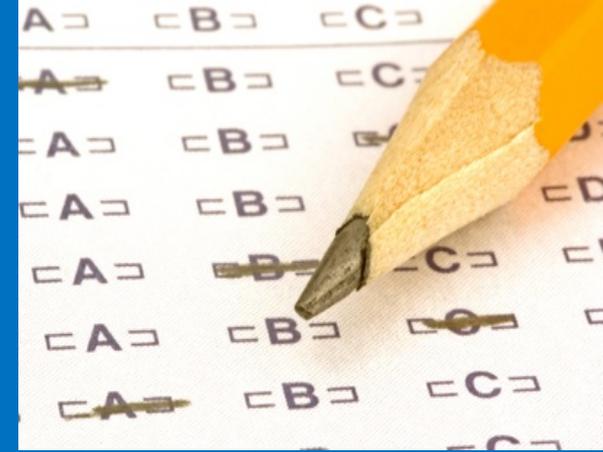
## When to take the exam

- If you want to enter med school immediately after finishing college, take the test during the summer between your sophomore and junior year.
- If you plan a gap year, take the test in the summer between your junior and senior year.
- If you can't do it over a summer, where you'll have dedicated time to study, then plan on adding a few extra weeks to your preparation schedule to ensure you have enough time.

## Study smarter, not harder

- Plan your study period so that it immediately precedes your test date so that the information is fresh in your mind.
- Start studying soon after you complete the prerequisites – this is efficient because you won't have to go back and relearn the prerequisite information.
- How long you study will vary depending on your learning style, if you are studying full- or part-time, and other individual characteristics, however, aim to study somewhere between 2 – 4 months. This is long enough to cover the information without getting burned out.
- Pace yourself, this is a marathon not a sprint.
- Stamina and focus will increase with time, so start with fewer hours per week and work up. However, don't use this as an excuse to only study a few hours per day. You still have to put in the work.
- At the same time, remember to maintain your physical and mental health (i.e. taking breaks, eating well, exercising, etc.).

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## Set up optimal environment – group vs solo studying

- Solo is possible but consider the benefits of working with partners
- If go with a group, keep it to a maximum of 3
- Pick people in the same prep course as you and on the same timeline
- Studying in groups can introduce friendly competition which can help motivate you

## Optimal environment - living space

- Make sure it's conducive to studying and free of temptations that would draw you away
- Living at home can have its advantages, e.g. basic needs are taken care of (food, etc.) so you can focus solely on studying

## Choose study resources carefully – your goals determine how you study

- If aiming for the 99th percentile -
  - “Overprepare”
  - Master all relevant concepts inside and out
  - This will take longer & your score will increase more slowly but your top potential score will ultimately be higher
- If aiming for a lower percentile –
  - Study the concepts, but you may be best served by resources that teach you *how to take the test*
    - e.g. how to navigate the test and certain test taking strategies (without necessarily mastering all of the material)
    - This strategy will increase you test score faster but you will plateau sooner and reach a ceiling with respect to the top score you are likely to achieve

## Make a schedule

- Make a schedule of when you'll review what content, mapping it out will help you set your pace
- Consider rotating between subjects on a daily basis - more interesting, material stays fresh in your mind, slowly build up your notes and flashcards which increases the number of times you review them over the weeks of studying
- When planning, remember to build in breaks (very important to prevent burn out) and catchup days

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## Practice Tests

- One of the best resources you can use
- Recreate the actual testing conditions - same breaks, phone off, wear earplugs if you plan on wearing them, same time of day, etc.
- Start them early to learn the style of questions and assess your strengths/weaknesses
- As test gets closer, take them more frequently –
  - 1st one after studying 1-2 weeks
  - Then 1/week for a full month (total of 4)
  - At 4 weeks out start taking approximately 2/week
- Set aside the whole day
- Afterwards, take a break but come back to the test later the same day to review wrong answers and questions you marked as being unsure of
- Avoid taking practice tests  $\leq 2$  days from the actual test as being fresh is paramount
- The MCAT tests your critical thinking ability above all else, being fresh is important for these types of questions



## Flashcards and Spaced Repetition

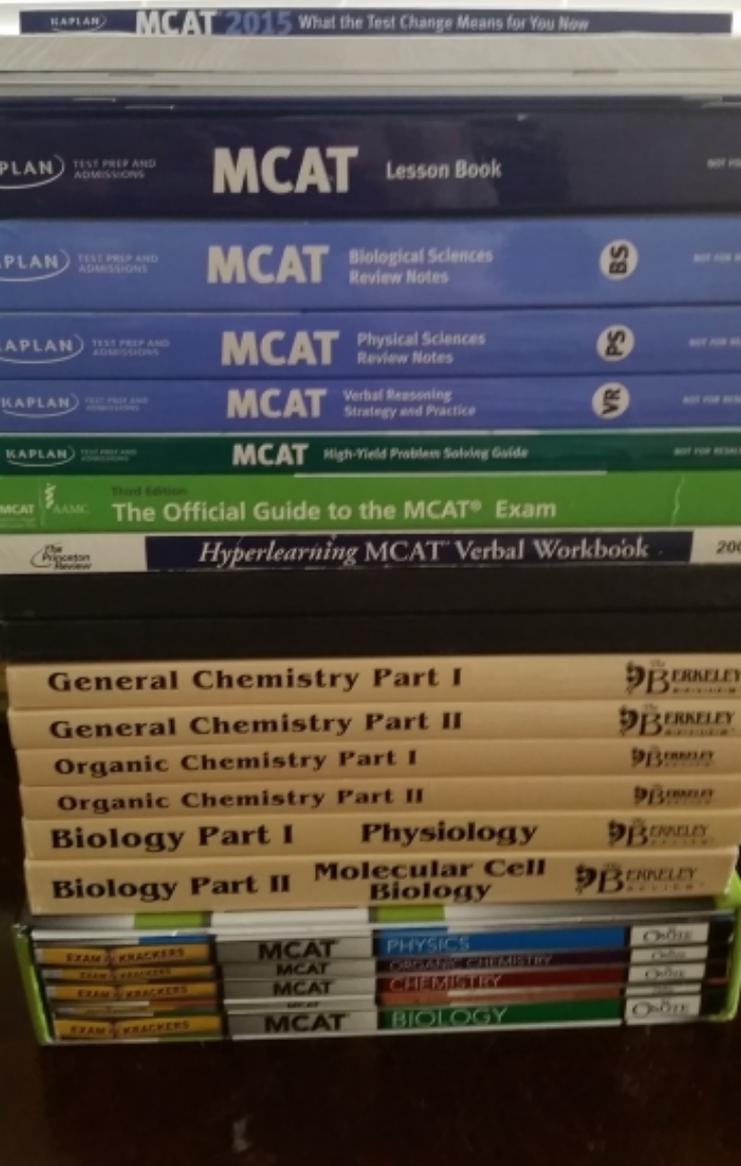
- Flashcards are used in a study technique called spaced repetition, an efficient way of memorizing material (click [here](#) for more information)
- Can be made either on paper or using a spaced repetition software (such as [ANKI](#) )
- Making your own is far more helpful than using someone else's (active vs passive learning)
- Aim to make 30 – 100 new cards a day, but the goal is quality over quantity
- Don't be afraid to delete or edit cards

## Optimize Test Day

- Drive to testing center to get familiar with route and location
- Relax the day before, recommend only studying for  $\frac{1}{2}$  the day
- Eat a good breakfast
- Get plenty of sleep



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## ▪ Prep Courses

- [Khan Academy](#) – free
- [Wikipremed](#) - free
- [Magoosh](#) – fee based
- [Kaplan](#) – fee based
- [NextStep](#) – fee based
- [Princeton Review](#) – fee based
- [Exam Crackers](#) – fee based

## ▪ Prep Books/Videos –

- [AAMC MCAT Official Prep Hub](#) – free
- [Recommended videos](#)

Click [here](#) for detailed information on each book below

- MCAT Complete 7-book Package
- Exam Crackers MCAT Complete Package
- Sterling test prep books
- Princeton Review MCAT 7-book Set
- MCAT Psychology and Sociology
- Kaplan MCAT flashcards

# MCAT Study Tips - Advice From Your Peers

I did a ton of practice problems and created a spreadsheet with every problem, if I got it right or wrong, why I got it right or wrong, the topic, what type of question it is (ex. Memory vs. implicit), and any additional comments. This allowed me to go back and study the stuff I was struggling with/recognize patterns in the problems I was getting wrong so I would pay more attention to them. (To see an example of this spreadsheet [click here.](#))

Create an ideal study plan factoring in time to relax/see friends/family

There is a free, dense, 24-page quick sheets available by Kaplan at the following:  
<https://www.kaptest.com/static/pdf/ktp-mcat-quicksheets.pdf>

I did not follow a day to day calendar, but it probably would have helped a lot.

One thing I wish I would have done more of are practice tests. The practice tests are long, and the review of them is even longer, but it's highly recommended.

Once you've gone through the lessons/chapters from the guide you choose (i.e. Kaplan etc.), work through practice problems. Try not to memorize the text, but rather practice the applications especially when it comes to Biology.

Do NOT stress if you don't hit the targets every week. Adjust your schedule as you get closer to the date.

The AAMC are the makers of the test. One should make sure to buy all of the materials they offer to prepare and then supplement with another company as well (Kaplan, Examcrackers, The Berkeley Review, etc.)

