

LONG-TRACK MCAT PREP TIPS

The comments below were submitted by a career-changer who studied for the MCAT over a period of three or four months and later worked as an MCAT Prep teacher for a commercial company.

MY COMPREHENSIVE STUDY PLAN IN 3 STEPS (MCAT SCORE: 522)

The MCAT is a unique test. Content recall is not even close to the only thing you'll need to do well. Like the SAT, LSAT, and other similar entrance exams, the MCAT is a reasoning-based exam that tests your problem-solving ability, performance under stress, and, most importantly, your dedication to a career as a physician. If you don't have a relentless desire to commit yourself to this path, then it's nearly impossible to do well. On the other hand, if you trust in yourself and your path that brought you here, I'm sure you'll find the motivation to soar over this hurdle. Good luck!!!

Step 1: Take an OFFICIAL AAMC (not third-party) practice test before you begin studying.

This can be hard to force yourself to do, but time and time again I've heard from other students about the importance of taking an official AAMC practice test (either the sample test or a full-length test, but not Official AAMC Practice Test #2) before beginning your formal review phase, to familiarize yourself with the exam format and to get an idea of where you stand with the content.

I think the trickiest part of the MCAT is getting a grasp on what the AAMC is looking for. This first step is crucial because it allows you to have a solid idea in your head of the AAMC's unique voice as you go through content review. You'll find that you can start to hear their voice and what type of questions they might ask, making the long and arduous content review phase much more fruitful. This is why I don't think it's nearly as useful to take a third-party practice test, especially at this point. Importantly, don't let the score from this test bruise your ego! It will likely be much lower than your goal for the exam.

Step 2: Content review phase

This is the most laborious phase of MCAT preparation, in my opinion. Methods will vary from student to student. It is important to take your time and not rush through this! Even if you think you know a subject well, taking a systematic approach will ensure that you don't see content on the exam you aren't prepared for.

My systematic method was as follows:

- First, I took detailed notes from every page of my Kaplan content review books on blank printer paper, drawing in diagrams and graphs. (If I had an iPad Pro, I would have probably used that instead.) For me, the act of writing and drawing by hand is crucial for encoding information. Some students do fine with typed notes. I ended up with a stack of notes about 1.5 inches thick front and back, which took me about 1.5 months of working 6-8 hours/day, 3-5 days/week.

- At the end of this phase, I went through all of those notes, page-by-page, and created flashcards on my laptop using Anki, which syncs the cards to your smartphone. I think a good goal to have is to make sure to finish this phase at LEAST 1 month out from your exam date. I highly recommend making a calendar and sticking to it during this time. I took no practice tests during this phase. In addition to using my Kaplan books, for concepts I was sketchy on (especially in physics and psych/soc in my case), I watched Khan Academy videos, used the Khan Academy Notes documents (Google “Reddit Khan academy MCAT notes” for these), and read Wikipedia articles until I felt I had achieved a full understanding.

Step 3: Practice Test Phase

My goal was to take 7 practice tests (including the diagnostic sample test I took at the beginning) before my exam date.

Now that you have your notes and Anki decks nicely organized, you can start doing this. Since the AAMC offers only 4 full-length practice tests, I decided to create my own AAMC full lengths using the section banks and question packs. This isn't exact and won't give you a scaled score, but it will allow you to avoid third party practice tests (which I really didn't ever want to use), plus it will allow you to build the stamina required for exam day. For example, you can take 60 chemistry questions from the section bank/question packs for section 1, then 60 questions from the CARS section bank for section 2, 60 questions from the biology QP's or bio/biochem SB, and finally 60 practice questions from the P/S SB. On the next one, you can use 60 questions from the physics QP for section 1, etc. Using this method, it's pretty easy to come up with several additional AAMC custom full-lengths. I put all of these practice tests on my calendar, interspersing the official AAMC FL's throughout. I left the AAMC's full-length Exam 2 (many regard this as the most accurate) to take 3 days before my exam date to get an idea of where I stood at that point.

My schedule for this phase was to get started every day at 8:00 AM (when the exam starts). On the first day of the week, I would take a practice test. On the second day of the week, I would do a complete review of the practice test. On the third day, I would study/run Anki flashcards. On the fourth day, I'd work at my job, then repeat.

How you review the practice tests is **very important**. I made it a point to understand not only every question I got right and wrong, but also to understand every graph and table and diagram. This takes *all day*, but official AAMC material is a GOLD MINE!!! I found that making an effort to understand every passage and graph, regardless of whether or not there was a question relating to it, was important in building my confidence, learning more about how to extract information from dense passages, and learning how the AAMC ticks.