

FAST-TRACK MCAT PREP TIPS

The comments below were submitted by career-changers who took the MCAT seven weeks after completing the one-year, cohort-based Post-Baccalaureate Health Professions program. Both earned competitive scores on the MCAT (514 and 521).

STUDENT A

I am of the opinion that focusing 100% on your coursework is the best preparation you can do during the post-bacc year for the MCAT. Having a strong foundation in the work you're doing all year is more than enough to help you with the devoted MCAT preparation that comes later. In particular, having a great grasp on general chemistry, physics, and biochemistry is fundamental!

After the school year ended, my study plan looked like this:

- Took an AAMC full length (not Test #2 – save that for later) to evaluate baseline knowledge
 - I reviewed every single question— *even the ones I got right*—this is probably the most important thing you can do to boost your score
- Made a schedule for how I would review weak content areas for 3 weeks
 - For reference, I read the entire Princeton Review Psychology and Sociology book... this whole section is essentially a vocabulary test ☺
 - I learned Anatomy from the AAMC series of Khan Academy videos
 - At the end of each day, I tested myself through UWorld questions
 - I bought a subscription to this and 100% recommend it. I found the questions to be representative of AAMC material and the answers they give are superb. UWorld offered some of the best content review for me.
- 3 weeks in, I took another AAMC full-length and then began dedicated question bank practice
 - I used both the AAMC Section Bank and CARS material as well as UWorld
 - I set up a timer and the correct number of questions to mimic what taking the actual test felt like—this was super helpful for time management
 - Each question I got wrong was reviewed and the content tested became an ANKI flashcard. I reviewed the deck each morning.
 - The Reddit premed community has a million helpful mnemonics
- Each Monday, I took another AAMC full-length
 - It is so important to mimic waking up at the hour you are going to need to for test day, trying out different snacks, and taking it without distractions if you want a representative score
 - I did not find taking 3rd party practice tests helpful. A lot of these companies claim they can improve your score by a specific number of points because they make their practice tests **much** more difficult than the real deal. I found this highly unmotivating.
- The day before the test, I studied my flashcards, ate well, and went to bed early.
 - FYI: I believed I did not do well after I finished and spent a lot of time torturing myself thinking about it. Plan something you can look forward to during this time so that you are distracted. My partner and I ended up camping so I could be removed from my phone/the internet. When my results came back, my feelings had been due to anxiety and were not a representation of reality. Trust yourself, your FLs, and your preparation during the school year. It is possible, and it is a huge accomplishment to take the MCAT and do this program. ☺

STUDENT B

My Guiding Principles of MCAT Prep

- I followed the advice of others to do **one practice test each week**, and then spend the next day going over every question. That was the extent of my structure, and I allowed my weak areas on each practice test to inform the topics I would study over the next week.
- I **took every Saturday off**, and a couple additional weekends I took Sunday off as well. I think having enough rest was crucial to not getting burnt out. I also really tried to stop studying by around 6 pm.
- I put myself on the **same sleep schedule as test day** for the last month before I tested. I had a 6:30 a.m. start time, so that meant sleeping from 9 p.m. to 5 a.m. every day.

My Step-by-Step Process

- My first step was to complete the AAMC Sample Test as a gauge of my preparation. I spent the next day going over it, and then I took two days off that weekend. I wish I'd taken a day off after finals, because I was pretty fried after my exams and it made the MCAT seem extra draining.
- After that, it was obvious that psych/soc and Gen Chem would be my most easily improved sections. I spent the next week and a half working through **every chapter of the Princeton Review Psych/Soc book and adding every key term to Anki** (I didn't take notes—just highlighted and read, then made flashcards)
- Over the next ~3 weeks I ended up going through almost every chapter in the Kaplan Gen Chem book, taking notes on a chapter if I felt especially weak on it, and then adding all formulas and key definitions to Anki
- I also began learning the organ systems and learning biology material that wasn't covered in MCDB 1150
- **I worked through all my Anki reviews (almost) every single day.** This was probably the single most important thing I did, because there's nothing worse than not being able to remember a formula for a topic that you completely understand on test day.
- **By the end of my studying, I was almost exclusively working through the AAMC materials** with only a small amount of content review. I did constantly have the feeling that I should have done more content review/worked through things faster/done more... I think a lot of people on the shortened timeline feel that way
- A few weeks out from test day, I worked through **2-3 CARS passages each day** from the official AAMC materials → very helpful in gaining a good rhythm with passages

Topics I never studied or hardly studied during content review:

- Genetics (as long as you're solid on class material, the genetics will be easy)
- Biochemistry (same as above, but I would refresh my amino acids every few weeks and right before the exam and had some flashcards on more memory-heavy topics like enzyme kinetics or glycolysis)
- Organic chemistry (I studied lab methods pretty heavily, but I never really made it through much OChem during MCAT prep. If I'd had more time I would have, but I kept doing alright without it. I do wish I'd really hammered home functional group names and names of different types of reactions)
- Physics (same as above, the physics on the MCAT was pretty basic compared to class. I just made sure I had formulas completely memorized)

Resources I Used:

- The **AAMC official materials**—every single thing the AAMC offers is very valuable, not just the practice tests!
- **Kaplan Quick Sheets**—I spent a day entering all of the mnemonics and formulas on the quick sheets to Anki, and I wish I'd done this week 1 or 2
- **Kahn Academy videos for the organ systems**—watched them on 2x speed, took visual notes, then entered right to Anki. I spent a ton of time going over organ system videos, which was necessary because there are a lot of questions on them, but the time investment I put in was definitely not proportional to the amount of points it yielded.
- **Princeton Review Psych/Soc book**—right level of depth, and my score jumped 3 points on psych/soc after reading it and working through flashcards
- The **300 page psych/soc outline on Reddit**—when I kept having new terms come up on practice tests even after reading the Princeton Review book, I went through this document as a more comprehensive set of terms and added all new terms to Anki.
- My **physics cheat sheets** from throughout the post-bacc program—just entered all common formulas to Anki.
- The **mnemonics** in the margins of the Kaplan books, especially for biology. Many of them came in handy on test day!
- **Reddit**—every time I didn't understand a problem explanation from AAMC full lengths, I would be able to find a WAY better explanation here.

What I Wish I'd Done Differently:

- **Started working through the vast quantity of AAMC materials earlier.** I underestimated how much there is and didn't get started on the non-full length materials until I was a few weeks out from test day.
- Purchased a **UWorld subscription**. I've heard the UWorld questions are the most similar to the AAMC questions
- I took 2 third party practice tests and I found them pretty unhelpful (other than with the COVID exam timing). I scored 6-7 points lower on these exams and the questions weren't super indicative of the actual content. I think those 4 days I spent on them would have been better used for more content review or official AAMC practice questions. But, everyone is different and if you're struggling with stamina more than content, then I would recommend doing third party tests.
- **Reviewed my full lengths more efficiently.** I would sometimes start reviewing them in the afternoon after finishing the full length, but other times it would take the full next day to go over it. Then with taking a day off each week, I would be down to only 4 days of actual studying and would get stressed that I wasn't doing "enough."